

TO DO OR TABOO?
A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO
THE PERSUASIVE SPEECHES OF
HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS AT
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

By

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Major Field: EDUCATION

Abstract: This study was a qualitative critical inquiry into the literacy learning of Honors College students at Oklahoma State University. Specifically, the told experiences of students learning to speak out for a significant social issue in a persuasive speech for an honors introductory speech communication class during the 2014-2015 academic year were explored. Research questions focused on how dialogue and reflection about the speech experience raised critical awareness and on uncovering elements that limited HCS in advocating for social change. Sub-questions explored what social issues Honors students took up, why they took up the issues, and conditions under which individual persuasive speeches were produced.

The purpose of the critical inquiry was to (1) engage Honors students in authentic dialogue and reflection in order to raise critical awareness and to (2) produce a critique of the social and educational elements that limited Honors students in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change. The study was based on dialogic interviews and documents. Data were analyzed using political analysis with components of narrative analysis.

Students felt that the camaraderie and bonding among students and with the course professor fostered a supportive and comfortable class climate that aided in open dialogue and exchange of ideas. However, the behaviors that HCS reported indicated that open dialogue, reflection, and authentic exchange of ideas were hindered through their enactment of strategies for maintaining peaceful relations. As a result, critical literacy development was hindered.

Authentic dialogue and reflection about the persuasive speech experience was found to raise critical awareness in Honors students. Dialogue and reflection empowered students to challenge existing social structures in ways not previously considered. Some students began to reimagine their motivations and the actions they encouraged for combating significant social issues while other students' ideas of an oppressive social system were reinforced. Authentic dialogue and reflection was found to be necessary in helping Honors students recognize the reproductive nature of social structures and its role in sustaining inequality.

The study concluded with an emphasis on providing Honors students with time and space for authentic dialogue and reflection during literacy learning experiences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I have some very sad news for all of you and, I think, sad news for all of our fellow citizens, and people who love peace all over the world; and that is, that Martin Luther King was shot, and was killed, tonight in Memphis, Tennessee... So, I ask you tonight, to return home, to say a prayer for the family Martin Luther King— yeah, it's true—but more importantly to say a prayer for our own country, which all of us love—a prayer for understanding, and that compassion of which I spoke.

- Robert F. Kennedy, April 4, 1968

The Power of Words

In an impromptu speech, Robert F. Kennedy broke the news of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination to an Indianapolis, Indiana audience. He urged the audience to embrace the peacefulness to which Dr. King had dedicated his life. While riots broke out in many other cities that night, Indianapolis was quiet. In 2005, the Indiana Historical Bureau installed a monument to mark the location of Kennedy's address. In part, the monument reads, "The speech is credited with keeping Indianapolis calm, while other cities reacted with violence." Likewise, the speech that Dr. King delivered to a crowd in Memphis, Tennessee on the evening before his assassination is often regarded as a prophetic message that helped deter the outbreak of riots in that city. As a society, people recognize the power of words and realize that words can have an impact on human behaviors, understandings, and attitudes.

The social issues the American leaders were addressing in 1968 were not topics easily spoken about or acted upon; risk was certainly involved. Just two short months after Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder, Robert Kennedy was assassinated after speaking to a crowd in Los Angeles, California. The slain leaders had confronted significant social issues in difficult social situations in order to act for social justice while persuading many others to take peaceful actions for positive social change. Current social issues are just as significant and the social situations are no less difficult today. Racial conflicts and violence against women are two social problems that reoccur in headline news as plagues on communities and university campuses.

For example, Oklahoma made national news with 2014 headlines such as, "Oklahoma father dies in police encounter after mother slaps daughter" (CNN, Feb. 26, 2014), which reported on the death of Luis Rodriguez after five Moore, Oklahoma Police Department officers wrestled him to the ground in responding to a domestic dispute call at a movie theatre. Cell phone video is difficult to see and hear as the wife screams out to the police officers that her husband is not moving and she needs to know if he is alive. Police who responded to the domestic dispute call were working under conditions that rank Oklahoma as 6th highest in the nation (tied with Tennessee) for the number of females killed by males. *The Violence Policy Center* (September, 2015) reported that 81% of the women killed in Oklahoma during 2013 were White, 16% were Black, and 3% were American Indian or Alaskan Native and that, in 90% of the cases, an acquaintance committed the murder and most times the acquaintance was an intimate partner (p. 17). A seven-hour drive up the interstate from Moore, Oklahoma leads to Ferguson, Missouri where a White Ferguson police officer shot and killed an unarmed Black teenager in August of 2014. The shooting and death of Michael Brown and the events that followed continued to shatter the community more than a year later, as gunfire and arrests ensued after a day of anniversary observation events.

Oklahoma State University (OSU) made national news when Tyreek Hill was dismissed from the football team after he was arrested on charges of domestic abuse by strangulation (*USA Today*, December 12, 2014). The incident followed on the heels of the controversy surrounding the

decision of the University of Oklahoma (OU) to allow the football player, Joe Mixon, to remain on the team (upon serving a one-year suspension) after surveillance video on July 25, 2014 captured him punching a female student in the face outside a sports bar. The video was not released to the public and reporter Berry Tramel (2015) wrote, “If that video had been shown to the public last year, no way could [OU President] David Boren and [Football Coach] Bob Stoops have withstood the pressure demanding that Mixon be removed from the OU squad” (*The Oklahoman*, July 7, 2015). Headlines like “University of Oklahoma fraternity shuttered after racist chant” (*CNN*, March 10, 2015) reported how Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity members sustained a tradition of racism through group song and reported that the fraternity was to be expelled from campus after a video of such a chant surfaced. Blogger for *Fox Sports* Clay Travis (2015) made the argument that while OU was tough on racism they were weak on violence against women.

Leaders of today, and future leaders for tomorrow, must be able to critically consider significant social issues and take positive actions for social changes that foster just and equitable conditions for all, and they must persuade others to do the same. Otherwise, conditions that allow troubling situations, like the ones just mentioned, will continue. Who can speak out on significant social issues in ways that persuade others to take positive actions that promote social change today? Individuals working for social change do not have to be national figures putting their lives on the line. To participate in the transformation of society, individuals begin by looking critically at the social situations in which they find themselves, and then they act in ways that promote the positive changes they wish to see. Scholar and social activist Allan Johnson (2006) said, “the more you pay attention” then “the more you’ll see opportunities to do something” to improve society, and he argued that it takes very little to make a difference (p. 142). Johnson (2006) explained, “It can be as simple as not laughing at a racist or heterosexist joke or saying you don’t think it’s funny” (p. 144). Johnson (2006) believes that awareness “compels people to speak out” (p. 137). To work for positive social changes, and to speak in ways that persuade others to do the same, an individual must first be able to critically see social problems that exist.

Seeing Critically

To critically see existing social problems, individuals must “acquire” a critical awareness of the “nature of social structures” (Mayer, 1986, p. 249-256). Critical awareness involves the development of an understanding of the world that “transcends common sense perceptions” through recognition of the political nature of knowledge and the various forms of inequality that are socially produced (Mayer, 1986, p. 249). Social structures produce categories that organize people by characteristics, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, education, age, and physical ability, among others. Memberships in certain social categories grant automatic unearned benefits, or privileges, which often are not granted to other (less dominant) categories of people (Johnson, 2013; McIntosh, 1988).

Johnson (2013) described privilege as “any advantage that is unearned, exclusive, and socially conferred” (<http://www.agjohnson.us/glad/what-is-a-system-of-privilege/>). For example, possessing the right to vote just because one is born male while a female is denied the same right just because she is born female would be considered a male privilege. The individual lacking the advantage holds the “short end of the stick” (Johnson, 2006, p.120), and is oppressed, through no fault of her own. Johnson (2006) said, “Individuals receive privilege only because they are perceived by others as belonging to privileged groups and social categories” (p. 34). He explained that the “granting of privilege has nothing to do with who those individuals are as people” (Johnson, 2006, p. 34). Recognizing the role of social structures in producing privilege and oppression helps individuals develop a critical awareness. Johnson (2006) argued, however, that after developing critical awareness there is a struggle to “hang on” to it (p. 138).

Reading the World

Johnson (1997, 2013) argued that critical awareness is difficult to maintain because of the way social systems are set up to produce privilege and because “very often those who have privilege don’t know it, for example, which is a key aspect of privilege” (p. 698). Johnson (2006) explained many ways that social systems make privilege invisible to those who have it and suggested that one

reason for the invisibility is that dominant groups do not have to pay attention “because privilege insulates them from its consequences” (Johnson, 2006, p. 69). Scholar and teacher bell hooks (2000) advised, “To work for change, we need to know where we stand” (p. 9). Individuals must recognize their own positions in order to grow and change.

Since individuals experience privilege and oppression differently, and because different levels of unearned privilege exist (Haviland, 2008; Hays, Chang, & Dean, 2004), it can be difficult for individuals to know where they stand. Literacy educator Paulo Freire (1970) suggested that individuals read their world and reflect on their experience in dialogue with others, in order to name the world on behalf of themselves (Freire, 1970). Individuals reading the world recognize that limits and privileges are political in nature and that political social structures shape thoughts that influence how individuals see themselves and others (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987). In dialogue with others, individuals can articulate their experience and transform the world through reading and naming and re-reading and re-naming (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970/2009) explained that dialogue “is capable of generating critical thinking” (p. 92). Individuals engaging in authentic dialogue are “people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they know” (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 90).

Dialoguing

In discussing authentic dialogue, Freire (1970/2009) explained, “It is not our role to speak to people about our own view of the world, nor attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (p. 96). Authentic dialogue opens the way for thoughts that can create possibilities for new social and political structures (Freire, 1970, 1985; Freire & Macedo, 1987). It allows individuals to question what is known and develop new thoughts that can lead to change. Seeing critically, reading the world, and dialoguing authentically with others are key elements of critical awareness. The problem of hanging on to critical awareness, which Johnson (2006) described, could be lessened through increased critical literacy.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is reading the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987) in an active way that situates the reader as a social analyst of messages sent and received. Messages can be in the form of images, texts, speech, or actions. Drawing from the work of Freire, literacy scholar Hilary Janks (2013) explained, “Essentially, critical literacy is about enabling young people to *read* both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference, and access to knowledge, skills, tools, and resources” (p. 227). Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) reviewed definitions of critical literacy in over 30 years of research and professional literature then synthesized their findings into four “interrelated” dimensions (p. 382). The four dimensions serve as a way to operationalize critical literacy and discuss critical literacy engagements and developments (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 382-391). The four dimensions of critical literacy follow: (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 382). Being critically literate means that a person is equipped to view messages on many levels in ways that take into account how the messages function and work in society so that action can be taken to promote social justice.

From a critical literacy perspective, reflection and action are the sources of knowledge and creation (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 100-101). How individuals read their world shapes their actions in it; the actions then create the world (Freire, 1970). Janks (2013) stated, “It [critical literacy] is also about *writing* and rewriting the world: it is about design and re-design” (p. 227). Once the world is read, it can be re-read, and re-imaged and new actions can become possible. Freire (1970/2009) said, “humans exist in a world which they are constantly re-creating and transforming” (p. 98-99). An individual’s actions lead to designs and changing actions can lead to re-designs. The social issues that individuals read as significant are the ones that spark the “small risks for change” that individuals will enact, which will begin the process of changing what is normal to re-design the world in ways that foster justice and equity for all (Johnson, 2006, p. 153). Johnson (2006) declared

that “millions of people who know inequalities exist and want to be part of the solution” are the ones whose “silence and invisibility allow privilege and oppression to continue. Removing what silences them and stands in their way can tap an enormous potential of energy for change” (p. 125).

Forming Words

At Oklahoma State University (OSU), speech instructors encourage undergraduate students in introductory speech communication classes (SPCH 2713) to speak out on significant social issues by requiring students to, among other things, develop an individual persuasive speech to deliver to classmates. The persuasive speech assignment is intended to build skills that enable students to critically think, write, and speak publicly about significant social issues. The process requires students to investigate social issues, select a significant social issue topic, take a stance, investigate plausible actions, and then form a speech that persuades others to act in specific ways. The speech experience can begin the development of orators who speak for social justice while persuading others to take positive actions for social change.

An honors section of SPCH 2713 at OSU offers high-achieving students an opportunity to engage with expert faculty and a homogenous group of learners. In education, homogenous learning groups are organized so that students of similar academic ability are placed together. Apart from their academic achievements, students in Honors SPCH 2713 share the characteristic of having chosen to participate in The Honors College at OSU. In order to participate in honors classes at OSU, freshmen and sophomore level students must maintain a 3.3 grade point average (GPA) or higher and actively earn at least six university honors credits each semester. Junior level students must maintain a 3.4 GPA or higher (seniors need a 3.5) and actively earn at least three university honors credits each semester. University honors credits are earned with a final grade of “A” or “B” in an honors course. An honors section of SPCH 2713 affords highly motivated, successful students the opportunity to work and dialogue together.

Honors Education

Honors college students (HCS) are a special group of capable learners who are often characterized as unique, or different, from regular students. HCS belong to a social category that positions them as academically above the norm, which means they are not considered part of the norm, or the typical (regular) group of students. HCS are often thrust into leadership roles and are frequently referred to, sometimes negatively, as over-achievers. High academic performance is not only characteristic of HCS, but it is an expectation of group participation that leaves little room for anything short of success. For example, failure to maintain the established GPA for honors participation often results in removal from honors programs and honors housing. HCS operate within cultural norms established for interaction within the honors community and they usually understand how to navigate and function successfully within the social and educational system. As a group, HCS are viewed as a university's top-achieving undergraduates and university honors programs and colleges are often the focal point of academic excellence (Boazman, Sayler, & Easton-Brooks, 2012).

Honors programs and colleges attempt to prepare honors students for diverse leadership roles by offering an augmented educational experience. With smaller class sizes, high achieving students, expert instructors, and innovative curriculum, honors classes are designed to accommodate a deeper engagement meant to foster critical thinking and academic enrichment. The overall goal of honors education is to offer academically advanced students an enhanced educational experience (Boazman, Sayler, & Easton-Brooks, 2012; NCHC, May 2015; Treat & Bernard, 2012). The “community of support and innovative academic excellence” that the Honors College at OSU develops “provides students from diverse backgrounds with the opportunity to realize fully their intellectual potential, while becoming leaders engaged with their communities and the world” (<https://honors.okstate.edu>).

Most often, HCS at OSU belong to at least one privileged social group and many times they are members of more than one privileged social group, meaning that a student could be any

combination of white, middle class, male, heterosexual, Christian, well-educated, young, or able-bodied, to name a few. Johnson (2006) stated, “Systems of privilege provide endless ways of seeing and thinking about the world that make privilege invisible” (p. 128). Helping HCS at OSU question what is known and develop new thoughts that lead to change (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 90) should be an important aspect of the honors education. Johnson (2006) said, “When dominant groups work against privilege, they do more than add their voices. They also make it more difficult for other members of dominant groups to dismiss calls for change as simply the actions of ‘special interest groups’ trying to better their position” (p. 151).

While HCS at OSU are often members of privileged groups, different levels of unearned privilege exist and individual HCS experience different privileges and hold diverse beliefs and values. Johnson (2006) asserted, “In many ways, the biggest challenge for members of privileged groups is to work with one another on issues of privilege rather than trying to help members of subordinate groups.” (p. 151). To recognize the role of social structures in producing privilege and oppression (Mayer, 1986), to consider the ways privilege insulates individuals from its consequences (Johnson, 2006), and to know where one stands in relation to privilege and oppression so that positions can be better understood (hooks, 2000), requires authentic dialogue. Authentic dialogue fosters critical awareness that can help develop the full intellectual capacities of individuals who would serve as leaders for diverse communities and the world (Freire, 1970/2009). Johnson (2006) specified, “The more aware people can be...the more they can contribute to change both in themselves and in the systems where they work and live” (p. 128).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of an honors education is to develop the intellectual capacity of leaders for a diverse world (NCHC, 2015; HNRS, 2015). Leaders in a diverse world must be able to critically consider significant social issues in order to take positive actions for social changes that foster just and equitable conditions for all, and they must speak out in ways that persuade others to do the

same. Therefore, raising the critical awareness of HCS in a way that fosters social action is an important function of an honors education.

However, HCS at OSU are often members of dominant social groups who may have difficulty recognizing systems of privilege and oppression, which can hinder critical awareness (Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 1988). If members of dominant social groups do not recognize systems of privilege and oppression then they may not think, write, speak, or act in ways that combat inequities and injustices in society. Instead, they may simply and unwittingly think, write, speak, and act in ways that reproduce dominant norms, or they may just be silent, both of which allow social patterns that produce inequalities to continue (Johnson, 2006).

Since students in The Honors College at OSU are expected to be and become “leaders engaged with their communities and the world” (HNRS, 2015), and those same students are often members of a privileged group, the critical awareness of HCS at OSU needs to be better understood. Research that explores the worldviews and experiences of HCS and the current conditions in which they are educated and trained to speak out on significant social issues is needed in order to begin to better understand how HCS at OSU are developing their intellectual capacity as leaders for diverse communities and the world. In gaining better knowledge, researchers can work to raise critical awareness, which authentic dialogue can accomplish, in order to promote human rights and social justice (Freire, 1970). A critical research paradigm is best suited for such a study.

Authentic dialogue invites individuals to share their worldviews in ways that foster reflection and critical thinking for increased social awareness (Freire, 1970; Johnson, 2006; Shor, 1999); therefore, a research orientation that nurtures dialogue and reflection is an appropriate position from which to explore the worldviews and experiences of HCS and the conditions under which they learned to speak out on significant social issues in an honors SPCH 2713 class at OSU. Such an undertaking is also in line with the mission of an honors education at OSU and the goals of the Honors SPCH 2713 persuasive speech assignment. The struggle to challenge social inequality is the concern driving this critical research study with HCS; raising critical awareness in a way that

allows the awareness to be turned into action is the goal. Cara Mulcahy (2010) explained, “The development of critical consciousness may be viewed as raising one’s level of self and social awareness and engaging in critical inquiry” (p. 98).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative critical inquiry was to (1) engage HCS at OSU in authentic dialogue and reflection in order to raise critical awareness and to (2) produce a critique of the social and educational elements that limit HCS at OSU in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change.

Research Questions

This qualitative critical research investigates the circumstances under which HCS at OSU lived, learned, and produced individual persuasive speeches on significant social issues for an honors SPCH 2713 class at OSU during the 2014-2015 academic year. The research questions under investigation that drove the critical inquiry follow:

1. In what ways does dialogue with HCS at OSU about the circumstances in which they lived, learned, and produced a persuasive speech on a significant social issue raise critical awareness?
2. What social and educational elements limited HCS at OSU in realizing their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change?

Answers to these research questions will help me and honors educators and administrators to begin to better understand how HCS at OSU are developing their intellectual capacity as leaders for diverse communities and the world. The following sub-questions helped to focus dialogue that aided in answering the research questions:

1. What topics did HCS at OSU address in persuasive speeches on significant social issues for an Honors SPCH 2713 class during the 2014-2015 academic year?

2. Why did HCS at OSU take up their specific social issue?
3. What were the conditions under which HCS at OSU produced persuasive speeches on a significant social issue?

Significance of the Study

This is a study of action and motivation, examining what was done and why it was done, as well as an investigation into the conditions under which HCS at OSU (critically) lived and learned to speak out on significant social issues in persuasive speeches. Engaging in a critical research study with HCS and exploring their persuasive speech decisions and experiences could generate critical thinking and encourage re-reading significant social issues, and re-imagining possibilities, in ways that could lead to enhanced critical awareness, increased action, and positive social changes that combat injustices and inequities in society.

Examining persuasive speeches on significant social issues produced for an honors SPCH 2713 class at OSU could provide insight into the critical literacy engagement of successful students and could produce knowledge that leads to the development of new ideas and teaching methods that support successful students in better developing their critical literacy skills. The increased critical literacy of successful students with privilege could spark actions for social transformation that could lead to increased social justice for all.

Understanding the worldviews of HCS taking up social issues and positions for persuasive speeches in an honors introductory speech class could provide insight that aids in understanding the particular population of communicators, which could benefit honors educators and administrators who develop educational experiences and programs for HCS. Understanding the conditions surrounding the choices, motivations, and actions of HCS at OSU could help start to answer the larger question of how HCS at OSU are developing their intellectual capacity as leaders for a diverse world.

Assumptions

As the researcher, I designed this qualitative study using the critical research paradigm described by Hatch (2002); the figure he developed to represent the basic ideas of the critical research paradigm appears in Table 1.

Table 1

Critical Research Paradigm as Presented by Hatch (2002, p. 13)

Research paradigm	Ontology (Nature of reality)	Epistemology (What can be known; Relationship of knower & known)	Methodology (How knowledge is gained)	Products (Forms of knowledge produced)
Critical/Feminist	The apprehended world makes a material difference in terms of race, gender, and class	Knowledge as subjective and political; Researchers' values frame the study	Transformative inquiry	Value mediated critiques that challenge existing power structures and promote resistance

The ontological assumption of a critical research paradigm is that “the apprehended world makes a material difference in terms of race, gender, and class” (Hatch, 2002, p. 13). There is “one reality about which there are multiple opinions” and factors of power influence which opinion is given privilege (Mertens, 2010, p. 470). Ontologically, the postpositivist view that “there is one reality that is waiting to be discovered and that can be captured within a specified level of probability” and the constructivist’s view “that there are multiple socially constructed realities wherein the researcher and researched co-construct meaning” are questioned within the critical paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 231). Critical research is undertaken from the “epistemological assumptions that all knowledge is subjective and political and that researcher values frame the inquiry” (Hatch, 2002, p. 201). There is an epistemological assumption that the researcher strives for “a level of cultural competency by building rapport despite differences” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 232). The methodological assumption is that research is designed as a transformative inquiry, which includes a purpose to provoke “transformations and changes in the public and private spheres of everyday

life—transformations that speak to conditions of oppression” (Denzin, 1997, p. 275); therefore, critical researchers act as “agents of prosocial change” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 232).

In this research study, I assume that power structures exist, which make society class divided and inequitable. Membership in privileged groups bestows power, which reduces the social exclusion (marginalization) that is often experienced by members of less privileged (oppressed) groups. I assume that an individual’s words and actions can make a difference for positive social changes that improve the life chances of individuals restricted by oppressive forces. Language is assumed to be a powerful tool for social change that can raise consciousness, reinforce and/or reconfigure discourses, and stimulate action. Literacy is assumed to be multiple (Gee, 2001; Lankshear & Knoble, 2003; Street, 1995, 2003); and, multiple literacies allow for reading the world in multiple ways and through various lenses. I began this critical research study embracing the following assumptions:

1. Socio-political structures work to reproduce and maintain dominant ideologies.
2. Oppressive forces influence individuals in ways that limit them in imagining social change.
3. Literacy practices follow certain patterns related to race, class, and gender.
4. Examining literacy practices can reveal powerful forces that are hidden or disguised in language and communication patterns, which are defined and dominated by ruling elites.

My assumptions shape my positioning as a researcher and my ideological positions shape my research. I believe that developing honors students’ full intellectual potential and leadership requires that they develop and practice critical literacy, which can enable them to resist conformity to dominant social systems and discourses that limit intellectual capacity for imagining social change and a more just society.

Organization of the Dissertation

In chapter one, I provide an introduction to ideological positioning leading to the critical inquiry and I introduce the qualitative study. In chapter two, I offer a review of relevant literature. In chapter three, I explain the methodology I used to conduct the study, including a description of the research design and procedures and my plan for data collection and analysis. In chapter four, I provide descriptions of the research participants. In chapter five, I present findings that resulted from my political analysis of data. In chapter six, I reflect on transformations and difficult dialogues. In chapter seven, I offer a discussion and my recommendations for action and change and suggest further research.

Definitions of Terms

Authentic dialogue – Authentic dialogue is conversation between “people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they know” (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 90).

Critical awareness – Critical awareness involves possessing an understanding of the world that “transcends common sense perceptions” by recognizing the political nature of knowledge and the various forms of inequality that are socially produced (Mayer, 1986, p. 249). Critical awareness stems from seeing critically, reading the world, and dialoguing with others in ways that increase consciousness to external social forces that operate to maintain systems of privilege and oppression.

Critical consciousness – Critical consciousness is “one’s level of self and social awareness” (Mulcahy, 2010, p. 98).

Critical literacy – Critical literacy is reading the world in an active way that situates the reader as a social analyst of messages sent and received in attempt to interrogate how the messages sustain power and inequality in human relations. Critical literacy “is about enabling young people to read both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference, and access to knowledge, skills, tools, and resources. It is also about writing and rewriting the world: it is about design and re-design” (Janks, 2013, p. 227).

Critical literacy perspective – A critical literacy perspective is a view that situates literacy (reading, writing, speaking, and doing) and literacy learning as a political act and recognizes critical literacy as a necessary component for aiding individuals in questioning their way of knowing in order to engage in enhanced reflection and action, which are the sources of knowledge and creation (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 100-101).

Critically literate – A person who is critically literate is equipped to view messages on many levels in ways that take into account how the messages function and work in society so that action can be taken to promote social justice.

Four-dimensions of critical literacy– The four-dimensions of critical literacy are elements that work in an interrelated manner to comprise critical literacy and enable critical literacy to be operationalized. The four-dimensions are (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 382).

Persuasive speech – A persuasive speech is an oral performance that encourages others to act in specific ways in order to address a significant social issue.

Privilege – A privilege is “any advantage that is unearned, exclusive, and socially conferred” and which is systematically denied to others through no fault of their own (Johnson, 2013).

Significant social issue – A significant social issue is a topic of importance to society or the speaker that can impact society.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

- Romans 12:2 New International Version

My scholarly interests lie in the areas of language, literacy, and culture; specifically, I am interested in how communication patterns (re)produce culture and how conformity to the patterns of dominant discourse sustains the power of dominant groups. My position is that discourse practices must be continually interrogated so that new thoughts, which transform the ideas and practices of individuals, can surface to prod the betterment of humanity. Taking to heart the instructive advice found in *Romans* 12:2, I do not review scholarly literature as a means to conform to the pattern of the academic world, but as a way to uncover thoughts that help move me to chose new ways of thinking so as to be transformed by the renewing of my mind. The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate discourses that have shaped my thoughts and informed my actions so that readers traveling along my research mission can recognize the shifts of my knowledge-in-progress as they consider my descriptions and analysis. I reviewed critical theory, critical literacy theory, honors education, and honors student identity scholarship.

In this chapter, I review critical theories and the role of critical literacy in producing citizens that act for social justice. Then, I review the goals and value of honors education in higher education institutions and the benefits of honors participation. Next, I review scholarship

that critiques honors education and the responses to those critiques. Then, I examine literature on honors student identity. Finally, I discuss gaps in the literature that need to be addressed and explain how I attempt to fill some of the gaps by contributing to academic scholarship through a presentation of knowledge gained from conducting a qualitative critical research study with honors college students (HCS) at Oklahoma State University (OSU).

Influential Theorists & Theories

For many critical theorists, power is often considered an oppressive force that excludes less dominant members of societies (Freire, 1970; Habermas, 1984, hooks, 1994; Lomawaima, 1994). However, French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault (1977/1995) offered a different understanding of power. In his book, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault (1977/1995) discussed a history of discipline and punishment not as a mere examination of the past, but as a writing of the “history of the present” (p. 31). Foucault (1977/1995) described power structures of modern society and said that his book “must serve as a historical background to various studies of the power of normalization and the formation of knowledge in modern society” (p. 308). Foucault (1977/1995) did not see power as a negative force that represses, but as an active force that produces, and he argued that “we must cease” describing the effects of power in negative terms: excludes, represses, censors, abstracts, masks, and conceals; instead, power produces: reality, domains of objects, and rituals of truth. (p. 194). Within Foucauldian discipline, the elements of power and knowledge are interdependent.

Disciplined in the Foucauldian Sense

Disciplinary power is a means of correct training that builds knowledge. Foucault (1977/1995) suggested that discipline “is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (p. 170). In Foucauldian thought, institutions do not hold power; power is a relational productive force that infuses human relations. Individuals exercise power, and exercise resistance to power, in interactional relations with others. Foucault (1977/1995) reasoned, “The success of disciplinary power derives no doubt

from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination” (p. 170). These three instruments (hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination) are tools of control, which produce a certain kind of knowledge. Observation of others leads to knowledge that is perceived. Perceived knowledge leads to the establishment of standards of normal behavior. Standards of normal behavior lead to examinations of individuals, who are sorted and classified (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 185). Individuals are in positions to oversee rituals of truth and, also, they practice self-regulation; individuals become instruments of disciplinary power at the same time that they are subjects of it.

Foucault’s (1977/1995) concepts of power, discipline, and knowledge convey how certain practices become standardized and dominant in societies, including discourse practices. Certain discourse practices become privileged because societal rules govern the discourse by silencing and permitting what can be said, as well as who is authorized to name or speak what can be said (Foucault, 1972, 1980, 1994). A disciplined society (where individuals exercise power in measuring, supervising, establishing truths, and correcting the abnormal) produces a homogenous effect. Foucault (1977/1995) concluded, “Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies” (p. 138). For Foucault (1977/1995), the status quo is established and maintained through such discipline and knowledge, which can leave very little room for methods or ideas that question positions of authority and embedded, perceived realities.

Moving Toward Change

Foucault’s (1977/1995) descriptions offer a good explanation for how social systems are maintained and reproduced. In such disciplined societies, knowledge is produced and becomes reality that accomplishes itself in the production of techniques that sustain it. Freire (1970/2009) warned, “One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating” (p. 51). This domestication, or taming of the population, supports

Johnson's (2006) claim that it is especially difficult for members of dominant groups to recognize social structures that produce privilege and oppression and to hold on to a critical awareness of how inequality is maintained over time to sustain the status quo. While Johnson (2006) argued that it is the small acts of individuals that make a difference in changing society and suggested that each person do something to make a positive difference in some small way everyday, Freire (1970/2009) offered authentic dialogue and reflection as keys to unlocking the kind of critical awareness needed to overcome the reproductive forces inherent in social systems. For Freire (1970, 2009) authentic dialogue, reflection, and action lead to new knowledge and change. He declared, "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 47).

Developing critical awareness is paramount in instigating social change and overcoming the difficulty that Johnson (2006) described as fundamental to dominant groups. Freire (1970, 2009) warned, however, that as members of dominant groups "cease to be exploiters or indifferent spectators or simply the heirs of exploitation," that they "must re-examine themselves constantly" because "they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin" (p. 60). As a middle-aged, southern, White, female, English-speaking, able-bodied, United States citizen, I recognize the need to examine and re-examine the marks of my origin as I develop as a scholar and researcher. Researcher Jenny Gordon (2005) explained how she re-examined herself as a White, female, researcher after working with a research team in a public school. Gordon (2005) examined her discourse practices and identified the strategies she used "to sustain White privilege" and then discussed "the logic of those strategies to understand the power they have in reproducing inequality" (p. 279). Gordon (2005) declared, "only by understanding the self-perpetuating nature of White privilege will we be able to begin to dismantle it" (p. 279). In a disciplined society (Foucault, 1977/1995) an on-going commitment is required of individuals in order to sustain critical awareness (Gordon, 2005; Johnson, 2006; McIntosh, 1988; Warren,

2001), which allows them to recognize and work against the operations of social systems in reproducing the status quo.

Foucault's (1977/1995) ideas of a disciplined society, Johnson's (2006) call for small acts of resistance, and Freire's (1970) ideas of dialogue and reflection for fostering critical thinking and awareness are ideas that I synthesized, which lead me to the position that one way for individuals to make a small difference in changing society for the betterment of humanity is to practice critical literacy. Concepts of literacy and language developed by researchers Herbert Kohl (1995), Lisa Delpit (2008), Deborah Brandt (2001, 2009), and Shirley Brice Heath (1983) shaped my thinking and motivate me to work for the kind of dialogical system that frees individuals from the confines of dominant discourse inherent in social systems.

A Critical Learning Environment

Herbert Kohl (1995) argued that dominant culture downplays social inequalities and elevates ideas and events that support dominant ideologies to maintain the status quo. In his book *Should We Burn Babar?* Kohl (1995) explained how the privileging of dominant values is manifest in histories presented in educational systems. Kohl (1995) examined the story of *Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* in elementary school texts and reported that many school texts present Rosa Parks as a tired old lady who refused to give up her seat on the bus as a matter of individual principle. Rosa Parks was not presented as a tireless human rights activist who was part of an organized movement for social change; so, the presentation of her story worked to reinscribe the U.S. cultural value of individualism and make invisible the collective efforts required for social change (Kohl, 1995). In this way, the power of dominant culture is reproduced in the literacy and language practices adopted in education systems.

Power issues are inherent in literacy and language education in U.S. schools. Even educators who work to ensure equity can be influenced by the power of the dominant language conventions at play in literacy and language education. In the book *The Skin that we Speak*, Delpit (2008) described herself as a literacy educator and researcher. She viewed herself as

embracing of diverse speech patterns but was surprised at her reaction when her daughter began using Ebonics in conversations with friends. The Linguistic Society of America describes Ebonics as African American English that does not utilize standard pronunciations (Rickford, 2015; Williams, 1975). Delpit (2008) explained the inner turmoil she felt and recognized her urge to correct her daughter's speech. She was torn by her belief in respecting various and diverse speech patterns and her wish for her daughter to represent herself in the style of dominant discourse. She approached her daughter with her concerns and her daughter told her not to worry because she could "code switch" (Delpit, 2008, p. 39). In this sense, code switching is the ability to shift one's language style to suit the needs of the moment and the audience. In not-so-many-words, Delpit's eleven-year-old daughter expressed an understanding that many educators and others in society often view non-standard English speakers as uneducated or unintelligent and acknowledged the value in conforming to dominant speech patterns.

For many, education is viewed as a means for upward mobility (Brandt, 2001) and a good education is viewed as one that supports standard (dominant) speech (Carter, 1997; Lewis, 1996). Brandt's (2001) research highlighted the role of literacy as a resource "pursued for the opportunities and protections it potentially grants" (p. 5). However, Brandt (1997, 2001, 2009) pointed out that literacy learning involves "sponsors" who in their sponsorship gain advantage in others literacy development in some way, which creates a literacy economy. Brandt (1997) demonstrated how "economic and political forces... affect people's day-to-day ability to seek out and practice literacy" (p. 9). Brandt (2001) also noted how literacies once privileged rarely fall-by-the-way-side but instead "accumulate" in ways that demand more and more from those seeking to be considered literate (p. 104). Brandt (2009) declared, "Above all, in matters of literacy, we should consider the problem not only of deficit but of surplus" (p. 190). As standards of literacy keep rising, Brandt (2009) believed that "literacy needs to be addressed in a civil rights context" to ensure that "collective resources and individual rights are equal to all members" (p. 188-191).

In *Ways with Words*, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) showed how cultural understandings of knowledge development influence the way language is gained. In her research, Heath (1983) discussed how knowledge and language are transmitted differently through an examination of two diverse communities, which she called Roadville and Tracktown. Heath (1983) revealed the differing cultural attitudes and practices that fostered language and literacy in each community. She detailed the beliefs and practices of caregivers of children in each community to demonstrate how cultural assumptions contributed to language and literacy learning. For example, Heath (1983) described an aunt in Roadville who spoke with her niece. The aunt asked, “What is that?” while pointing to a tomato and the niece replied “red” (Heath, 1983, p. 141). The aunt repeatedly said, “Yes, it’s red, but it’s a *tomato*,” and worked with the child until she produced the noun (Heath, 1983, p. 141). On the other hand, a grandmother in Trackville relayed that she could not tell her grandson everything he needed to know and that he must keep his eyes open and notice the things he needed to know (Brandt, 1983, p. 84). The grandmother said, “Aint’s no use me tellin’ ’im: ‘Learn dis, learn dat. What’s dis? What’s dat?’ He just gotta léarn, gotta know” (Heath, 1983, p. 84). Heath (1983) described these two moments, and many others, as cultural influences on language, literacy, and learning to show how cultural differences can disadvantage individuals and stigmatize groups working in social systems that privilege certain cultural ways of knowing and learning.

Educational Knowledge

The cultural practices of society’s dominant groups are the practices and ways of knowing and learning that are favored in public schools and that are sustained through certain teaching practices. Freire (1970, 2009) described a “banking” method of education that attempts to deposit knowledge into students’ minds without connecting the information to meaning and purpose for the students’ lives (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 71-79). Freire (1970) argued that the banking method does not work well and suggested a critical pedagogy instead. A critical pedagogy is teaching and learning that takes the goals, desires, and purposes of the students as a

foundation for instruction. The teacher is no longer viewed as the keeper and giver (depositor) of knowledge but is viewed as a learner as well.

Within a critical pedagogy, the teacher is a student and the students are teachers. Students bring their ways of knowing to the classroom and then examine the world in conjunction with the instructor. Freire (1970/2009) professed, “The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades” (p. 124). Instructors using a critical pedagogy present materials to the class but remain open to new ideas and ways of approaching the information and the world. Students are the masters of their learning; they do not simply accept their instructor’s education as the basis for their own. For Freire, importance should be placed on the transformations that occur as a result of dialogue and reflection, which produces new knowledge and changes in action. In describing a dialogical learning environment, Freire (1970/2009) said,

We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears- programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. (p. 96)

It is important to note that an individual’s increased critical awareness (consciousness) cannot be force upon them; dialogue and time for reflection are required to begin the transformation process that first shifts mindsets, then actions, in ways that effect transformations in societies.

Critical Literacy Theory

Critical literacy theories emerged from ideas for prompting positive social change, which can be traced back to the philosophical stance of a group of influential, White, male scholars who made up what has come to be known as the Frankfurt School (Crotty, 1998, p.130). While critical theories are always evolving, through all of the diversity of positions and traditions, the binding element unifying critical theorists (past and present) is their commitment to social change. The underlying assumption of critical literacy theory is that language and learning are never neutral (Comber & Kamler, 1997; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988, 1988b; Powell, Cantrell, & Adams, 2001) and that literacy can be used as a tool to challenge the status quo in effort to find alternative pathways that lead to equitable conditions and a more just society for all (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1999).

Critical literacy practices include examining and re-examining messages in a way that disrupts the commonplace, interrogates multiple viewpoints, and focuses on the socio-political in order to take action that promotes social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). Engaging in critical literacy practices allows individuals to consider more than their own perspective when determining community needs and appropriate actions for change. Individuals interrogate existing, often taken-for-granted, social structures and challenge the reproduction of socially constructed concepts in order to confront issues of equity and social justice (Anyon, 1981; Freire, 1970; Lankshear & Knobel, 1997; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, 1993b; Leland & Harste, 2005; Luke, 2012; Luke & Freebody, 1999; McDaniel, 2006; Shor, 1999). Critical literacy practices foster change in understandings, speech, and behaviors by close critical readings of messages and the world (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Freire, 1970).

Current critical literacy research explains how critical literacy practices can be utilized in classrooms to foster dialogue and encourage students to look at significant social issues across multiple perspectives (Harste, 2014; Janks, 2014; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2013, 2014; Mankin, 2012). Teacher-researcher Bourke (2008) demonstrated how children as young as six

and seven years old engaged in critical literacy practices. In *Fairy Tales and First Graders: A Teacher's Action Research into Critical Literacy*, Bourke (2008) reported how he approached teaching in his first grade class with the four dimensions of critical literacy in mind (Lewison et al., 2002). Bourke (2008) described his experience utilizing concepts of critical literacy while reading *Three Billy Goats Gruff* (p. 304-312). From questions that Bourke (2008) posed to his class, the first graders were able to begin to think about how the troll might have felt when the goats crossed the bridge to feed on the green grass. One student noted that the goats were able to eat but that the troll was hungry, too. By disrupting commonplace understandings and readings of fairy tales, Bourke (2008) felt that the students were starting to better recognize and discuss issues related to equity and social justice.

The first graders informed Bourke (2008) that they could distinguish the good characters in their books from the bad characters because of the colors that were used to depict the characters. The students pointed out that good characters had yellow hair and light skin while bad characters were depicted in dark hues (Bourke, 2008, p. 306-307). Listening to the children comment on stereotypical features found in many of their books caused Bourke (2008) to question how the representations might shape students' understandings of themselves and their world. Bourke (2008) was determined to work with the children in ways that did more than teach them to decode and comprehend words. Bourke (2008) wanted to develop the children's understanding of how texts work in society. He wanted his first graders to celebrate diversity and recognize the effect of the proliferation of negative representations and stereotypes in the world around them (Bourke, 2008). Enacting critical literacy practices in his classroom allowed multiple perspectives in the stories to be investigated and allowed multiple student voices in the classroom to be heard in ways that opened dialogue and reflection to foster new ideas and possibilities for change (Bourke, 2008).

Becoming aware of critical literacy concepts is what created the pathway for Bourke (2008) to ask critical questions and engage in conversations that shed light on his students'

perceptions and developing worldviews. Bourke (2008) was taking action when he took critical literacy practices into the classroom. His work serves as an example of how critical conversations can be approached (even with students as young as first grade) to open up dialogue and reflection on issues of equity and social justice (Bourke, 2008).

Many literacy researchers explore critical literacy practices with students of all ages. Johnson and Vasudevan (2012) discussed the “lived and embodied critical literacy practices” of tenth grade students as they responded to pop culture and report that the students discussed consumerism and engaged in racial play with their language and bodies only when the teacher was out of earshot (pp. 34-41). Lee (2012) described how the four dimensions of critical literacy framework could be implemented with pre-service teachers. Wellington (2006) explained how four Samoan teachers who were introduced to critical literacy used it in their elementary classrooms to work with first, second, third, and sixth grade students. The important conclusion was that the teachers needed “time and space for teacher self-reflection, self-examination, and the process of reconstruction of identity as self and teacher” when engaging in critical pedagogical practices (p. 45). Critical literacy researchers work with diverse populations and age ranges exploring many different aspects of critical literacy.

Critical Literacy in Teacher Education

Pre-service teachers engage in university coursework designed to foster a critical literacy stance in order to prepare for the critical discussions they will facilitate in their classrooms (Mankiw, 2012; May, Stenhouse, Holbrook, 2014; Mosley, 2010; Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012; Sherff, 2012); however, many teachers and future teachers have difficulty with critical literacy concepts (May, Stenhouse, Holbrook, 2014; Robertson & Hughes, 2011, 2012). Mosley (2010) examined pre-service literacy teacher education and reported on “how pre-service teachers learn to teach” and use critical literacy (p. 404). Scherff (2012) examined the classroom-based work of pre-service teachers and discussed the broad range of critical stances and the varying extents to which pre-service teachers adopted a critical stance. Educational researchers offer

ideas on how to enact critical literacy in the classroom as they encourage teachers to enter the critical conversations and assume a critical literacy stance (Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Cook & Voelker, 2010; O'Neill & Geoghegan, 2012). Practitioner publications present techniques to help teachers create a “positive classroom climate” for discussion and exploration as they work with students (Zambo, 2007, p. 127). Inconsistent critical literacy practices across classrooms and varying degrees of teacher adoption of a critical literacy stance translates to students entering colleges and universities bringing varying degrees of critical literacy practices and inconsistent critical literacy experiences with them.

Honors Education

Honors education systems sustain a hierarchical social structure and, at the same time, work against disciplined society by offering innovative, dialogical, learning environments meant to empower students. Honors education attempts to forge “new paths that contradict the core values that systems of privilege depend on” (Johnson, 2006, p. 151) by encouraging broadened perspectives that challenge traditional (dominant) notions of education and learning. For example, independent honors projects, seminars, and other co-curricular activities inform honors curriculum and classroom practices, which challenge notions of standardized testing and educational practices. The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) is a non-profit (501c3) organization that functions as a professional association serving undergraduate honors programs and colleges. The NCHC acknowledges different program goals and teaching approaches across honors programs and colleges but declared on its website, “Always however the central goal of Honors education is academic enrichment; the ways to this goal are defined by the specific institutional context, the faculty teaching in the program, and the needs of particular students” (NCHC, May 2015).

Acknowledging the specific, local, and particular needs of honors programs and colleges, the NCHC identifies “similar features within honors that occur regularly among these various programs, regardless of the variation within institutions” (NCHC, May 2015). The council offers

guidelines that can be used to differentiate the basic characteristics of a fully developed honors program from basic characteristics of a fully developed honors college. The major difference between an honors program and an honors college is found in the structure of the organization, including whether a Director or Dean oversees the program and to whom the overseer reports. The NCHC maintains an Assessment and Evaluation Committee that consists of trained members who are qualified to serve as external program reviewers and honors education consultants (Otero, Spurrier, & NCHC, 2005).

The NCHC offers best practices, guidelines, and support in all aspects of participation in collegiate honors education to faculty, administrators, and students. The NCHC (May 2015) described the value of Honors programs/colleges on their website:

The value of Honors programs and Honors colleges for students cannot be overemphasized. For high achieving students, Honors programs and colleges offer many opportunities to make the most of their higher education.

For the bright and talented students, participating in an Honors program provides the challenges necessary to stay motivated and stimulated. Honors education promotes lifelong learning through personal engagement, intellectual involvement, and a sense of community.

Honors classes are generally smaller, allowing students to engage in thoughtful discussion with their professors and with each other. Honors education encourages independent learning, often involving undergraduate research or creative projects. National and regional Honors conferences provide opportunities for students to present their research. Participation in co-curricular activities is also an integral part of the college Honors experience. Honors programs and colleges encourage students to develop their leadership skills, to assume mentoring and teaching responsibilities at their institutions, to study overseas, and to take internship positions. And scholarship opportunities abound in Honors!

The overall goal of a collegiate honors program/college is to offer academically advanced students an enhanced educational experience (Boazman, Saylor, & Easton-Brooks, 2012; NCHC, May 2015; Treat & Bernard, 2012). According to the NCHC, the value of an honors education for students is opportunity, challenges, intellectual involvement, community, and leadership development.

Boons: Benefits of Honors Participation

The structure of a collegiate honors program/college affords qualified students who choose to participate benefits, opportunities, recognitions, and supports that set them apart from other students. Honors students can receive honors credits for community service, internships, study abroad activities, and high scores on college level placement exams. An honors section of a class offers students a smaller class size, an expert instructor, high achieving classmates, and enriching activities. Honors course content is designed to develop advanced reasoning skills and interdisciplinary knowledge, which is shown to foster critical thinking and cognitive development (Bransford, 2000; Darbellay, Moody, Sedooka, & Steffen, 2014; Repko, 2008). Honors courses are distinguishable on academic transcripts and honors students can engage in independent study projects under the supervision of course instructors to earn honors credits and honors transcript distinctions for non-honors courses. Honors award certificates are given to students, frequently in public ceremonies, and completion of various honors program requirements are noted prominently on transcripts and diplomas.

Participation in an honors program/college can improve a student's feelings of personal wellbeing (Boazman, Saylor, & Easton-Brooks, 2012; Walker, 2012), which can ease the transition from high school into higher education (Kelly, Kendrick, Newgent, & Lucas; 2007). For example, Boazman, Saylor, and Easton-Brooks (2012) examined 213 gifted students who were entering colleges in Texas. Participants included 91 traditional-aged college students who entered the University of North Texas (UNT) Honors College and 122 gifted students who entered the early-college program for 15 and 16 year-old gifted students at the Texas Academy of

Mathematics and Science (TAMS). The study followed the personal wellbeing of the gifted students and the researchers offered a descriptive discussion of “the psychological constructs that were facilitative of positive personal wellbeing,” which included general self-efficacy, beliefs about intelligence, hope, gratitude, religiosity, and resiliency (Boazman, Sayler, & Easton-Brooks, 2012). The researchers related that the UNT Honors College students reported slightly lower feelings of personal wellbeing than did the TAMS students upon entrance in college; however, at the end of their first year in college UNT Honors College students’ personal wellbeing scores were higher than at entrance while the TAMS students personal wellbeing scores were lower than at entrance (Boazman, Sayler, & Easton-Brooks, 2012, p. 124). The increase in UNT Honors College students’ feelings of personal wellbeing could stem from the enhanced support system that honors students enjoy.

In addition to major academic advisement, honors students receive supplemental honors academic advisement in order to provide the honors student with increased personal attention and additional administrative support. Often, additional honors housing options are made available to students to create a living and learning environment with high achieving peers, which is shown to deliver additional support for students (Daffron & Holland, 2009; Lease, 2003; Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Participation in an honors program/college affords students “enhanced confidence, success, and social capital” (Treat & Barnard, 2012), which can unlock opportunities for leadership roles that help prepare individuals for continued and future success.

Recent Criticisms of Collegiate Honors Education and Responses to Criticisms

Given the benefits afforded to college honors students, it is no wonder that an increasing number of students participate in honors education. Honors programs/colleges have been experiencing enrollment booms (Hamilton, 2004; Scott & Frana, 2008) in line with the increasing population of university students nationally (Kozlowski, 2015; Olson, 2014; Redden, 2014). The increasing number of students in universities experiencing shrinking budgets (Lederman, 2015;

Olson, 2014) has likely contributed to criticisms of honors programs/colleges that revolve around educational expenditures (Knudson, 2011; Powers, 2006; Treat & Barnard, 2012).

Resources allotted for honors programs/colleges seem to serve only a small population of students in an increasingly constrained economic climate and Huggett (2003) points out that “the types of experiences designed for honors students can also be costly” (p. 53). Treat and Barnard (2012) discuss concerns that honors programs/colleges often attract students who already have “opportunity” and then work to provide those students with even more opportunity (p. 711). Knudson (2011) reports that parents and students often view honors education as an upgrade to first class when the focus should instead be on a “culture of engagement” and not on rewards for achievement. Such criticisms intensify the economic argument and harken back to historic criticisms of elitism associated with honors education (Burnett, 2005; Wiener, 2009) and its Ivy League roots (Guzy, 2003; Rinn, 2006).

Economic pressures can result in the raising of admission requirements for honors programs/colleges, which can intensify claims of elitism. For example, scores on national college admission tests, such as the ACT or SAT, and high school GPA could increase for entering students seeking honors admission, which would support and demonstrate Brandt’s (1997, 2001, 2009) insight on accumulating literacies that, at one time sufficient, become inadequate under increased demands of advancing economies. However, honors programs/colleges are touted as the counterpart to an Ivy League education without the expense of an Ivy League school (Ashburn, 2006; Burnett, 2005; Hamilton, 2004), and are claimed to attract a more diverse population than would otherwise be found in the host institution (Burnett, 2005; Singell & Tang, 2012; Treat & Barnard, 2012). Honors programs/colleges attempt to address current criticisms by, among other things, providing alternative pathways for admission and by producing students who contribute leadership for the betterment of society (NCHC, 2015).

Honors Student Identity

Many eligible students choose not to participate in honors education; as a result, college students who decide to participate in honors education are individuals who share certain common characteristics, including strong academic ability (Singell & Tang, 2012) and high motivation (Lapp-Rincker, 2003). Many students who participate in honors programs/colleges come from gifted and talented programs in secondary schools where some achieved success in their regular schoolwork with little effort (Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Emmons, & Zhang, 1993; Colangelo, Assouine & Goss, 2004; Lancaster, 2014). In academic climates where success is measured by completion of academic tasks and high scores on standardized tests, many students may have never been required to engage in critical thinking (Carroll, 2013; Cooper, 2014).

Gifted students can struggle academically in colleges and universities and can experience a displaced sense of identity (Lancaster, 2014; Robinson, 1997). Consequently, gifted students transitioning into collegiate life may experience adjustment issues more intensely than other entering students (Rice, Leever, Christopher, & Porter, 2006). Honors students can be influenced by their own religious and philosophical backgrounds (Mathey, 1993) and may be resistant to new thoughts and actions that challenge a culture of “niceness” (Elmore, 2007; Haviland, 2008; McIntyre, 1997) and may view certain topics as taboo (Lundstrom & Shrode, 2013; May, Stenhouse, Holbrook, 2014).

Communication as a Political Model for Change

Change in social practices occurs through a development of critical awareness (Freire, 1970; Johnson, 2006). A critical awareness of the nature of social structures (Mayer, 1986) includes an understanding of social structures as politically produced systems that work to maintain a disciplined society (Foucault, 1977/1995), which reproduces conditions of privilege and oppression for all its members (Freire, 1970). In pursuit of a greater humanity, individuals work collectively and advocate for greater diversity of values, stances, and positions that improve

the life chances of all members of societies (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 66-85). Johnson (2006) describes a process of action and communication that is not about “changing people’s minds” but is about “shifting entire cultures” by providing better paths of normalcy. He stated, “At most, we can shift the odds in favor of new paths that contradict the core values that systems of privilege depend on” (Johnson, 2006, p. 134-135).

The Persuasive Speech Assignment at OSU

Persuasive speeches on significant social issues composed for an honors speech communication class (SPCH 2713) at Oklahoma State University (OSU) offer opportunities to engage HCS in authentic dialogue on social issues topics that they selected as significant. Near the end of the SPCH 2713 course, students develop an individual persuasive speech focused on a significant social issue and speak to persuade the audience to take specific action to alleviate the social problem identified. Students self-select the social issue topic and a position on the topic, then write a full sentence outline of the speech presentation and construct a bibliography. Valid sources of evidence must be included in the persuasive speech and each piece of evidence must link to a specific stated idea. Constructing the bibliography requires students to investigate and evaluate what others have said about the issue. Providing solid evidence and advocating for specific action on a social issue necessitates that the students consider social issues topics, positions on the topic, the audience, and plausible actions for change. However, students practicing critical literacy would also question why they take a certain stance, explore whose interests are served, and consider the implications and social effects of their position.

Speaking about Social Issues

If students choose to speak about social issues on which they have strong views, then the topics that students perform for persuasive speeches could illuminate the social issues that university students consider significant; however, research indicates that there are many factors that can impact a student’s willingness to publicly express an opinion. For example, expressing minority opinions are viewed as socially risky and knowing that the majority does not share one’s

position slows expression (Bassili, 2003; Hoge & Glynn, 2013; Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

University students who perceive their positions on certain issues as in opposition to dominant views may avoid selection of topics they view as divisive and will, instead, gravitate toward topics and positions with higher perceived consensus. On the other hand, researchers have shown that individuals who possess a strong inclination toward individualism desire uniqueness (Becker, et al., 2012; Ruvio, 2008; Triandis, 2001); thus, those students may select and perform topics that they perceive as in opposition to majority views simply because it positions them as unique.

Librarian researchers Lundstrom and Shrode (2013) spoke with sophomore composition students and some honors students at Utah State University to investigate how students choose topics for persuasive research papers. Through focus group studies, the researchers found a few major characteristics of students' topic considerations, including "perceived ease, pleasing the instructor/following the assignment, personal relatability and/or interest, and the ability to locate sufficient resources" (Lundstrom and Shrode, 2013, p. 23). The research demonstrated that most students shy away from controversial topics or topics they perceived as political due, in part, to concerns about peer feedback and uncertainty regarding the instructor's reaction to the paper (Lundstrom & Shrode, 2013, p. 28-32). The conditions Lundstrom and Shrode (2013) described can be problematic for students' development of the skills needed to advocate for social justice and to persuade others to take positive actions for social change.

Lundstrom and Shrode (2013) envision the role of the librarian as shifting from helping students find sources to "helping them with the more difficult task of learning, which includes assisting with reading strategies, thinking critically throughout the process, and defining (and redefining) a topic" (p. 37). Participating in the focus group conversations about topic considerations increased the students' critical awareness and alerted them that politics surround topics that even, at first glance, appear mundane (Lundstrom & Shrode, 2013). Lundstrom and Shrode (2013) noted, "Towards the end of each conversation, students started to recognize that controversy is inherent in almost anything and that the definition did not apply only to topics like

abortion, race, or gun control” (p. 31). What became apparent was that engaging in conversations with students about topic choices sparked students’ critical awareness by fostering more diverse ways of thinking about the topics considered. The researchers described students who were beginning to recognize that knowledge and language are never neutral (Freire, 1970).

Gaps in Literature

Much research in critical literacy learning focuses on the teaching practices of K-12 educators and on the preparation of future elementary and secondary teachers in teacher preparation programs (Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Cook & Voelker, 2010; Lee, 2012; Mankiw, 2012; Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002; May, Stenhouse, Holbrook, 2014; Mosley, 2010; Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012; O’Neill & Geoghegan, 2012; Sherff, 2012). However, there currently is a lack of scholarship that focuses on the critical literacy learning and practices of students in collegiate honors programs/colleges. Research in collegiate honors education frequently focuses on program development and student satisfaction (Hill, 2005; Huggett, 2003).

Additionally, there is little scholarship that focuses on the learning, growth, or worldviews of collegiate honors students (Huggett, 2003; Rinn & Plucker, 2004; Seifert, Pascarella, Colangelo, & Assouline, 2007; Walker, 2012). Holman and Banning (2012) conducted a bounded qualitative meta-study on honors dissertation abstracts and identified a need for honors dissertation work that focuses on “dynamics among personal attributes and environmental conditions related to behavioral outcomes but also helps structure interventions” (p. 53). They suggested research that would investigate students’ attributes under program characteristics and the kinds of behaviors produced.

More research is needed that explores the learning, growth, and developments of collegiate honors students; in particular, research is needed that explores the growth and developments of HCS in realizing their full intellectual capacity as leaders for diverse communities and the world. Without such research, it is hard to justify the expense and benefits of an honors education and counter claims that it is more than additional opportunity for the

already privileged. This dissertation project is designed to help meet the need. The next chapter explains the methodology used to conduct the qualitative critical research study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

“Though this be madness, yet there is method in ’t.”

-William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

This study is a qualitative critical inquiry into the literacy learning of Honors College students (HCS) at Oklahoma State University (OSU). Specifically, I explored students’ experiences learning to speak out for a significant social issue in a persuasive speech for an honors introductory speech communication class, which students completed during the 2014-2015 academic year. The struggle to challenge social inequality was the concern driving the critical inquiry with HCS; raising critical awareness in a way that allows the awareness to be turned into action for social change was the goal. A critical research paradigm (Hatch, 2002) supported the purposes of this study: (1) to engage HCS at OSU in dialogue and reflection in order to raise critical awareness, and (2) to produce a critique of the social and educational elements that limit HCS at OSU in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change. Research questions focused on how dialogue and reflection during the critical inquiry into the persuasive speeches of HCS raised critical awareness and on uncovering elements that limited HCS in advocating for social change. Sub-questions explored what social issues

HCS took up, why they took up certain social issues, and the conditions under which the persuasive speeches were produced. The methods I used to engage in the qualitative critical inquiry with HCS are described in detail in this chapter.

The Research Design

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research offers an emergent and flexible design that allows the researcher to adjust to research needs and situations as a study unfolds (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002). Exploring worldviews with HCS as participants dialogued and reflected on the experience of learning to think, write, and speak persuasively about a significant social issue required that I employ a flexible research design. Qualitative research provides “a means for understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). The meaning HCS ascribed to their literacy learning experience as well as the meaning they ascribed to the critical inquiry process was vital to this study. Qualitative research allows the point of view of participants to feature prominently in research reports and in answers to research questions (Hatch, 2002; Jacob, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A qualitative research methodology was a logical choice for me to explore in-depth the literacy learning experiences of HCS while attempting to raise critical consciousness to new levels through dialogue and reflection (Freire, 1970).

The Critical Research Paradigm

In a critical research paradigm, the researcher’s values frame the study and the researcher serves as the research instrument; therefore, the researcher’s experiences, trainings, and perceptions shape, influence, and limit the study. To be very clear, my values had implications for this research study’s focus, data collection, fieldwork, and analysis. In regards to research undertaken from a critical/feminist paradigm, Hatch (2002) warned,

Deserved or not, much critical and feminist research is dismissed by mainstream science because it is seen as biased and/or not empirical. Findings are often read as

political position statements rather than reports of research. The issues associated with bias reflect a lack of understanding or acceptance of the critical/feminist paradigm as a legitimate research perspective. Given Kuhn's (1970) dictum that the logic of each paradigm only makes sense to those standing within it, it may be foolish to try to convince those not inside the circle of the legitimacy of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of critical/feminist work. (p. 192)

While many researchers may not agree with the theoretical grounding and aims of a critical research paradigm, the work is empirical and researchers should present it as research that takes a position (Hatch, 2002). The researcher assumes an active role and an active voice that does not hide the agency of the researcher (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Jordan, 1985; Sprague, 2005; Wolcott, 1990). According to Patton (2002), "Orientational qualitative inquiry begins with an explicit theoretical or ideological perspective that determines what conceptual framework will direct fieldwork and the interpretation of findings"(p. 129). I framed this orientational qualitative inquiry through a critical research paradigm that relied on critical theory and a theory of critical literacy.

Critical Theory

Critical theory is a philosophical perspective that views the world through the lens of power relations and it holds that the dominant culture represents and recreates its values as norms for society while marginalizing those who are outside the dominant culture (Crotty, 1998). Critical theorists strive to expose covert and overt issues of power and injustices to enact change that will lead to a more equitable existence for all (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Habermas, 1984; hooks, 1994; Johnson, 2006; Kohl, 1993, Shor, 1999). Critical theory is a viewpoint concerned with social structures and their formations and with empowering people to transcend the constraints placed on them by dominant ideologies, structures, and practices (Adorno, 1973; Apel, 1980; Habermas, 1984; Marx, 1961; Marcuse, 1964; Mills, 2000).

Critical Literacy Theory

Stemming from critical theory, critical literacy theory focuses on the relationships among language, literacy, and power. A critical literacy perspective situates literacy as a political endeavor that is never neutral (Freire, 1970). It challenges traditional notions of literacy, which define literacy as an ability to read and write. Critical literacy fosters an active engagement with messages and asks how they sustain power and inequity in human relations, which requires competency in decoding the purposes and effects of a spoken, written, or visual message. Critical literacy encompasses an active literacy made up of four dimensions that seeks to (1) disrupt commonplace understandings, (2) interrogate multiple perspectives, (3) focus on socio-political issues and (4) take action that promotes social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

Researcher Ideological Positioning

My ideological perspective rests on my belief that the human world is made up of social structures that work to keep powerful people in power and others in their place. Social structures impact the life chances of every individual by setting up tools of control that privilege and oppress different groups of people. Dominant social groups have difficulty recognizing social structures that (re)produce privilege and oppression. Critical literacy offers a means of raising critical awareness in ways that foster actions for social justice. My position stems from a belief that literacy learning is never neutral but is shaped by political, economic, and social forces that work to maintain the power of dominant groups and the status quo (Brandt, 2001; Delpit, 2008; Freire, 1970; Heath, 1983; Kohl, 1995). Authentic dialogue and reflection with others can impact understandings of the world and foster critical thinking. When one considers the impact of social structures, critical literacy helps individuals engage in a resistant reading of their world that can increase critical awareness. Increased critical awareness can foster actions that can result in a more just and equitable existence for all. Working to foster critical consciousness is an attempt to change society and, therefore, a political act.

Critical Inquiry: Methodological Assumptions

Hatch (2002) described the methodology of a critical research paradigm as a “transformative inquiry” (p. 13). He said methods that attempt to raise consciousness and reveal oppression tied to race, class, and gender in historically situated structures are transformative (Carr, 1995; Giroux, 1988) “in that they require dialogue between researchers and participants that can lead to social change” (Hatch, 2002, p. 17). Critical researchers seek more than understanding; they seek change that leads to a more just and equitable society. Creswell (2009) explained that critical researchers move beyond “seeking understanding of the world” by “advocating for an action agenda to help marginalized peoples” (p. 8-10). Freire (1970/2009) declared, “The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not ‘marginals,’ are not people living ‘outside’ society” (p. 74). He stressed that until all members of society experience freedom then no one experiences the full extent of humanity (Freire, 1970).

Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) argued, “critical research can be best understood in the context of empowerment of individuals” (p. 291) and stated the following:

Inquiry that aspires to the name *critical* must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label *political* and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness.

Freire (1970/2009) described students as striving toward liberation from “contradictions of reality” that once realized “may lead formerly passive student to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality” (p. 75). He cautioned, however, that liberation cannot be carried out *for* others, or on behalf of others, but only through solidarity *with* others (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 48-85). In this critical inquiry, I embraced a social reform agenda with focus on the relationship between knowledge and power. I explored the worldviews and experiences of Honors students while striving to raise critical awareness to social structures that (re)produce

inequality; my hope was that this would combat the oppressive conditions that hinder the pursuit of a fuller humanity (Freire, 1970).

Researcher's Role

Critical researchers are “involved with their informants” and work collaboratively with participants to bring about social and political change (Hatch, 2002, p. 23). Researchers working within the critical research paradigm foster authentic dialogue and critical reflection so that new ways of thinking emerge that can unlock possibilities for new actions that can lead to more just and equitable conditions for all (Freire, 1970). Critical researchers design research to raise awareness, evoke resistance, and encourage political action; therefore, it is important that researchers make the transformative nature of their research endeavors very clear for participants (Hatch, 2002, p. 49). Creswell (2009) described such research as an “advocacy/participatory approach” since the researcher works in a “practical and collaborative” way *with* participants in an effort focused on “bringing about change in practices” (p. 9-10). Individuals make choices that lead to certain actions and they can make different choices that lead to different actions that propagate the change they wish to see. Individuals work together to “transform” the world by “naming” it anew (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 88).

Crotty (1998) explained that critical researchers “make a sustained effort” to hear “the voice of an inherited tradition and a prevailing culture,” and to recognize that “the tradition echoing through personal accounts of experience is a tradition founded on exploitation and resounds with overtones of domination and unfreedom” (p. 159). A critical researcher must listen attentively as an analyst who recognizes that words position individuals and that language produces what can become possible (Freire, 1970). Feminist researcher Patti Lather (1986) reported that a critical researcher will “probe and stimulate” when listening to accounts of experience and explained that “the researcher’s role as a privileged possessor of expert knowledge must be reconceptualized as that of a catalyst who works with local participants to understand and solve local problems” (p. 73).

In this study, participants were Honors students at OSU and the local problem under investigation focused on their learning to critically think, write, and speak persuasively about significant social issues. Investigating the learning experiences allowed for engagement in authentic dialogue as “people who are attempting together to learn more than they know” (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 90). The significant social issues taken up for persuasive speeches offered an opening for exploring our privileged and oppressed positions in society so that we could better know reality in ways that might “energize the desire to do things differently” (Lather, 1986, p. 73).

Setting and Context

The setting for this study was Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma and the context in which individual Honors students reflected on their experiences learning to think, write, and speak persuasively on a significant social issue for an Honors introductory speech communication class in the 2014-2015 academic year. OSU offers 43 sections of SPCH 2713 each semester but only one section is designated as an Honors section. The same professor instructs the honors class each term and serves as director for the Speech department. Limiting this study to HCS who completed an honors section of SPCH 2713 at one university, with one professor, during one academic year helped place the study in context through consideration of social and educational climates that might have influenced the students who produced the persuasive speeches. Focusing on a culturally and historically situated place and time with local people and their perceived issues is in line with a critical research paradigm. The knowledge gained at the end of this study will be about specific HCS at OSU and the circumstances under which they lived, learned, and produced persuasive speeches on a significant social issue. Findings from this study must be kept in context and are not intended to be generalizable to other people, other places, other time periods, or other situations. Transferability is limited to similar contexts and situations.

Oklahoma State University

OSU is a four-year higher education teaching and research institution with its main campus located in Stillwater, Oklahoma, in the south-central United States. OSU was established as a land grant university in 1890 and celebrated its 125th anniversary during the time of the research study. OSU has a mission to “promote human and economic development through the expansion of knowledge and its application” and a vision to “advance the quality of life in Oklahoma” (<http://news.okstate.edu/system>).

Six major undergraduate academic colleges are part of the university system, which includes the following: Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources (AG), Arts and Sciences (AS), Spears School of Business (BU), Education (ED), Engineering, Architecture and Technology (EN), and Human Sciences (HS). Students who have not declared a major academic area of study are assigned to the General University (GU) until a major is declared. Undergraduate enrollment statistics for OSU’s Stillwater campus by academic college during the Fall 2014 semester are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Enrollment by College, Fall 2014

OSU College	Number of Students
AG	2,315
AS	4,868
BU	4,573
ED	1,867
EN	3,856
GU	1,558
HS	1,784
Total	20,821

Undergraduate enrollment statistics for OSU's Stillwater campus during the Fall 2014 semester by ethnicity are reported as 74.04% for non-minority and 25.96% minority students. Undergraduate enrollment statistics for OSU's Stillwater campus during Fall 2014 semester by gender are reported as 51% Male and 49% Female.

The Honors College at OSU

The Honors College at OSU is comprised of high achieving students from the undergraduate academic colleges and the general university, who desire to participate in a supplementary educational program. Enrollment in The Honors College at OSU is based on demonstrated academic achievement. For entering students, possession of a high school grade point average (GPA) of 3.75 and a qualifying score on a national college admission examination (an ACT score of 27 or higher or an SAT score of 1220 or higher) constitutes qualifying academic achievement. Individuals desiring to participate in honors education at OSU but who do not meet the participation standards can submit a written essay or petition for admittance, which is then reviewed and decided upon by committee (Mohler, 2013). Alternatively, entering students can wait until after they have obtained a qualifying university GPA, which corresponds to the number of university coursework hours completed, to join The Honors College at OSU. Table 3 shows the number of students enrolled in The Honors College at OSU by college and gender.

Table 3

Enrollment in The Honors College at OSU in May 2015

College	Females	Males	Total Honors Participants
AG	159	45	204
AS	310	187	497
BU	163	143	306
ED	67	22	89
EN	134	267	401
GU	20	9	29
HS	108	12	120
Total	961	685	1646

Comparatively, the female population of The Honors College at OSU is higher than that found in the larger university population.

Demographic data from the Spring 2014 semester indicates that HCS originated from 32 states and 13 nations and that 81.6% of them were White. The total operating budget for the 2013-2014 academic year was over \$868,000 and 113 Honors College Degrees were awarded that academic year. Graduates from the university whose official transcripts indicated an honors degree first began appearing in May of 1969. From May of 1969 to May of 2014, a total of 1,549 Honors Degrees were awarded.

The Oklahoma State University Honors College provides the vision and mission statement for the program on The Honors College website. The Honors College includes in its vision the development of “leaders engaged with their communities and the world” (May 2015).

The mission of the Honors College at OSU follows:

The Honors College will attract high-achieving students from Oklahoma and beyond. It will support them with a high-quality living/learning environment that provides intellectually challenging courses and encourages their personal development in service and leadership, ultimately helping them reach their full potential. (Mission, 2015)

The vision of the Honors College at OSU follows:

The Honors College at Oklahoma State University develops a community of support and innovative academic excellence, which provides students from diverse backgrounds with the opportunity to realize fully their intellectual potential, while becoming leaders engaged with their communities and the world. (Vision, 2015)

The vision and mission statements articulate the driving forces of The Honors College at OSU, which is committed to attracting high achieving students, providing support, nurturing full intellectual potential, and to producing engaged leaders active in service to their communities and the world.

Persuasive Speech Assignment

The persuasive speech assignment in Honors SPCH 2713 is designed to encourage critical thinking about significant social issues and to train students to speak publicly in ways that prompt others to action. Grading criteria from the rubric read, “Topic: The topic was socially significant, persuasive in nature, of interest to the audience, fit the requirements of the assignment, and was narrowed appropriately and creatively to meet time constraints” (p. 35). A description of the assignment as it appears in the course handbook (p. 32) is shown in Figure 1.

The Persuasive Presentation Assignment Description

Objective: To persuade your audience to take specific action on a significant and current social issue. The issue may be local, national, or international in nature.

Rationale: To construct and present orally a thorough, coherent, and well-supported argument **advocating specific action** regarding a significant social issue. This assignment will enable you to develop reasoning, analytical, organizational, and presentational skills that are considered vital to the success of your personal and professional life. **Textbook Reference:** Chapters 12-16.

Oral Component: A 5-7 minute persuasive presentation. Persuasive presentations must conform to the Motivated Sequence Organizational Pattern (see Chapters 13 and 16 in the textbook for a description of this organizational pattern; a worksheet is provided on page 33 of this handbook).

Selecting a Topic: Selecting a suitable topic is a critical aspect of the presentation process. One of the best ways to select a current topic would be to browse through weekly news magazines or daily newspapers. Another approach would be to use your own experience as a volunteer. Keep in mind that the topic you address must be something we can really **do something about**.

Social issues arise from the problems and needs of specific groups of individuals and/or the collective whole. Our response to these issues is deeply rooted because they trigger our attitudes, values, and beliefs, and they get us off our derrières and motivate us to **do something**, to get involved, to participate in something that transcends our self-interests—that is, they tap into the core of our humanity and inspire us to help others. We can help others by volunteering our time, talent, and money to an organization, movement, cause, benefit, rally, or event. **Keep in that the focus of your presentation is the issue not the specific organization, even though the action you advocate will benefit that organization.**

An example may help. Every summer cyclists participate in the Race Across America. Cyclists are part of teams that raise awareness for a cause or a disease. For instance, teams raised money for melanoma research, the Northwest Arkansas Children's Shelter, Walter Reed Hospital, National MS Society, inner city youth, among other things. These causes or diseases would be the focus of your presentation, and participating in the Race Across America (in any capacity, not just as a cyclist) would be the **action** you would advocate to address that problem. In this case, the Gaining Attention, Establishing Need, and Satisfying Need steps would focus on cancer research or the problems facing veterans or inner city youth. In the Visualizing Solutions and Call to Action steps you would tell us about one or more organizations that are addressing these problems and how we can help.

Figure 1: Persuasive speech assignment for Honors SPCH 2713 at OSU

Permissions Needed to Complete the Study

To begin the research study, I needed permission from gatekeepers and stakeholders. First, I found a faculty member who agreed to supervise the dissertation study. Second, I wrote and submitted the first three chapters of the dissertation, in the form of a research proposal, to the

dissertation committee for their approval. Third, I requested permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at OSU in order to undertake research with human participants (Appendix A). Fourth, I created a written informed consent statement for each participant to ensure that that they understood the study, knew their rights as research partners, and willingly agreed to participate. After gaining all the necessary permissions, I began to conduct the study. I followed a timeline to begin the research process and to complete the study. Obtaining permission to conduct the study occurred in June of 2015 and data collection began in July and ended in October of the same year.

Gaining Entry

My association and work with The Honors College at OSU granted me a pre-existing relationship with the honors community. As an undergraduate student, I participated in the honors program at OSU from December 1998 until May of 2003, when I graduated with an Honors College Degree. In 2006, my daughter joined the honors program as a student at OSU. She served as a student aid in the honors advising offices and graduated with an Honors College Degree in May of 2010. I had daily contact with her and many of her Honors College peers during her time as a student. My son began his undergraduate studies as a member of the Honors College at OSU in August of 2014 and moved into on-campus honors housing. He is pursuing an Honors College Degree as of the writing of this dissertation. In December of 2013, I began employment as an Honors Academic Counselor at OSU and retained that position until August 2015 when I accepted a full-time position as a Lecturer for the Speech department at OSU. Moving into a new position as a SPCH 2713 instructor granted me access to new community of speech instructors and students, which provided me with additional insights. The various connections I established as an honors student, honors alumna, honors parent, and honors academic advisor granted me multiple access points to different parts of the honors community (Levon, 2013, p. 202).

My interactions with the honors community at OSU ranged from formal to informal and from professional to personal. Employment duties required my daily engagement with honors students, families of honors students, potential students, honors administrators, instructors, advisors, curriculum, housing staff, programming, events, and educational records. Day-to-day activities included conversations both with and about honors students. While I participate in the honors community, I do not participate as an honors student. As the researcher for the study, I claim both insider and outsider perspectives; my challenge is to manage the tensions that exist and do justice to both perspectives (Patton, 2002, p. 268). Beginning this research study as an Honors Academic Counselor, I reached out to Honors students, explained the research study to them, defined the research relationship, and developed a research partnership.

Participants

After receiving the required institutional permissions (described above) to conduct the qualitative critical inquiry, I contacted HCS who met the criteria of having completed an honors section of SPCH 2713 at OSU during the 2014-2015 academic year via email with an invitation to participate. Selection of participants was based on purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) explained, "Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). There were 44 HCS who completed an Honors SPCH 2713 class at OSU during the 2014-15 academic year and all were invited to participate in the study.

The research study was presented in the body of the initial email, and I attached the written recruitment script. Later, I sent out a second email to all invited HCS, which contained the participant instructions and the consent form for their review. I sent a copy of the guiding interview questions to all HCS who expressed interest in participating in the study. Individual arrangements were made to meet with each HCS who expressed interest in joining the study so that I could explain the transformative aspects of the critical inquiry. The willingness of participants to collaborate and share their worldviews is a fundamental aspect of participation in a

critical inquiry since critical research stems from an “effort to raise consciousness and bring about social change” (Hatch, 2002, p. 76). I spoke with some HCS who declined the invitation to join the study. HCS agreed to join the study by signing and returning the consent form, which I read and explained to them.

Number of Participants

The number of participants for this study was limited by the size of the honors classes and the number of willing participants. When discussing sample sizes for qualitative research Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) stated the following:

In general, sample sizes in qualitative research should not be too large that it is difficult to extract thick, rich data. At the same time, as noted by Sandelowski, the sample size should not be too small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation (Flick, 1998; Morse, 1995), theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), or informational redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 242). (p. 242)

The minimum number of participants required for the study was one and the maximum number was 44 participants. Of the individuals invited to participate in the research study, 11 of the 44 had a pre-existing professional student/advisor relationship with me. Many others had familiarity with me through honors functions and temporary advising situations.

Response rate. Out of the 44 HCS invited to participate, nine students (approximately 20.5%) volunteered and participated in the critical inquiry. Demographic information for the nine study participants is closely representative of the entire population of HCS enrolled in the Honors SPCH 2713 course during the 2014-2015 academic year. The nine HCS who participated were 19 to 21 years of age, sophomore, junior, and senior level honors students from Oklahoma, Texas, and Minnesota. A total of five female students and four male students participated. Participants indicated that they were from middle and working class families, all able-bodied, and all nine students identified as White. One male student also identified as a Native American, specifically he identified as Cherokee. Participants who mentioned their religion identified as Christian. Over half

of the HCS who participated were pursuing majors housed under the College of Arts and Sciences while two students were in the Spears School of Business and two were in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. Over half of the HCS indicated that they were pursuing a pre-medical/pre-health course of study (track) in their academic program, two students indicated a pre-law track, one student was pursuing an accounting career, and at least one student expressed an interest in a career in the ministry. Table 4 displays the gender, university classification, and major of the participants.

Table 4

HCS Who Participated in the Critical Inquiry

Demographic Groups	Male	Female	Total
University Classification			
Senior: 94+ earned college hours	0	1	1
Junior: 60-93 earned college hours	1	4	5
Sophomore: 28-59 earned college hours	3	0	3
Total	4	5	9
University College			
Ag Sciences & Natural Resources	0	2	2
Arts & Sciences	2	3	5
Business	2	0	2
Total	4	5	9

Four students had taken the SPCH 2713 class in Fall 2014: three were female; one was male. Five students had taken the SPCH 2713 class in Spring 2015: two were female; three were male. The semester information affects the study in that the students were asked to reflect on the situation in which they lived, learned, and produced persuasive speeches for an honors introductory speech class. Almost half of the students were reflecting on events that had occurred approximately nine months prior to the dialogic interviews. Student who had taken the course in the spring of 2015 were reflecting on events that had occurred approximately four months prior to

the dialogic interviews. Due to the reflective nature of the inquiry, I asked each participant to prepare for the formal dialogic interview by re-reading notes, the planning report, visual aids, and any other materials that would assist their recollections.

Establishing and Building Working Relationships

Individuals participating in a critical research study must feel comfortable enough to engage in authentic dialogue and participants should feel empowered to express their opinions, questions, or concerns as the research study progresses. Building a respectful, trusting relationship with participants is an especially important aspect of a transformative inquiry (Hatch, 2002; Mertens, 2009); however, developing relationships takes time. All nine HCS who joined the research study visited the honors advising office where I worked prior to joining the research study. Two participants were my advisees and others had met with me briefly when their advisor was out of the office. It is possible that there were interactions at honors events and ceremonies, prior to beginning the research study. Participants could have been more familiar with me than I was aware. I expressed to participants that I would strive to know them and their interests while working collaboratively with them during the research study and I painstakingly explained the transformative nature of a critical research study to each participant.

Level of Participant Involvement

In this study, I invited participants to speak openly and honestly in dialogue with me in an ongoing fashion. Phone numbers, email addresses, and daily schedules were exchanged. I anticipated that each participant would invest a minimum of 4 to 6 hours of their time and energy over the course of 3 to 4 months of research activities. I encouraged participants to provide their insights and to participate collaboratively in research endeavors. Different participants desired different levels of involvement and preferred different means of engagement. All participants engaged in a one-to-one formal dialogic interview lasting from twenty-five to fifty minutes and all participants invested time and mental energy in the research process. Engagement differed for

each participant depending on personal willingness and desire to actively engage in the research process.

Over the course of the research period, participants reviewed their persuasive speech planning report and the visual aid created for the persuasive speech assignment. They formally and informally discussed and answered questions about their experiences, their lives, their thinking, their feelings, and the circumstances under which they produced their persuasive speeches. They explained and described the creation of their visual aids and engaged in dialogue about critical and visual literacy. Participants contributed feedback on the research study throughout the research period (Wolcott, 1995, p. 109). Participants read summaries of the research report and offered clarifications, approvals, compliments, and further thoughts to aid deeper understanding (Hatch, 2002).

I asked participants to keep a journal (hand-written and/or electronic) during the research process in order to capture and reflect on their initial, developing, and changing ideas, feelings, and actions that occurred as a result of engaging in the critical inquiry. Hatch (2002) stated that “researchers in the critical/feminist paradigm are interested in raising the consciousness and transforming the lives of those they study” (p. 49); therefore, I told participants I would ask them to offer insight on how the research process increased their awareness and changed, or reinforced, their thinking, feelings, and/or actions. I assured participants that their journals, or other diary materials, were for their personal use and reflection during the research process and I would not ask them to provide their documents to me at any time. I told participants that I would ask them to review and reflect on their journal writings in order to offer information about the transformative effects of the research and they could decide for themselves whether to make all, some, or none of their journal writings available.

Ethical Issues

I made an effort to ensure that participants were treated fairly and with respect and dignity. I reassured participants throughout the research study that they could stop participating

at any time without penalty. I made every attempt to continually be sensitive to potential vulnerabilities of participants and to protect them from any harm. I took research summaries and reports to the participants for review and I assured them that I would honor requests to edit or remove any information appearing in the summaries and reports. I took measures to protect the identities of participants, such as using pseudonyms in all research documents and reporting. Furthermore, I extended an invitation to participate in the research study to individuals from two different sections of Honors SPCH 2713, occurring across two semesters, in order to further protect participant identities from any person who might gain insight into the identity of the research participant by reading research summaries and reports that mention a specific persuasive speech topic or element. I communicated that participation in the research process was voluntary at each stage of the research, which was meant to help ensure that participants never felt coerced into participation at any research stage.

Reciprocity. When so much is asked of research participants, the researcher should give back “something of substance” (Hatch, 2002, p. 66). Hatch (2002) explained that researchers make “labor-related contributions” or contribute to “expertise-related” endeavors in order to develop a research “bargain” (p. 66). Working collaboratively with HCS in a critical inquiry placed me in a position to offer assistance to HCS in various ways. I offered labor-related contributions, such as providing transportation to meetings or other off-campus outings, and expertise-related endeavors, such as tutoring or editing services and providing letters of recommendations to participants. I assumed that study participants would benefit from their participation in the critical inquiry through the potential for transformation and increased critical awareness.

This research study required a lot of trust. I trusted that HCS who participated would invest time and mental energy in the research endeavor. HCS trusted that I would respect their worldviews and would strive to know and understand them. That was our research agreement. I received more than I bargained for and I hope the HCS did, too.

Exiting the research study. After working with participants throughout the course of the research study (which included the collection of data, on-going analysis of data, composition of draft summaries, negotiation of meanings, and addressing consciousness raising) I offered a final one-to-one debriefing meeting to each participant to bring celebration and closure to the research partnership (Hatch, 2002, p. 66). The purpose of the final meeting was to protect the feelings of participants and to maintain relationships.

Data Collection Strategies

The data collection strategies in this study were document gathering and formal and informal dialogic interviewing. First, I explain documents that I gathered. Next, I explain dialogic interviewing.

Document Gathering

Document gathering is a strategy for collecting unobtrusive data that may or may not require direct interaction with participants. Some unobtrusive data are obtainable from existing archives and databases while other unobtrusive data may only be available through a direct request of participants. Documents and artifacts created for an individual persuasive speech provided an avenue for examining the topics and positions HCS took up for a persuasive speech on a significant social issue for an Honors SPCH 2713 class during the 2014-2015 academic year. The documents offered a baseline for examining shifts (transformations) in thinking, feelings, and actions that occurred as a result of dialogue and reflection while engaging in the critical inquiry. Other documents I gathered included enrollment statistics, demographic data, syllabus and course handbook, and course evaluations kept in public files in the honors office.

Dialogic Interviewing

The “primary data collection strategy” for this qualitative study was “informant interviewing” (Hatch, 2002, p. 23-24). Formal and informal dialogic interviewing is a strategy for collecting data that is intended to reduce the researcher/researched power dynamic often associated with standard

interview techniques (Anyan, 2013). Way, Zwier, and Tracy (2015) explained, “Rather than treating participants as sources of information, a dialogic approach encourages researchers to engage with participants as people with complicated and developing worldviews” (p. 11). The use of dialogic interviewing supported the theoretical notion that authentic dialogue and reflection can foster critical thinking (Freire, 1970). Dialogic interviews provided material and insight relevant to this critical inquiry.

Dialogic interviewers employ “methods for gathering knowledge but also methods for intervention and critical reflection” (Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015). Hatch (2002) explained, “interviewers enter interview settings with questions in mind but generate questions during the interview in response to informants’ responses, the social contexts being discussed, and the degree of rapport established” (p. 23). I examined enrollment statistics, demographic data, mission and vision statements, Honors College pamphlets and recruitment materials, the Honors SPCH 2713 course handbook, textbook, previous course evaluations, and researcher’s notes and musings prior to conducting dialogic interviews. HCS explained their decisions and perspectives as I listened intently and probed and stimulated dialogue that helped to push thinking forward (Hatch, 2002; Knight & Saunders, 1999; Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 1998; Spradley, 1979).

Data

I organized the data generated under four main categories: formal dialogic interviews, informal dialogic interviews, unobtrusive data, and researcher documents. Specific types of data resulting from this critical inquiry are listed under the data categories in Table 5.

Table 5

Categories of Data Listing Specific Types of Data Generated.

Formal dialogic interviews	Informal dialogic interviews	Unobtrusive data	Researcher documents
Structured oral discourse	Unstructured oral discourse	Full-sentence outlines of persuasive speeches	Audio recordings of dialogic interviews
Memories of interviews	Memories of interviews	Visual aids created to accompany persuasive speeches	Transcripts of audio recorded dialogic interviews
Feedback and negotiated meanings with participants	Feedback and negotiated meanings with participants	Unanticipated data relevant to the research	Notes from interviews
		Course documents including the syllabus and course evaluations	Researcher notes and journals

Formal Dialogic Interviews

Prior to conducting formal dialogic interviews, I closely read persuasive speech planning reports and visual aids multiple times. I examined documents created by the HCS for topic choices and the political positioning (stance) of the HCS. I marked places where critical literacy seemed evident, or where it seemed noticeably absent, and areas that seemed to merit further exploration, which were all places relevant to my ideological concerns; I then studied and reflected upon those planning reports and visual aids. I made two clean copies of each persuasive speech planning report and visual aid in anticipation of the formal dialogic interviews.

I conducted all the formal dialogic interviews on campus and held most in Historic Old Central, which houses The Honors College advising offices and classrooms. When possible, I scheduled formal dialogic interviews to occur when campus offices were closed, so that meeting places were quiet and to help maintain confidentiality. Immediately prior to the formal dialogic interview, I reread a clean copy of the planning report and visual aid and lightly marked

statements to possibly probe during discussion. I provided each participant with a copy of the guiding dialogic interview questions, a clean copy of the persuasive speech planning report, and a printout of any visual aids to review and reference during the interview.

The formal dialogic interviews allowed me to explore the told experience of learning to think, write, and speak persuasively on a significant social issue in an Honors SPCH 2713 class. Guiding interview questions I created for the one-to-one formal dialogic interview helped focus the dialogue but did not limit it. I expected that the formal one-to-one dialogue would require an investment of 30 to 60 minutes. I audio-recorded formal interviews, which ranged from 25 to 50 minutes, and made very few notes so that I could participate fully in the conversation as it occurred. As soon as possible following the formal dialogic interviews, I wrote my observations, impressions, and reflections on notepaper or in a Word document.

Informal Dialogic Interviews

Informal dialogic interviews are “unstructured conversations” that provide opportunities for participants to further explain their perspectives and reflect on “what they have said, done, or seen” (Hatch, 2002, p. 92-93). Informal dialogic interviewing allows researchers and participants to work in a collaborative manner that avoids discrimination (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) by ideally offering a more balanced research relationship (Anyan, 2013). Through unstructured, authentic dialogue participants and researchers explore worldviews and contemplate possibilities they may not have originally considered to the extent that rapport allows (Freire, 1970; Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002) specified, “Critical/feminist researchers may use informal interview settings as opportunities to engage in transformative dialogues that serve to raise consciousness of participants and plant the seeds of critique and resistance” (p. 93-94). I expected the research partners would invest approximately an hour each month, over the course of 3-4 months, in one-to-one unstructured dialogue. In this study, informal dialogic interviews occurred in an ongoing manner as the study progressed to the extent that each participant desired to engage, which was less than I hoped and anticipated. The informal dialogues were not recorded and I did not take

notes due to the appropriateness of the circumstances in which the informal dialogic interviews occurred (Hatch, 2002, p. 93). Notes were jotted down as soon as possible following exchanges, sometimes in notebooks, sometimes on sticky-note pads, or scraps of paper that were nearby.

The most substantial informal dialogic interviews occurred directly before and after the one-to-one formal dialogic interview with each participant; most occurred after I put away the audio recorder. Research participants seemed to seize the opportunity to make sense of their own learning and experiences and to negotiating meanings during that time. Participants talked more in-depth about their learning and life experiences and questioned me about my research, education, job opportunities, and personal life. During informal conversations, HCS and I shared what seemed to be more relaxed and open dialogue than that which occurred during formal interviews. The quality of the exchanges and the data generated seemed to be enhanced without the recording device. Informal conversations seemed to help stimulate exploration of critical and self-awareness for the participants and for me. Short phone conversations, via voice or text message, with some participants provided other informal opportunities for dialogue and insight. Informal interviews fostered a feeling of collaboration that helped in opening discussion and in clarifying concepts during member checks.

Unobtrusive Data

Unobtrusive data was described by Hatch (2002) as “artifacts, traces, documents, personal communications, records, photographs, and archives” (p. 117). In this study, artifacts were student created written speech planning reports and visual aids as well as instructor created course documents and other course materials. Written speeches and visual aids created by the participants offered insight into the worldviews, decisions, and critical literacy engagement of HCS. The course syllabus and other course documents provide information that helped illuminate institutional expectations that informed the decisions, behaviors, and products of the students. Other unobtrusive data included the text messages and emails exchanged with the HCS

during the research study. Email exchanges proved valuable in exploring ideas and sharing feelings. I also utilized institutional demographic data and archival databases.

Researcher Documents

The journal, notes, recordings, transcripts, self-reflexive statements, summaries, and memories I generated during the study made up other types of data collected. Some journal entries and notes were about capturing moments exchanged with participants while others were self-reflexive. Researcher documents aided in capturing emerging and shifting thoughts that highlight the values, motives, and understandings of the researcher as well as the transformative effects of the research process.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the political analysis method that Hatch (2002) offered “for ensuring that findings from politically driven studies are solidly grounded” (p. 191). In discussing political analysis, Hatch (2002) explained, “It is designed to accommodate critical/feminist epistemological assumptions that all knowledge is subject and political and that researcher values frame the inquiry” and he stated that the “political analysis model can be adapted to fit the many kinds of studies that can be framed within the critical/feminist perspective” (p. 200-201). Hatch’s (2002) political analysis served as an appropriate analytic tool for examining data for this critical inquiry into the persuasive speeches of HCS at OSU and their told experiences of learning to speak out on a significant social issue in an Honors SPCH 2713 class. Table 6 lists the eight steps Hatch (2002) provided for conducting a political analysis.

Table 6

Steps in a Political Analysis by Hatch (2002, p. 192)

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole, and review entries previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols
 2. Write a self-reflexive statement explicating your ideological positionings and identifying ideological issues you see in the context under investigation
 3. Read the data, marking places where issues related to your ideological concerns are evident
 4. Study marked places in the data, then write generalizations that represent potential relationships between your ideological concerns and the data
 5. Reread the entire data set, and code the data based on your generalizations
 6. Decide if your generalizations are supported by the data, and write a draft summary
 7. Negotiate meanings with participants, addressing issues of consciousness raising, emancipation, and resistance
 8. Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support generalizations
-

In this study, the eight steps Hatch (2002) offered for conducting a political analysis served as the primary analytic tool for examining data; however, other analytic methods influenced how I approached the political analysis.

Analytic influences

While a political analysis served as the analytic method for this study, narrative methods of analysis influenced me and informed my interpretation of data. Narrative methods of analysis serving this study included transcription (Poindexter, 2002), dialogic/performance analysis (Reissman, 2008), and visual narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008; Rose, 2012). Further, the four-dimensions of critical literacy framework served as an analytic tool for examining data deductively (Lewsons, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

Transcription. Multiple transcription methods help enhance analysis of oral discourse occurring in the face-to-face social interactions (Poindexter, 2002; Riessman, 2008). I revisited audio-recordings of dialogic interviews multiple times and transcribed in various ways. I view transcription as an interpretive analytic endeavor (Kvale, 1996, p. 280). I considered my interpretations drawn from transcriptions as suspect and revisited the audio file for corroborating evidence. Transcription methods included a “rough, content-driven re-presentation” (Poindexter, 2002) of participants’ words, so that I could begin to see and consider patterns and themes. Later, I used one analytic approach drawn from Poindexter (2002) and based on “Mishler’s work on joint construction in narrative and significance of research utterances” (p. 68). I focused on verbatim utterances and other vocalizations such as “Mm-hmm” and “uh,” which enable me to become “aware of the frequency of my encouraging an affirming utterances” (Poindexter, 2002, p. 68). I explored and utilized other methods of re-presenting oral discourse in written form, such as those that draw on poetic forms (Richardson, 1992, 1993, 1994), to a lesser degree.

When a researcher makes a choice to provide a certain transcription style to readers then that researcher is making a choice about how the research participant is depicted, as well as what the reader experiences. I see it as a power issue inherent in the researcher/researched/reader dynamic. As the researcher, I struggled with data presentation decisions. I spent a lot of time listening and re-listening to audiotapes of formal dialogic interviews. I imagined inserting audio segments of oral dialogue into this dissertation then attempted to represent the oral discourse as faithfully as I could with text and punctuation. I hoped dissertation readers would appreciate the complexity of transforming oral dialogue into a written form. My decision to include mostly verbatim oral discourse in final reports of research was made because I knew that it would be offset with the written discourse produced by the participants. I did not correct grammatical errors in participants’ speech or in my own due to my respect for actual speech patterns and because some speech errors seemed to occur at moments of tension or during struggles to articulate thoughts and ideas, which I felt were important reasons to leave spoken features intact.

Dialogical/Performance analysis. Catherine Riessman (2008) explained dialogical/performance analysis as “a broad and varied interpretive approach to oral narrative,” which “requires close reading of context, including the influence of investigator, setting, and social circumstance on the production and interpretation of narrative” (p. 105). The concept of narratives as performance is important in understanding that language does not simply convey information; language offers a showing/performance of one’s self that must be contextualized as an interaction with another in dialogic communication (Bakhtin, 2006; Goffman, 1974; Riessman, 2008). Dialogic/performance analysts recognize that stories don’t fall out of the sky but are told for reasons, to certain people, at certain times, and are in flux with shifting worldviews and understandings. Narratives are always incomplete, tentative, revisable, and partial (Bakhtin, 1982; Riessman, 2008).

A dialogic/performance analyst asks questions about the communication act, such as to whom was the communication directed, when, and for what purpose and they interrogate words, characters, and hidden discourses that the speakers take for granted (Riessman, 2008, p. 105). Riessman (2008) specified, “dialogic/performance analysis can uncover the insidious ways structures of inequality and power—class, gender, and race/ethnicity—work their way into what appears to be ‘simply’ talk about a life” (p. 115). Dialogic/performance analysis can add insight into how larger social structures work their way into individual’s consciousness in ways that shape how socially constructed selves are performed for and with an audience (Riessman, 2008). Meaning “does not reside in a speaker’s narrative, but in the dialogue between speaker and listener(s), investigator and transcript, and text and reader” (Riessman, 2008, p. 139).

Visual narrative analysis. Analysis of the visual aids HCS created to accompany their individual persuasive speeches for Honors SPCH 2713 was influenced by Riessman’s (2008) presentation of visual narrative analysis, which differs from descriptions of visual analysis in fields such as Art History, History, and Rhetoric. Riessman (2008) stated visual narrative analysis draws on dialogic/performance methods (p. 141). Researchers “have to make arguments

in words about images, that is, contextualize and interpret them in light of theoretical questions in our respective fields” (Riessman, 2008, p. 143). Riessman’s (2008) presentation of visual narrative analysis draws on the work of Gillian Rose (2012), who described a “critical approach to visual images,” which interrogates “the agency of the image, considers the social practices and effects of its viewing, and reflects on the specificity of that viewing by various audiences, including the academic critic” (p. 17). Visual narrative analysis methods rely on “reading an image closely and responding to *details*” from three sites: 1) the story of the production of an image, 2) the image itself, and 3) how it is read by different audiences (Riessman, 2008, p. 144).

Four Dimensions of critical literacy framework. Data analysis was informed by my ideological position, which holds that development of one’s full intellectual potential necessitates that one practice critical literacy in order to resist conformity to dominant social systems and discourses that limit intellectual capacity for imagining possibilities for a more just society. With my ideological position in mind, I employed a critical literacy framework to examine the critical literacy practices of HCS at OSU who had recently learned to think, write, and speak persuasively on significant social issues in an honors SPCH 2713 class. The four dimensions of critical literacy, as defined by Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys (2002), was used as an analytic framework to operationalize critical literacy and allow the critical literacy practices of HCS to be considered. The four dimensions of critical literacy “are inter-related, none stand-alone,” so all elements in the four-dimension framework were taken together to constitute critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 382). I conceptualized critical literacy as shown in Figure 2.

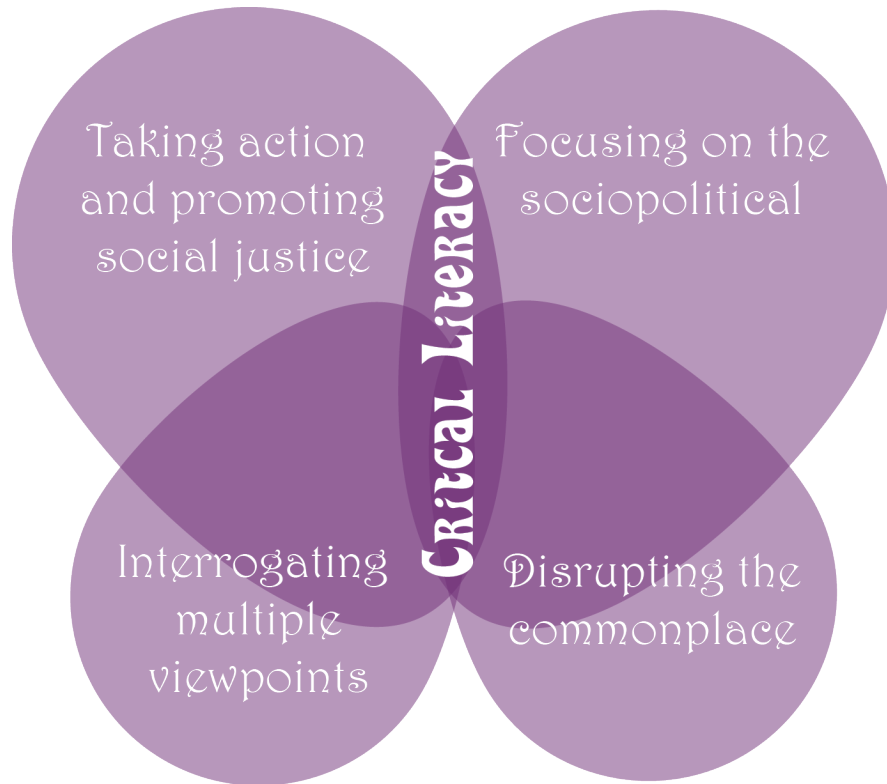


Figure 2: Conceptualization of the four dimensions of critical literacy.

While the four dimensions framework has not been applied to an investigation into the literacy learning of HCS constructing persuasive speeches, it has been used as “a framework for examining teacher beliefs and practices” when conceptualizing and enacting critical literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002, p. 382-391). The framework has been used successfully to investigate and discuss the critical literacy engagements and developments of teachers (Graham, 2003; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Ramirez-Nava, 2013; Winney, 2005); therefore, I selected it for this research study with the assumption that it would also be an appropriate tool to investigate the critical literacy engagements and developments of HCS at OSU. In this study, the four dimensions of critical literacy aid me in recognizing the critical literacy engagement of HCS who made decisions for a persuasive speech on a significant social issue for an Honors SPCH 2713 class.

Political Analysis Eight-step Procedures with Analytic Influences

The first of the eight steps Hatch (2002) described for a political analysis read, “Read the data for a sense of the whole, and review entries previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols” (p. 192). This step involved reviewing and reading all documents compiled and collected to get a sense of the whole. As Hatch (2002) recommended, reviewing and reading at this stage was done without “stopping to critique or classify or synthesize” (p. 193). Each time a new piece of data came into the study then I reviewed and reread the whole data set in order to keep sight of the big picture.

The second step Hatch (2002) described in a political analysis read, “Write a self-reflexive statement explicating your ideological positionings and identifying ideological issues you see in the context under investigation” (p. 193). This step of analysis involved writing a self-reflexive statement with enough detail that others could have an idea of what my position means for how I think about and see the world. During this step, I read, thought, wrote, reread data, reviewed theories, rethought, wrote some more, and revised. Eventually I wrote that my ideological positioning starts with the assumption that critical literacy raises critical awareness in ways that foster positive actions for social change; therefore, literacy can never be neutral but is political in nature and is often used as a tool to keep the powerful in power and others in their place. I view literacy learning and literacy teaching as political acts.

Hatch (2002) stated that the second phase of the second step is to “write out your best guesses about the ideological issues that are salient to the context you are studying” meaning that one should write “an exposition of what you suspect is going on in the settings you are studying based on your ideological predispositions” (p. 194). Believing that social systems work in ways that reproduce the status quo, I suspected that HCS literacy learning might limit the ways students could increase their critical awareness of the nature of social structures. My suspicions were that privileged HCS would speak out for social issues in persuasive speeches in ways that reproduced dominant norms that worked to sustain the status quo. I suspected that they would utilize some

dimensions of critical literacy but that they would not utilize all of them in composing their speeches. I suspected that the literacy practices of HCS would follow patterns related to class, race, and gender. As Hatch (2002) suggested, my belief system guided how the research study proceeded and what I looked for. The issues I identified during this step became a useful list for engaging in the third step of the political analysis.

The third step Hatch (2002) described in a political analysis read, “Read the data, marking places where issues related to your ideological concerns are evident” (p. 195). Hatch (2002) explained that this step of analysis involves “reading the data just to locate excerpts that seem related” to issues previously identified (p. 195). During this step, I read and marked the honors speech handbook, giving most attention to the persuasive speech assignment; then, I read and marked the persuasive speech planning reports created by HCS and the visual aids they created to accompany their speeches. Much later, I read and mark rough transcriptions of formal dialogic interviews.

In marking the honors speech handbook, I engaged in a close reading and searched for elements that I suspected could hinder critical awareness. In marking persuasive speech planning reports created by HCS I looked for evidence, or noticeable absence, of the four dimensions of critical literacy and made notes in the margins and on text capturing my interest. I recognized engagement with each dimensions of critical literacy by asking myself questions while reading through the planning reports. The process questions I developed for this study demonstrate how I employed each dimensions of critical literacy during data analysis. The questions I developed are listed in Table 7.

Table 7

Process Questions for Analyzing Data Using the Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy

Disrupting the commonplace	Interrogating multiple viewpoints	Focusing on the sociopolitical	Taking action & promoting social justice
Where have HCS reproduced or disrupted commonly held ideas, beliefs, & practices?	What views have HCS considered when deciding on topics and positions?	Where do social issue considerations move beyond self-interest or personal fulfillment?	What actions do HCS persuade others to take & how is social justice promoted?

I assigned a color to each dimension of critical literacy and then marked places on the persuasive speech planning report with a check or underlined in colored ink. I worked through each dimension separately. First, I went through planning reports looking for evidence of where HCS were disrupting commonplace understandings and I marked those places with a check or underlined in red ink. Second, I went through planning reports looking for evidence that HCS were interrogating multiple viewpoints and I marked those places with a check or underlined in green ink. Third, I went through planning reports looking for evidence where HCS were focusing on socio-political elements and I marked those places with a check or underlined in blue ink. Fourth, I went through planning reports looking for evidence where HCS were encouraging or taking action and I marked those places with a check or underline in black ink. At this stage, data analysis involved deductive thinking (Hatch, 2002, Patton 2002). Hatch (2002) stated, “It is a good idea to keep this step as deductive as possible, but to ignore insights that emerge from the data, even during this sorting phase, would be a serious error” (p. 195).

While the deductive phase of analysis was occurring, I noted new issues that arose inductively in the margins just to capture the ideas. Hatch (2002) stated, “The bottom line here is not to let your predetermined issues keep you from making sense of what the data are telling you” and he explained that when new ideas emerge the researcher should “establish a new issue, add it

to your list, and do a systematic search for evidence related to it” (p. 195). When new issues emerged from the data then analysis involved inductive thinking (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) described two ways of analyzing data inductively and reported that analysts can “identify, define, and elucidate” categories articulated by the research participants or the analyst can “develop terms” to describe categories or patterns as they emerge (p. 454). Data are then reviewed in light of the patterns, themes, categories, and typologies identified, which emerged from the data (p. 463). Patton (2002) stated,

Sometimes, as with analytic induction, qualitative analysis is first deductive or quasi-deductive and then inductive as when, for example, the analyst begins by examining the data in terms of theory-derived sensitizing concepts or applying a theoretical framework developed by someone else (e.g., testing Piaget’s developmental theory on case studies of children). After or alongside this deductive phase of analysis, the researcher strives to look at the data afresh for undiscovered patterns and emergent understandings (inductive analysis). (p. 454)

I reviewed and marked documents for new issues that arose. Inductive categories served “as a way to name, distinguish, and identify” important observations rather than serving as a way to “sort” data (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 175). I drew on a wide variety of resources when asking questions of data for “open coding” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 177). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) listed the following when discussing possible researcher resources:

direct experience of life and events in the setting; sensitivity toward the concerns and orientations of members; memory of other specific incidents described elsewhere in one’s notes; the leads and insights developed in in-process commentaries and memos; one’s own prior experience and insights gained in other settings; and the concepts and orientation provided by one’s profession or discipline. Nothing is out of bounds! (p. 177)

I analyzed data in this study, both deductively and inductively, in an ongoing fashion as it was collected. I examined data for “confirming and disconfirming evidence” (Erickson, 1986, p.90).

In analyzing visual aids created by HCS, I relied on “reading an image closely and responding to *details*” from three sites: (1) the story of the production of the image, (2) the image itself, and (3) how the image might be read by different audiences (Riessman, 2008, p. 144). I first viewed the images created in PowerPoint presentation view on a computer screen and then printed the slides in note form. I viewed the slides in conjunction with the planning report, then as stand-alone documents, then again in conjunction with the corresponding planning report. I made notes about images in the margins of printed slides and made plans to speak about the production of the images with participants.

After completing each formal dialogic interview, I listened to the voice recording in its entirety. Rough transcriptions were made from the audio recordings and then I printed, read, and marked the rough transcription while engaging in a constant back-and-forth between rereading the transcription and re-listening to segments of the 25-50 minute audio recordings. Rough transcriptions functioned as secondary support for analyzing the voice recordings. Transcriptions allowed dialogue to be frozen so that it could be seen, considered, and marked for areas addressing my ideological concerns. Again as Hatch (2002) explained, this step of analysis involves “reading the data just to locate excerpts that seem related to your issues” (p. 195).

The fourth step Hatch (2002) described in a political analysis read, “Study marked places in the data, then write generalizations that represent potential relationships between your ideological concerns and the data” (p. 195). In this step of analysis, I re-read documents with attention given to targeted sections that had been marked. Documents were kept intact during this rereading so as not to lose sight of the whole. Narrative dialogical/performance analysis heavily influenced analysis of data during this step and I gave intense consideration to the context in which persuasive speeches and interview dialogues were produced. A dialogical/performance approach to analysis “requires close reading of context, including the influence of investigator, setting, and social circumstance on the production and interpretation of narrative” (Riessman,

2008, p. 105). My interpretation was shaped by considering why the dialogue was occurring, for whom it was produced, and for what purposes.

Narrative dialogical/performance analysis enabled me to look for connections between what I suspected was happening and what was actually indicated by the data. Riessman (2008) stated, “the social scientist can interrogate particular words, listen to voices of minor characters, identify hidden discourses speakers take for granted, and locate gaps and indeterminate sections in personal narratives” (p. 107). Making connections in the data led to writing tentative generalizations. I revisited the data with the question, “Does this generalization support or counter my suspicions?” Reading closely, revising, and refining ideas were a large part of this circular step. This was an extremely messy step that resulted in the rather tidy outline of generalizations shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Issues and Generalizations Emerging from Analysis of Data

I. Issue: Topic Choices Generalizations

- A. HCS choose topics they consider non-controversial
- B. HCS choose topics they are familiar with
- C. Hypocrisy is a concern in topic selections

II. Issue: Positioning/Stance Generalizations

- A. HCS take on helping roles
- B. HCS recognize differences in their material situation and others
- C. HCS make concessions for social system and the way things are
- D. Doing something means the something is physical

III. Issue: Generalizations about Conditions

- A. Peers and the professor positively influence the environment
- B. Politeness rules the day
- C. Elements of the assignment were limiting
- D. Religious affiliations sponsor service to others
- E. HCS see their time as both flexible and constrained
- F. HCS conform to standardized expectations and resist in small ways
- G. HCS are concerned about how others view them
- H. HCS expect a lot of themselves and other HCS

IV. Issue: Critical Literacy Generalizations

- A. Multiple viewpoints are not interrogated regarding issue position
- B. Multiple viewpoints are considered in relation to classmates' reactions

V. Issue: Visual literacy Generalizations

- A. Most HCS gave a lot of consideration to the visual images they used
 - B. Images were used to disrupt commonplace ideas
-

The fifth step Hatch (2002) described in a political analysis read, “Reread the entire data set, and code the data based on your generalizations” (p. 197). This step of analysis involved rereading the entire data set and marking places in the data for “evidence that in any way touches each generalization” identified (Hatch, 2002, p. 197). Hatch (2002) recommended going back to original copies of data so that each data piece could be considered anew. I printed out clean copies of planning reports, visual aids, and rough transcriptions and examined them in light of the generalizations I developed in the last step. I assigned each issue a color (red, green, blue, black, purple) and I checked the text that supported a generalization under an issue with the corresponding color of ink.

The sixth step Hatch (2002) described in a political analysis read, “Decide if your generalizations are supported by the data, and write a draft summary” (p. 197). This step of analysis involved deciding if the generalizations were supported by the data and then revising the generalizations as needed. During this stage, I wrote a draft summary of the potential findings. Hatch (2002) explained, “These summaries will be designed to expose the dimensions of oppression experienced by the individuals being studied” (p. 198). Therefore, the summary was composed for participants and written to “describe the conditions in the participants’ setting in enough detail and clarity to provide a compelling place for starting or continuing a dialogue about oppression” (Hatch, 2002, p. 199). The research summary that I wrote for participants was ten single-spaced pages long. I sent the research summary to participants as an attachment to an email. As Hatch (2002) suggested, I noted data that seemed especially significant for possible display in the final research write-up while waiting to hear back from participants.

The seventh step Hatch (2002) described in a political analysis read, “Negotiate meanings with participants, addressing issues of consciousness raising, emancipation, and resistance” (p.

198). The draft summary was designed to be “true to the potential findings” and “useful for generating dialogue,” which Hatch (2002) explained means “different things for different groups of participants” (p. 198). For this group of people, it meant that I sent a draft research summary in an email that could be read, reviewed, reflected upon, considered, reread, and reconsidered before responding. Taking into account my personal relationship with each participant and my generalizations about participants’ polite dispositions, I took the approach that I thought was the most logical and appropriate for generating dialogue about privilege and oppression with the participants. I suggested that HCS contact me to schedule a time to discuss their response to the summary or indicated that they could choose to email a response. I asked HCS to consider and respond to the following three questions:

1. What was your reaction to the summary while reading it AND after some time reflecting on it?
2. How has participation in this research process (dialoguing, reading the summary, and reflecting) impacted you and your understanding of the forces that reproduce privilege and oppression (inequality)?
3. Moving forward, what actions might you take to recognize and combat oppressive forces that limit you and others?

Two HCS did not offer a response to the ten-page research summary and the others chose to respond via email. I anticipated that HCS would choose to respond in written form since written responses can be carefully thought out, reviewed, revised, discarded, or sent.

Hatch (2002) explained that “most critical/feminist research will be based on close personal relationships with participants that build in a moral imperative to work with them to raise consciousness, seek emancipation, and sometimes stage acts of resistance” (Hatch, 2002, p. 199). In other words, simply raising consciousness is not enough. Hatch (2002) stated, “individuals committed to operating within this research paradigm obligate themselves to the kinds of ongoing involvement that will bring about significant, meaningful change in the lives of

those they study” (Hatch, 2002, p. 200). Ongoing involvement with the participants and with the Honors community is anticipated moving forward from this research study and efforts will continue to be made to support and increase critical awareness in pursuit of a fuller humanity.

The eighth step Hatch (2002) described in a political analysis read, “Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support generalizations” (p. 200). This step in the political analysis process is designed to incorporate my experience and what I have learned from the negotiations with participants into the research. This step is about gaining insight into how the study unfolded, deciding how to frame the summary for a wider audience, and determining what empirical evidence to include in the final report (Hatch, 2002). Tracing transformations and reflecting was a large part of this step.

Nature of Anticipated Findings: The Form Findings May Take

Anticipating the form findings may take is “an important conceptual step” in the qualitative research process (Hatch, 2002, p. 57). Wolcott (1994) said that “most helpful advice” is “to think through your project ‘finish-to-start’ rather than ‘start-to- finish’” (p. 404). Wolcott (1994, 2009) made a distinction between description, analysis, and interpretation of qualitative data and explained that the process of “writing-up” qualitative research is a matter of emphasis. Hatch (2002) specified, “Critical/feminists may include some description and analysis, but their orientation assumes interpretation from particular sociopolitical perspectives” (p. 59).

Findings from this study build logically from a critical research paradigm that holds raising critical awareness as a value of the study. Hatch (2002) stated that a political analysis of data produces “value-mediated critiques that challenge existing social structures and promote resistance” (p. 200), and he explained:

The products of a political analysis will be summaries that have been revised based on feedback from participants and excerpts supporting the generalizations that make up the stuff of the summaries. The summaries will be different in nature than those described as outcomes of interpretive analysis in that they will explicitly be built around an

analysis of the political dimensions of the research. The summaries from political analysis will likely include generalizations that draw out relationships between participant experiences and the oppressive conditions in which they live. The summaries will be in narrative form, but they may lack the elements of story that usually characterize interpretive findings (p. 235)

Findings from this study are meant to offer some description and analysis but the “orientational” perspective of the inquiry “eschews any pretense of open-mindedness in the search for grounded or emergent theory” and “seeks not just to study or understand society but rather to critique and change society” (Patton, 2002, p.129-131).

Qualitative Validity Strategies

Validity in qualitative research is “based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Creswell (2009) described eight primary validity strategies (p. 191-193), four of which are incorporated into this study. First, different data sources are examined for evidence and information, which is referred to as triangulation. In this study the different data sources include formal dialogic interview, informal dialogic interviews, unobtrusive data, and researcher documents. Second, findings and summaries of the research are taken back to participants who are involved in negotiating meanings and offering further comment, which is referred to as member checking. Third, using rich, thick description to convey findings is a validity strategy that is evident in this study through detailed descriptions of the setting/context, participants, and perspectives. Fourth, presentation of negative and/or discrepant information allows contradictory evidence to be considered (Creswell, 2009, pp. 191-192). Additionally, face validity and catalytic validity described by Lather (1986) were employed. Lather explained that face validity is “established by recycling categories, emerging analysis, and conclusions back through at least a subsample of respondents” and that catalytic validity provides “some

documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents” (1986, p. 78). The categories of validity described by Lather are useful for critical and feminist analysis at odds with post-positivist claims of validity criteria.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative critical research study focused on raising critical awareness through authentic dialogue and reflection with honors students in discussion about, and examination of, persuasive speeches on significant social issues created for an honors introductory speech communication class at Oklahoma State University. In this study, persuasive speech compositions on significant social issues offered a means of examining the critical literacy engagement of HCS at OSU, and provided a platform to engage in authentic dialogue and reflection in formal and informal dialogic interview settings, as “people who are attempting together to learn more than they know” (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 90). Interviews with HCS about their persuasive speeches allowed HCS to express their worldviews on the topic they selected as a significant social issue and to describe the thinking that shaped their compositions and their literacy learning. Participant and researcher journaling during the course of the research study offered an opportunity for reflection that provided insight into transformations that occurred as a result of authentic dialogue and reflection. The next chapter introduces the participants in this qualitative critical inquiry.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANTS

‘I’m sure I’m not Ada,’ she said, ‘for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn’t go in ringlets at all; and I’m sure I can’t be Mabel, for I know all sorts of things, and she, oh! she knows such a very little! Besides, *she’s* she, and *I’m*, I, and – oh dear, how puzzling it all is!

–Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

Who in the World Am I?

Keeping track of all of the characters in Wonderland is no small task. Keeping up with oneself can result in asking, “I wonder if I’ve been changed in the night?” which begs the next question, “Who in the world am I?” (Carroll, 1865/2001, p. 46). That’s the great puzzle. This chapter is dedicated to introducing the Honors College students who participated in this critical research study. Each participant was valued because of the unique perspective the participant could bring to the research partnership. In order to provide “rich, thick description” (Crotty, 2009, p. 191-192) of each HCS who participated in this critical inquiry, I emailed each research partner and asked each to provide “a narrative” with “details about who you are, as you would like to be represented in this research” (personal communication). In the body of the email, I included a description of myself that reflected who I had been as an undergraduate student. The personal narrative I included read as follows:

Erica Burns is a non-traditional adult student who began her undergraduate studies ten years after her high school graduation. She has long, dark hair and green eyes and always wears make-up and blue jeans to class. She says she sits in the front row and sometimes feels that she engages too much with the professor and tries to not be so outspoken in class.

Erica married when she was sixteen years old [and] has two children, a son and a daughter. She builds her university schedule around the school day of her children because she feels that it is important for her to be home to meet the school bus each day.

Erica started college because she felt that a higher education is important in establishing a career and in bettering her financial opportunities. She also wants to set a good example for her children. She is an Honors College student with a 4.0 GPA and receives Pell grants and scholarships that help pay her tuition and expenses. She also works as a massage therapist and schedules appointments around her university and family responsibilities.

Erica has no idea what job she might pursue after graduation but is majoring in Art History with a minor in Theatre and English. She thinks she is best suited for the tourist or entertainment industry but is also considering pursuing teacher certification after graduation.

I wanted to offer something about myself to the HCS of whom I was asking to share so much about themselves; also, I thought the descriptive narrative might serve as examples that could help HCS think about what they wanted to disclose.

Originally, I wrote narrative descriptions about each participant; however, after engaging in that activity for a while, I began to feel unsettled and realized that the HCS participating with me in the critical inquiry should have the power to make choices about their descriptive depictions and the personal information written in the dissertation. After writing the narrative of myself as an undergraduate, I also created a description of an imaginary male undergraduate student who took shape from my blending of elements of all the participants. I included both narratives an email that I sent to participants. The creative narrative that I wrote read as follows:

Johnny is a 20-year-old, white, male, Honors College student at Oklahoma State University. He is tall and lean with dark hair and big blue eyes. He spends at least two hours a week in the state-of-the-art fitness facility on campus. Johnny is on a pre-

medical track and wants to start medical school as soon as he completes his undergraduate degree in Biochemistry.

Johnny is involved in (xyz), serves as (x: *president, treasurer, other*) for the (abc), and works (X) hours a week at (wxy). Johnny balances his time between his studies, his work, and the organizational responsibilities, which he views as stepping-stones to experiences and networking that he thinks will improve his future.

Johnny is dedicated to his Christian faith but feels that his university studies have been keeping him too busy to attend services on campus. He intends to spend his summer on a mission trip in Peru where he will help residents build houses and plant gardens while spreading the gospel of Christ.

Johnny has a long time girlfriend who he intends to propose to at the end of the semester. He looks forward to starting a family soon after college. Johnny's goal is ultimately to serve in the organization *Doctors without Borders*.

Participants promptly emailed descriptions to me and most said to let them know if I needed something more, or different, and that I could change or use them in any way. I assigned pseudonyms to the participants' descriptions but otherwise left them intact. The descriptions HCS provided are offered in their entirety (below) as a way of introduction and they appear in chronological order of their participation in the formal dialogic interview.

Tara

Tara was majoring in Microbiology and Molecular Genetics (MCMB) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class. Tara offered the following description of herself:

[Tara] is a female, white, 20 year old Honors College student at Oklahoma State University. She is from the small town of [Home City], MN about an hour outside Minneapolis. She is the only child of extremely loving parents, but she chose OSU partly out of a desire to gain some freedom from them. She is pursuing a degree in Microbiology with a minor in Health Education and Promotion and hopes to someday work with college students on establishing healthy eating and exercise habits. She hopes to start graduate school immediately after graduating from OSU in May 2017

[Tara] is involved in undergraduate research in the Nutritional Sciences department and recently finished two years of research in biochemistry. She works for the Department of Residential Life as a Resident Advisor (RA) in [a residence] Hall, which houses over 300 Honors students. She is an intern at [a wellness center] and is learning about measuring health risk factors and implementing [employee] wellness programs She is

also an active member of [a] pre-health honors society and serves as an ambassador for [OSU's scholar recruitment and development initiatives].

[Tara] balances her involvement in these organizations with maintaining her 4.0 GPA because she is passionate about helping other college students be successful, and because she hopes her involvement will make her an ideal candidate for graduate programs.

[Tara] is a Christian, but has struggled to find a church in Stillwater she is comfortable in. She grew up in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and is committed to the beliefs of the ELCA, which tend to be extremely accepting of LGBT individuals and female church authorities. She finds it hard to fully engage with the Stillwater area churches with more conservative beliefs.

[Tara] and her boyfriend have been together for 10 months and both feel like they have found "the one." They plan to attend the same graduate school (he wants to do MD/PhD) and build a life together. He hopes to someday be the head of a university hospital's neurology department.

[Tara] sometimes worries that they will not see each other enough and their relationship will suffer. However, both are committed to making their relationship work. Ultimately, [Tara] hopes to be a health authority and to encourage college students to live healthy lives.

Sherri

Sherri is a White female who was majoring in Animal Science (ANSI) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class. Sherri offered the following description of herself:

[Sherri] is a 21 year old Animal Science student at Oklahoma State University, pursuing a future in veterinary medicine. She is a recipient of the General Honors degree at OSU, and is involved in multiple pre-professional and student organizations, including the agricultural honors [organization], the Pre-Vet Club, and the Student Union Activities Board, for which she serves as an [active] member.

She is the youngest in a family of 6, and grew up in an upper middle class household in a small town in Texas. She is of average height, with medium length curly brown hair and green eyes. She says she usually sits in the third or fourth row during class, because she doesn't want to seem overzealous but still wants to feel engaged during the lecture.

Though she has not personally experienced many hardships in her life, she began sympathizing with the struggles of others at a young age. Through her involvement in her home church, [Sherri] has helped with many service projects and events, including

working at food pantries, helping the disabled decorate for holidays, hosting free babysitting for those in the community who needed it, and attending several mission trips to other towns to help recover from disasters, like Hurricane Ike in Galveston.

[Sherri] is an avid reader, and enjoys diving into fantasy and romance novels until all hours of the night. She has four pets, two dogs and two cats, who live with her parents while she at school, though it pains her to do so. After earning her veterinary degree, she plans on working with small companion animals, although horses are beginning to work their way into her heart. Either way, she has known since she was ten years old that veterinary work is the best way for her to help her community while having a profession that she deeply cares about, and she can't wait to start her future as a veterinarian.

Bailey

Bailey is a White, female who was majoring in Multimedia Journalism (MMJ) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class. Bailey offered the following description of herself:

[Bailey] is a traditional student who grew up in the suburbs of Dallas-Fort Worth. She comes from a traditional family and has one younger sister. She has dark blonde hair and deep brown eyes. [Bailey] is going to graduate in May 2016 with a Bachelor's of Arts in Multimedia Journalism and a Bachelor's of Arts in Spanish. She has enjoyed her time at OSU by becoming highly involved in campus.

[Bailey] has held leadership positions in a number of campus clubs as well as in her sorority. She plans to attend law school after graduation to begin a career working with non-profit organizations. She works 30 hours a week as a means to pay for school and save for the future.

[Bailey] has a long time boyfriend who is her high school sweet heart. They have been dating for four years. She is not a religious person but recognizes her spirituality with nature and those around her.

Pete

Pete is a White, male who was majoring in Biochemistry (BIOC) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class. I served as Pete's Honors Academic Counselor. Pete did not offer a description of himself. He is tall and thin with dark hair and pale white skin. Pete plans to go to medical school when he finishes his undergraduate degree. He is a first-generation college student from a working class family and believes a good education is a stepping-stone to a better job and lifestyle.

During the formal dialogic interview, Pete coughed several times, and I asked him if he would like a bottle of water. He chose the small, plain bottle of water over the large, flavored one that I had brought and I watched him empty the small bottle in one large drink. As the bottle lowered, I noticed the hole in the crook of his arm. I glanced at the other arm. Identical. A bluish puncture in each arm looked as if Pete had recently been stabbed with an 8-penny nail. I encouraged Pete to take the other bottle of water. Pete advocated for plasma contributions in his persuasive speech so I asked him if the marks in his arms were from donating plasma. They were. Pete sells plasma twice a week, every week since he turned eighteen, to pay for his education. Thinking about the expense of medical school made my heart ache. I included the narrative Pete shared in poetic form below:

The Bursar's Blood Money

At the point where
you donate twice a week,
and like 150 times at this point,
You kind of get
Permanent needle marks
in your arm.

I use the left arm
but after a while
your veins can flatten a bit.

And the easiest way to fix that is
go to another vein
or just wait
two or three days.

So this one
was getting a little harder
to donate,

It kind of rolled
a little bit
because of scar tissue
Building up
so, "Just switch to the other arm"

I'm now using the right arm.
That one went bad.
So, I moved left
Again
And it's after like
Six months.

It was around the time
in 2012, something
along those lines
My dad lost his job
during the recession

and he hadn't found work
at that point
so he started donating

At that time,
I was 17
So my mom tried to go.

My mom couldn't do it.
But my dad did it.

And when he found a job,
he continued to donate

Because there was enough
to basically get
about half a week of groceries
or a full week of groceries

and I didn't have a car,
I didn't have a job.
Couldn't really *do*
Do
Anything
To make money

So I would just go to his office,
before he'd get off work,
and we'd go together
and donate
and then go back

So there was a convenience
where we both
could make money

I could pay for what I needed to
and he could

pay for
the family

in some way

I probably wouldn't have started donating
Without it
But at this point,
I've donated enough and I know
It's fine
and Safe
and I figured

It's a way I could help.

Because this is,
Every single college
bill
I get from
Just
the Bursar
I just pay it with that.

I just build up funds
during the summer
from donating
to pay off
any bills I have

I gained money
here in Stillwater
because
they do it
on a debit card
So, I have one debit card
that's always empty
and one
that's filled up.

That's depending on
what time of the year it is.

Allan

Allan was majoring in Management Information Systems (MIS) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class. I served as Allan's Honors Academic Counselor. Allan offered the following description of himself:

[Allan] is a 19-year-old male from [Big Town], Oklahoma. He is a tall, lean young man, and a member of the Cherokee Nation. On his free time, [Allan] enjoys reading the Wall Street Journal, The Economist, Foreign Affairs, and Forbes, among other print media outlets.

[Allan] is [a leader] of the Debate Team, [and] the College Republicans, The Alumni Relations [committee] and [he is] Pledge Class President for [his] [f]raternity, and hopes to start an international relations club on campus.

Majoring in Economics and minoring in Chinese, [Allan] hopes to pursue his goal in becoming a Foreign Service Officer for the U.S. Department of State. With research interests in Central Asia, he will be interning at the State Department in Washington D.C. with the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs next Spring.

As of late, [Allan] has been interested in researching spatial memory, mental math, and other mnemonic oddities. His goal is to win a Harry S. Truman Scholarship and study International Law at Harvard.

Sam

Sam was majoring in Accounting (ACCT) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class.

Sam offered the following description of himself:

[Sam] is a 19-year-old, white, male, student at Oklahoma State University. He is tall, relatively thin, with an athletic build, dark brown hair, scattered freckles, and blue eyes and typically wears running shorts and a T-Shirt. He enjoys playing sports and can often be found running, swimming, or competing in an intramural sport.

[Sam] is an Accounting Major who plans to graduate in four years with a master's degree and then pursue a career in corporate America outside the state of Oklahoma.

[Sam] is widely involved on campus, most notably as [a leader] for Business Student Council, a member of President's Partners, and Pledge Class President in his Fraternity.

[Sam] leads a busy life, but manages to balance his extracurricular activities with his academics by maintaining a 4.0 GPA. He also was [highly acknowledged] for his work during his freshman year.

[Sam] is dedicated to his Christian faith and is active in spreading it in the community. He serves as a small group leader for [a church youth club], mentoring a group of 8th grade boys on a weekly basis. [Sam] is also involved with the college ministry at his church- [Baptist].

Kyle

Kyle was majoring in Music Education (MSED) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class. Kyle offered the following description of himself:

[Kyle] is a 21-year-old, white, male, Honors College student at Oklahoma State University. He is tall with dark hair and brown eyes. He says that he is your average Honors College student, in the sense that he always attends class (even when he might should stay home sick) and strives to get the most out of his education that he can.

As a Vocal Music Education major, [Kyle] is actively involved in the music department. He is a member of the OSU [Music Group] and the Undergraduate Assistant for [another music group]. In addition to his time spent in the music build[ing], [Kyle] is also a Resident Advisor in [a residence] Hall, which is [a] resident hall that houses a significant amount of the honors college students who live on campus. He also works for 10 hours a week at the front desk of [the] Hall.

[Kyle] is a dedicated Christian, who while in Stillwater, attends and serves in a local Southern Baptist church. Because of his faith he intends to go and work once again at a Christian camp this summer to help share the love and gospel of Christ.

While he is going to graduate with a bachelors in Vocal Music Education, h[e] is still uncertain of what career he wants to pursue. Even though his bachelors will be in music he is considering going on for a masters in counseling.

Hannah

Hannah was majoring in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (BIMB) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class. Hannah offered the following description of herself:

[Hannah] is a 20 year old, Caucasian, female, Honors college student at Oklahoma State University. She is tall with curly brown hair and hazel eyes. She spends most of her time doing homework and studying for upcoming exams in different areas around campus.

[Hannah] is a pre med student hoping to go to OSU-Tulsa once she has received her undergraduate degree.

[Hannah] is involved with residential life at OSU and serves as an Academic Mentor for her community by helping promote good academic habits and being a resource to residents on campus. She works around 15-20 hours a week doing work related to residential life including maintaining one of the tutoring facilities, holding academic programs, and mentoring a group of residents through the University College.

[Hannah] balances her school life, her job, and her social life which has allowed her to individually grow and help her improve in her future endeavors once she graduates college.

[Hannah] wishes to pursue a career path in pediatrics for her love of helping care for children as well as her love for knowledge which the world of medicine allows her to indulge in both interests. Though she does plan to have a family in the future, she is currently focused on her studies and has put the thoughts of a family on hold for a later date.

Ivy

Ivy is a White, female who was majoring in Biochemistry (BIOC) at the time of the Honors SPCH 2713 class. Ivy did not offer a description of herself. Ivy contacted me early in the research process and said that she would like to participate; however, communication was not exchanged again for many weeks. In fact, I had given up on hearing back from her. She contacted me again late in the research process and indicated she would still like to participate in an interview. I suggested that we meet. I do not know what motivated Ivy to reach out to me, but I suspected that she was associated in some way with another research participant who had just completed a formal dialogic interview. I thought the other participant might have encouraged Ivy's participation, which was speculation on my part due to associations I made with class schedules, interests of the students, and a comment that was made in an informal dialogue. Engagement in the formal dialogic interview was the extent of Ivy's participation. Our research relationship was the least developed.

Power Relations

In asking the participants to write their own descriptions, I was attempting to shift power in the researcher/researched dynamic in favor of the participants. In retrospect, I can see that the examples that I offered heavily influenced the form of the narratives that the participants sent to me. I recognize that much of the content was also influenced by my examples. The HCS adherence to the form and content of my examples reinforced for me how a researcher can wield power in a research investigation and influence the study in ways that are unintentional. Except for Pete and Ivy, who did not reply, HCS were willing to comply with my request and work within the framework that they assumed I wanted, which is a theme that appears again in the data analysis. The next chapter contains findings that resulted from data analysis.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

“Fan her head!” the Red Queen anxiously interrupted. “She’ll be feverish after so much thinking.”

–Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

Curious Indeed!

In trying to “answer useful questions” and not “leave out so many things” (Carroll, 1871/2001, p. 261), I had to think deeply about the purposes of my research study and the questions guiding the critical inquiry into the literacy learning of Honors College students (HCS). Specifically, the purpose of this critical inquiry was to (1) engage HCS at OSU in authentic dialogue and reflection in order to raise critical awareness and to (2) produce a critique of the social and educational elements that limited HCS at OSU in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change. Research questions focused on how dialogue about learning to speak persuasively on a significant social issue in an honors speech communication class (SPCH 2713) raised critical awareness and on uncovering elements that limited HCS in advocating for social change. Sub-questions explored what social issues Honors students took up, why they took up the issues, and conditions under which individual persuasive speeches were produced.

Participants were a consciously targeted group selected for this critical inquiry because of what they could potentially reveal about larger issues under which their critical literacy learning occurred. HCS at OSU are often multi-privileged, meaning they can claim membership in multiple dominant social groups. Members of dominant social groups often have difficulty recognizing systems of privilege and oppression, which can hinder critical awareness. Critical literacy can help individuals transcend common sense understandings in order to read their world anew and in ways that increase critical awareness. However, critical awareness is difficult to hold on to since the marks of our origin shape what we view as common sense (Freire, 1970; McIntosh, 1988; Johnson, 2006).

The study was situated within the context of dialogue and reflection on one honors assignment, with one honors professor, for one honors speech class, with participants from two different semesters, all contained within one honors program dedicated to providing “an enhanced intellectual experience that helps students develop creative and critical thinking skills” while fostering leadership with a global perspective (Vision, 2015). Participants reflected on and dialogued about the experience of learning to think, write, and speak persuasively on significant social issues in order to share their worldviews and experiences. My goal was to uncover elements that limited the Honors students in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change and to raise critical awareness in ways that led to increased social justice.

This research was politically driven; in that, I want Honors students at OSU to be critically literate citizens who speak out for social change that leads to more just conditions for all. I do not want HCS to simply reproduce thoughts and behaviors that support the existing conditions of an oppressive social system. I want HCS to question and challenge their ways of knowing so that they can re-imagine what is possible in pursuit of a more just world. I want HCS to recognize the role of social structures in producing privilege and oppression (inequality) and then act in ways that enable a pursuit of fuller humanity (Freire, 1970).

I suspected that the reproductive mechanisms of a social system, dependent on keeping the powerful in power and others in their place, were not likely to support critical awareness or critical literacy development, especially not in those more privileged in the system. I suspected that critical literacy development, which challenges existing social structures, would be problematic for the population of multi-privileged HCS at OSU. From my experience working with HCS, I suspected that they might both support and challenge existing social structures in their persuasive speeches on significant social issues, but I really did not know, so I became curious (and curiouser and curiouser!).

I wondered how high-achieving, highly motivated, often multi-privileged, Honors students at a state university in the South-central United States were developing their full intellectual capacity as leaders for diverse communities and the world. I wondered what significant social issues they took up for persuasive speeches. I wondered why they took up certain social issues. I wondered about the conditions under which they produced the persuasive speeches. I wondered how authentic dialogue and reflection with HCS about their persuasive speech experience might increase critical awareness of the reproductive nature of social systems in sustaining inequality. I explored my wonderings with nine Honors College students during a critical inquiry into their persuasive speeches on significant social issues produced for an Honors SPCH 2713 class.

Using political analysis with components of narrative analysis, I examined multiple data sources to create generalizations that formed the findings of this critical inquiry. I identified one major theme that encompassed the elements that most limited the Honors students in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change: Maintaining peaceful relations. HCS felt that the social and educational conditions under which they produced the persuasive speeches were pleasant, supportive, and open. However, they described social and educational conditions that restricted their critical thinking and limited the development of critical awareness. HCS described educational conditions that allowed them to achieve success in the persuasive

speech assignment without thought given to sociopolitical factors underlying significant social issues that were presented in speeches. The social conditions HCS described informed their speech decisions in ways that hindered authentic dialogue and reflection, which limited their critical awareness and their critical literacy learning.

For example, I found that HCS were reluctant to engage in discourse practices that might disrupt the social and educational climate they felt was open, friendly, and supportive. Their efforts to maintain peaceful relations resulted in carefully selected speech topics and positions that they perceived would cause the least amount of disruption to the thoughts and values of classmates. HCS took up certain social issues because they were acquainted with the issues from personal experience and viewed the topics as non-controversial. Despite a purpose to develop reasoning skills, the persuasive speech assignment was a missed opportunity for the HCS to foster critical development that supports leadership with a global perspective; however, I found transformations in thinking that resulted from engagement in the critical research study.

Transformations in thinking that resulted from engagement in the critical inquiry demonstrate that HCS in this study were willing to explore alternative perspectives and investigate the role of social structures in (re)producing privilege and oppression. The students in this study began to question core values that systems of privilege depend on (Johnson, 2006, p. 135). I view the HCS who participated in this study as continuing to develop their full intellectual capacity as leaders for diverse communities and the world through their willingness to question their own understandings and to explore possibilities for social change that they had not previously imagined. Authentic dialogue and reflection with HCS about their persuasive speech experience increased critical awareness of the reproductive nature of social systems and prompted HCS to begin to question ideologies that sustain the status quo and inequality. In this chapter, I offer details of the findings that emerged from my critical research journey with nine Honors College students.

The Research Setting

In this section, I offer a narrative description of the setting in which most of the conversations and interactions with participants took place. Understanding the setting is important in understanding one of the basic characteristics of a fully developed honors program: space and place. The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) offers the following best practice for honors programs on its website (May, 2015):

The program is located in suitable, preferably prominent, quarters on campus that provide both access for the students and a focal point for honors activity. Those accommodations include space for honors administrative, faculty, and support staff functions as appropriate. They may include space for an honors lounge, library, reading rooms, and computer facilities. If the honors program has a significant residential component, the honors housing and residential life functions are designed to meet the academic and social needs of honors students.

It was appropriate that conversations with participants took place in the space that was designated for their use as honors students and my use as honors staff: Historic Old Central. In the narrative that follows, the discerning reading will recognize tensions between access and accessibility, flexibility and schedules, and welcoming and accommodating while gaining insight into my feelings and experiences as a researcher, exploring and questioning as I travel through my Wonderland (Carroll, 1865/2001).

Setting sail: Down the Rabbit-hole

It was Monday: enough said. It was the start of what is referred to on campus as *Welcome Week*. From my office window in Historic Old Central, the first permanent building on campus erected in 1894, I could see the percussion section of the band situated in the shadow of the large bur oak tree. Other than the rhythmic sounds from the bass, snare, and quads, Old Central was quiet and still; not even the hum of the a/c unit disturbed the stillness. In an effort to

be environmentally friendly, the air conditioning system in the renovated Honors building was scheduled by central services to shut down at 5:00 p.m. every weekday. It was hot enough outside that by 5:30 p.m. the remnants of the artificially cooled air had started to fade.

I made my way to the main hallway and wedged open the heavy historic door with one of the hundreds of copies of *Historic Old Central* (a book by OSU History professor Dr. Leroy Fisher, written in 1988 as part of a *Centennial Histories Series*). My decision to employ the book was made due to the fact that the door was locked and I was anxiously awaiting the arrival of an Honors student who had volunteered to participate in research activities with me; I did not want her to be greeted by a locked door. When Tara had not arrived by 5:45 for our six o'clock interview I began to worry that she had forgotten. I texted, "See you shortly in Old Central," and waited.

From my experience, Honors students in Oklahoma, also known as the Sooner State, seem to embrace the adage "It's better to be early than to be too late" and often take it to heart. In fact, earliness was the single factor driving my decision to join the honors program in 1998 as an undergraduate student. Honors students receive the advantage of *Priority Enrollment*, which means they are able to enroll in classes on the first day that enrollment is opened, or permitted. In most cases, this is much earlier than their enrollment date would have been were they not an honors student. Prime time classes with prime instructors fill up fast. Class schedules are of utmost importance in my mind because they structure students' lives in ways that allow or deny their ability to pursue other important endeavors. For me, it was a need, or desire, to be home to meet my children when they stepped off the school bus. I also needed blocked time to study, commute, and work. For more traditional honors students, class schedules are important for extra-curricular activities, campus leadership roles, pursuing religious interests, internships, or jobs. I spent more hours working with honors students to design class schedules than my job as an academic advisor required. Sometimes it was just that important.

At 6:00 p.m. there was still no reply from Tara. I decided to sit behind the historic table in the hallway, which was used as a reception desk. From my position, I could see bookcases that lined the office walls and the historic pictures and maps of campus in the showcase. A poster showed *Orange Power* by listing the OSU Creed. I read the set of principles meant to guide students' actions. Five minutes after six, I figured that I had been stood-up. When Tara bounded through the door a few minutes later, I smiled. Tara took a cell phone out of her pocket and looked at it. The first thing she said was along the line of "I am so sorry I am late! I have been so busy that I completely forgot our meeting; but, I rushed right over when I saw your text." I told her not to worry and apologized for not sending her the text earlier in the day, as I had intended.

I moved the book out of the door jam as I asked her, "Was your busyness due to preparation for Bid Day?" Preparing for bid day—the day when new students join Greek Life—had been the buzz of all the students returning to campus the week before. She said, "No" and explained that she worked as a residential advisor (RA) and that tomorrow was "Move-in Day" for students. I asked her if she would like to, maybe, reschedule. I hoped that she would not want to reschedule because, in my mind, it was Interview Day: the time that Tara and I had set aside for her formal dialogic interview. She said she was absolutely up for the interview and I was glad. We decided to head downstairs to the sofas in the computer lab to talk.

We made our way through the glass door at the end of the hallway and descended down the historic wooden staircase to the basement. The basement hallway was much darker than the one upstairs and, as our eyes were adjusting, we had trouble seeing. We walked down the center of the hall passing closed, locked, dark wood doors on either side and passed under a row of unlit lamps hanging from the ceiling. I fumbled with three identical-looking golden keys and tried all of them in the keyhole of the computer lab door. I had trouble seeing the keyhole and unlocking the door. Tara looked for a light switch. I pointed out the switch nearest to her and she happily flipped it. No use. I walked back to the other end of the hallway and tried another light switch. Still, no use. Tara suggested that we go back upstairs to my office as I tried the keys a second

time. “Thump,” to my delight the tumbler in the lock turned and the door opened to a room lit by evening sun shining through large windows.

Tara settled on the sofa and I placed some things to drink and some snacks to eat on the coffee table. With the voice recorder between us, and our cell phones silenced, Tara and I settled in for our chat. Thus began the first formal dialogic interview with HCS at OSU during a critical inquiry into their persuasive speeches. The next section reports on what I found on the research journey.

Sailing Merrily Along

This discussion begins with the idea of traveling companions: people who travel together. Generally, people who travel together enjoy each other’s company. Sometimes, people travel together for work commitments or for convenience. Sometimes they are simply strangers who share a seat and never speak. I am using the term “traveling companions” to capture the same ideas in the context of an educational journey where HCS learned to speak publicly on significant social issues with others honors students in a SPCH 2713 class at OSU. When discussing their educational journey in the Honors SPCH 2713 class, Honors students participating in this critical inquiry described classmates as people who enjoyed each other’s company and developed friendships. The instructor was viewed as a respected authoritarian who was not a fellow traveler but was the steward of the educational journey.

Shipmates: A Tight Knit Group

The expression “a tight knit group” captures the described feelings of camaraderie among students in Honors SPCH 2713 and the rapport they felt with the professor. HCS demonstrated a high level of respect for each other and expressed a sense of bonding during the educational process, which was a phenomenon that occurred among participants from both semesters of the speech class. Sam described the dynamic of his class in the following way:

We, actually, I'm pretty tight in that speech class. We all, we all got to know each other really well. And it was very, like open dialogue, and stuff, uhm, which is cool...I think the familiarity helps. Uhm, I didn't feel pressure. I think the biggest thing really for me is, more than being worried about the peers, is I was worried about the grade. I would take, uhm like, being seen as, like, bad or something, by the peers, if it improved the grade. So, it's more being worried about [Dr. Sims's] thing.

Sam felt that the "open dialogue" contributed to the development of relationships in his class.

The fact that Sam maintained and was influenced by class relationships was evident in a later statement explaining why he joined the critical inquiry. Sam stated, "[Allan Granahan] said you are really nice and that I should help with the study." Allan was the first person to join the critical inquiry and he said that he contacted some of his classmates during the summer break, before he traveled to the University of Cambridge for a summer study program, about their possible participation. Allan's actions demonstrate his efforts at helpfulness, which was a quality of all the students who participated in the critical research study.

Tara was not in the same speech class as Sam and Allan; however, responding to the "tight knit group" finding that was presented as a section in the ten-page draft research summary for participants, Tara confided a close relationship with a classmate and demonstrated how participation in The Honors College at OSU fosters community. Tara wrote,

I liked your "tight knit group" theme. I think we talked about this in my interview. I know off the top of my head that I lived in the same building as five of my classmates, and I still see quite a few of them just because we are in the same honors classes. One of my group mates from speech is now my boyfriend (I probably should have told you that when we met in August, I just wasn't sure about saying something). I think this is such a benefit of being an honors student, because I've become so familiar with my classmates and the comfort level makes class participation much less nerve-wracking.

Tara's comments show the access that HCS have to each other and the multiple opportunities they have to engage in dialogue in various venues. Tara was the first person to complete a formal dialogic interview and wrote to me about how participating in the formal dialogic interview made her feel. Tara wrote,

I felt like my class project was validated. The purpose of the persuasive speech was to hook someone in and to share my passion with someone else. You taking the time to listen to me talk about Freedom Farm felt like it was reinforcing the purpose of my project. I was just happy someone was interested in my project!

I was glad that Tara felt that I was “taking time to listen” to her and that she could share her passion about the topic with me. Early in the research study, I noticed time was a precious commodity that had to be maximized, respected, and cherished.

Ivy, who was in Tara’s speech class, was the last person to join the study and the last to interview. During an informal dialogue with Ivy, I developed the impression that she might have been encouraged to contact me after her classmates spoke with her about their formal dialogic interview experiences. Several informal comments made me aware that participants were discussing their participation with other HCS. The examples I offer show that honors students are a “tight knit group” but they also indicate that participants were reflecting and dialoguing with others about the dialogues we were having as part of the critical inquiry into their persuasive speeches on significant social issues, which fulfilled one purpose of this critical inquiry: to engage HCS in authentic dialogue and reflection.

Admiral: Respected Authoritarian

While the professor was viewed as an authoritarian for his role in assigning grades, he was held in high regard and viewed as a positive influence on the class climate. Responding to the draft research summary, Sam offered the following supplement to his comment about open dialogue and grade concerns:

Despite being the professor and holding the keys to my grade, which did put pressure on me, Dr. [Sims] was a big reason behind the class dynamic. His warm personality and teaching mannerisms encouraged class bonding and gave off a “family-like” feel.

After reviewing the research summary, Sam wanted to ensure that his esteem for the professor was crystal clear. His comments and behavior capture the fondness for the professor expressed by every participant. Tara demonstrated her fondness for the professor and the strong sense of support she felt while associating the relationship as a benefit to honors participation:

It was definitely good to, like, stand up in the class and know that, like, your professor wants you to succeed. And that's, like...definitely the benefit to the honor classes is that they're always so small and, like, you know your professor. And I know a lot of the speech classes, they're small, because they have to be but...it was just great to feel that support from the professor.

Despite his “warm personality and teaching mannerisms” Dr. Sims was never presented as a co-learner but was viewed as the respected expert who led the class and was in charge of activities, assignments, and grades.

Comments made by participants (such as “holding the keys” to grades and putting “pressure on”) revealed that the professor was the person who held the power in the classroom. When describing her best memory of the speech class experience, Sherri illuminated some of Dr. Sims’ teaching mannerisms and the power that he possessed in the learning environment. Sherri stated,

There was one part of the class where we were describing the different kinds of love, through songs. We had, we found a song. We would play like a 30-minute, --I mean-- 30-second to 60-second clip of it, uhm, of the lyrics. And we talked about the lyrics, and how the lyrics proved that *that* song related to the type of love that we were talking about. And so, that was pretty fun. Because just to see all the different kinds, or like, different songs that came up. And having to listen to tens and twenty--10 to 20 songs-- trying to figure out which one met, excuse me, *matched* my term. I think that one was pretty fun, because it just involved something different.

Also, Dr. [Sims] would--we called it “naptime” because a lot of people would actually fall asleep, but it was more like a meditation time.--Like we, *he* would turn the lights off and we would just lay down, lay our heads on our desk for five minutes and just be quiet. Some people fell asleep, so. But it was nice because it would, like, our class was from 12:30 to 1:30 so most people had already eaten lunch, and they were tired, and it was good to just, get out of the way. Sometimes we would do stretches.

Sherri’s comments reveal that her favorite experiences were the one that “involved something different” than had been her experience in other classes. However, she was careful to indicate, when she interrupted herself to include the fact that “*he* would turn the lights off” for them, that it was Dr. Sims who allowed heads to be laid on desks. When asked if she knew the purpose of the class activities described, Sherri reasoned,

I think the naptime, one, was just to have everybody calm down and get into like a certain state of mind, maybe. While the stretches were probably just to get people moving and get the brains moving and, maybe, wake up a little bit, you know.

Dr. Sims was the one who could decide when and if to “turn the lights off” for “naptime” or whether to get “people” and “brains moving” with stretches, or whether popular music could serve as an avenue for learning new concepts. As the instructor for the Honors class and (what’s more) as Director of the Speech department, Dr. Sims was empowered to determine what were appropriate activities for the class and he could decide to introduce “something different” or rely on more traditional approaches to speech education. The decision to take a social activist approach to persuasive speaking was also determined by Dr. Sims.

When Pete was asked to offer his views on the social activist approach to learning that was utilized in the Honors speech class, he explained,

It [a social activist approach to learning] encourages people to have to talk about something that’s not, like, in their common knowledge, that they may be comfortable about, something they even may be uncomfortable about, with speaking. Because it was like “Oh, what do you think about fracking?” It’s like, “Well, some people are very adamant on both sides.” So it’s like, “Well you have to talk.” And you have to realize you have to research. You have to. Because if you want to offend someone in a way you could just see, do it to the extreme. It also teaches you to think about both sides, because it would be like... like, “I realized that this maybe a good option but it also has cons.” But if you use pros from this side, you can put it in the middle with minimal damage; and everyone’s happy on the end. Well not everyone’s happy, but everyone feels a little better.

The sentiments that Pete expressed reflect students’ attempts to sustain the feelings of an open, friendly, supportive class climate. HCS were actively resisting power and authority, in a small way, when the enacted behaviors meant to maintain peaceful relations in the class by seeking the middle ground on significant social issues. I imagine Pete’s reported dialogue looking something like this in his class:

Dr. Sims: Oh, class, what do you think about fracking?

Honors students: Well, some people are very adamant on both sides. (So, that's all we are willing to say.)

Dr. Sims: Well, you have to talk.

Honors students: Then we will have to do some research because we don't want to offend someone. We don't want to be extreme in our views. We need to think about both sides. We need to take features of each side and try to straddle the fence so that everyone is happy—well, actually no one is happy—but everyone feels a little good.

In communication theory, the *principle of cooperation* holds that in any communication event, both parties “make an effort to help each other understand each other” and the *maximum of quality* says that communicators will only say what they know or assume to be true and will not say what they know to be false (DeVito, 2012, p. 77). In the cultural context of the honors community, it appeared that the principle of peaceful relations trumped the principle of cooperation and the maximum of quality. The *principle of peaceful relations* states that the primary goal of communication is to maintain peaceful relations to the extent that you never insult anyone and that you even agree with someone when you really disagree (Midooka, 1990). Maintaining peaceful relations with classmates and the instructor was an important value to the HCS participating in this critical research study and it informed their speaking decisions. The pleasant class climate and the close relationships that were developed in the Honors SPCH 2713 class actually worked to hinder the development of authentic dialogue and reflection, which limited HCS in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change.

Afraid to Rock the Boat

HCS selected what they perceived to be “safe” topics and positions for persuasive speeches. They avoided issues they perceived as controversial, especially if the issues or their positions were envisioned as running counter to the perceived majority views or experiences of the class, which supported other research on the topic selection choices of undergraduate students writing persuasive essays (Lundstrom & Shrode, 2013). All participants indicated a belief that they had chosen a non-controversial topic and stance for their persuasive speech. Table 9 is

arranged in chronological order beginning with the first participant to engage in the formal dialogic interview and it identifies each participant's pseudonym and the speech focus presented in the Honors SPCH 2713 classes.

Table 9

Participant Pseudonym and Speech Focus

Participant Pseudonym	Speech Focus
1. Tara	Serving Special Needs Kids through Therapeutic Horseback Riding
2. Sherri	The Souper Bowl of Caring: Fighting Hunger & Poverty
3. Bailey	The Beagle Project: Ending Animal Testing
4. Pete	Earn Money and Save Lives: The Power of Plasma
5. Allan	Saving Time and Money: Support the AP Program in Oklahoma
6. Sam	Earn Money and Help Kids: Staff Summer Camps
7. Kyle	Keeping Kids Off the Streets: Staffing After School Clubs
8. Hannah	Helping Hospice
9. Ivy	Aiding the Autistic

I wrote the following verse to help in remembering whose false name is whose:

T is for Tara who loves Therapeutic horses

S is for Sherri who loves Soup-er bowls

B is for Bailey who loves Beagles

P is for Pete who provides Plasma

A is for Allan who achieved AP credit

S is for Sam who works at Summer camps

K is for Kyle who Keeps Kids off the streets

H is the eigHth letter of the alpHabet and the eighth participant:

Hannah who Helps Hospice

I is the nInth letter of the alphabet and the ninth participant: Ivy who aids autIsm.

Students indicated a conscious effort to avoid topics they perceived as controversial. For example, Kyle stated,

I couldn't think of anything to do and I didn't want to do something too controversial 'cause that's not my personality, to like wanna throw... a bunch of controversy into people's faces. So, I was like, "Okay this is a pretty safe—zone." In my mind, it's like, it's for the kids. If you're against the kids, why, okay, we have other issues [laughs]! So, to me it felt very safe, so that's why I did it.

In further example, I asked Sam, who had encouraged the staffing of summer camps, "Did you avoid controversy, or you just didn't think it fit this topic?" Sam said, "No, I, I avoided controversy" and chuckled. He explained,

I tried, like, I was very careful. Originally, I was just thinking about talking about just specifically religious camps then I thought, I kind of thought about my audience, and people. Like, "Well, you know, not everyone here is going to be religious or, um, want to work at a religious camp. Uhm, so I need to make it so that it fits people in the room."

No-wake Zone: Speech Topics and Positions

Considering levels of perceived controversy in conjunction with the feelings HCS expressed allowed me to develop a topic selection continuum, shown below in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Topic selection continuum with feelings expressed

HCS gave persuasive speech topics that were deemed appropriate to do a green light for the go ahead, which starts the continuum in what Kyle referred to as the “safe zone.” As a topic was perceived to increase in controversy then it traveled across the continuum and was only taken up for persuasive speaking slowly and with caution. Topics that were deemed taboo for a persuasive speech in the Honors SPCH 2713 class received a red stop light from participants in this study. Taboo topics fell near the far right end of the continuum, referred to by Pete as an attempt to “do it to the extreme.” The terms listed under the continuum represent feelings HCS expressed within each stage of the continuum. Significant social issues taken up for persuasive speeches by the participants in this critical inquiry were perceived to fall in the “safe zone” and efforts were made to speak from general positions that would “fit people in the room.”

Check your Baggage at the Door

The action of checking baggage at the door continues the traveling metaphor. The baggage that travelers carry with them contains grooming items and clothes for various activities: nice clothes for fancy dinners, attractive clothes for going out, comfy clothes for staying in, swimsuits, ski vests, athletic gear, hairbrushes, toothbrushes, and an array of other items. The bags contain all the possessions travelers deem necessary for success in their destinations. Travelers are often able to leave their heavy bags at the door with a bellhop or with curbside travel staff who ensure that the baggage makes it to the appropriate room, car, plane, train, ship, or bus. Checking bags allows travelers to navigate their environment more freely by lightening their load. They reclaim their possessions at the end of the transport.

I am using the expression “check your baggage at the door” to capture the behaviors of HCS who left their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences at the classroom door in order to engage in the persuasive speech events without the added weight of the possessions (stances) they carry with them. Checking personal items at the door did not result in freedom to explore other ways of knowing with an unburdened mind. Instead, checking personal items at the door resulted in an inability to share their worldviews with others in ways that might lead to authentic

dialogue and reflection, as people “attempting, together, to learn more than they know” (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 90). The behavior of leaving values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences at the classroom door was a barrier to critical literacy development. In the following section I describe the actions that erected the roadblocks to critical literacy development.

Shipshape: Impression Management

Honors students’ feelings that the class climate supported “very, like open dialogue” and “bonding” did not equate to reports of “open” authentic dialogue and reflection that leads to critical awareness. Instead, image concerns and separation anxiety resulted in behaviors that limited authentic dialogue and reflection. HCS participating in this study were very aware of how their choice of words and language can shape others’ ideas and impressions. Tara reported talking to classmates outside of class time to get a feel for topics that others were planning to present before constructing her speech. When Sherri was asked if there was anything about being in a class with all Honors students that hindered her, she stated,

Ah, sometimes. Because, if you have an opinion that, maybe, isn't the most accepted, then you kind of...have your normal reserves about sharing it. Because you think, “Well, what if people don't like me because of it?” But then also, these were people that I knew were open-minded, and they were intelligent, and so if they – even if they didn't agree with my opinion, they would understand it. And hopefully respect it.

Sherri’s comments indicate how she reasoned through her fears by connecting classmates’ identities as Honors students to perceptions of open-minded intelligence and respectful understanding.

Allan expressed a feeling that was similar to Sherri’s when he reported that it was easier for him to “profess” his intellectual views due to his perception of other Honors College students. Allan said,

I'm blessed to have been able to get into the Honors College because when you're in a setting, thus: everybody there is like-minded; everybody there *wants* to achieve the most; everybody there *did* achieve great things in high school. And to some degree, it's easier to, um, profess your intellectual views on these issues when everybody else is on

the same page and not half asleep, eating, like—[joking tone] having a big cigarette in the back of the room with a leather jacket on and having their ears pierced.

Hannah stated, “I knew there would have been a bigger audience [in a regular section of SPCH 2713], which may have been easier for me. But at the same time, I don’t think they would have been paying attention as much as the honors college kids did.” HCS in this study expected much from themselves and much from other HCS.

To demonstrate the contradictions between feelings of openness and behaviors of silence that emerged during data analysis, I juxtapose two statements made by Sam. Shortly after Sam said, “I would take, uhm like, being seen as, like, bad or something, by the peers, if it improved the grade,” he said,

I didn’t feel like my topic, that I had chosen, was in any way edgy, or kind of weird, but if, I think if I had, if I had a topic that, uhm, might have shown my stance on something specifically, to be kind of, like, a little, a little odd in comparison to the rest of the class, I might have been more hesitant to choose that one. For mine, I mean, I talked about my religious affiliation there. I’m in the Christian faith; but I didn’t feel uncomfortable doing that among peers.

Sam did not view his topic or position as “odd in comparison to the rest of the class” or else, as he confessed, he “might have been more hesitant to choose” the topic. Since the Christian religion was perceived as the dominant position of the class, Sam did not have trouble disclosing his Christian faith; however, he was concerned about reaching his “broad audience” and tried to consider everyone in the class. His concern about classmates who might not practice his Christian “way of life” influenced his decision to offer “non-Christian alternatives” for the audience. Both Sam and Kyle indicated a strong desire to encourage classmates to mentor youths in ways that would lead the youths to accept Christ; however, both modified their calls to action in ways that promoted more secular or general aid, which worked to concealed the personal passion they possessed (they checked it at the door).

Kyle’s decisions to check his personal values, beliefs, and attitudes stemmed from concerns about being “controversial” with his speech in ways that might separate him from the

class. During the formal dialogic interview, I had to prod Kyle to share his worldviews, which I had glimpsed in his planning report statements. His hesitancy to express his views was evident in his pauses, false starts, and struggles to find just the right words. After struggling for a time, Kyle finally stated his position, which he felt was very controversial: The church today in America is failing at their job. Even after making the statement to me, Kyle pulled back from it by qualifying his comment with the phrase, “a little bit,” which seemed to soften his stance.

Kyle’s statement that “the church” was failing at “their job” as opposed to “its job” equated the church with the people serving in it, which may have made the statement feel especially controversial to Kyle since he could be viewed as criticizing Christian servants. Unlike Sam, who silenced himself out of concern for a “broad audience” with non-Christian values, Kyle silenced himself out of concern for offending other Christians in the audience through disclosure of his belief about the state of Christianity in America. Kyle said he did not want to “lose” that audience. An excerpt from the formal dialogic interview with Kyle reveals the “deeper issue” that he held in check during the persuasive speech, but which factored into his speech decisions:

Erica: Okay, so we talked a lot about your issue [staffing after school clubs]. Uhm, I know that you said that this really impacts people who have two—uhm two family jobs—the parents are both out working—and, or—two-job families, I guess I should have said. And also, you talked about it really impacting single mothers. So, what are the issues you see in those situations—with society, is that a problem to you?

Kyle: Yes.

Erica: Okay.

Kyle: Uhm. And that was—this was something more, I kind of glazed over that section, a little bit, when I presented it. Because to me, this starts getting into a little bit more of personal beliefs and values.

Erica: Uh-huh.

Kyle: Uhm, which like I said, I didn't want to be, like, controversial.

Erica: Right.

Kyle: Cause that's, there's not—I just didn't wanna go there, uhm.

Erica: So—I had to work hard to pick that out—to put you on the spot today [laughs].

Kyle: Yeah, um so [pauses for 4 seconds]. So, I don't like—to me—it's a society issue. You know? “Why” um, you know—if we could—the kid. The after school programs wouldn't be an issue, you know, about being over packed, if you didn't have these family issues going on. So, “What's the issue in the family?” you know.

Erica: Right.

Kyle: Uhm, and for me personally, it's—um, I believe, you know. Part of it is that the church, today in America, has—is not—is failing at their job, a little bit, in—you know—reaching out in the communities and reaching people in general. You know, making the church be a place people want to go. And want to, you know, come and have fellowship. You know, and *then* also hopefully, eventually, know—accept Christ, as your Lord and Savior and have *that*, uhm, change their life. So to me, that was one of—that was the deeper issue. So I tried, uhm—and I know that, *that* would have set off some people, in my speech. So, I didn't address that because I didn't want to lose that audience.

Erica: Right.

Kyle: Because, uhm...

Erica: ‘Cause your goal was to get them to volunteer after school.

Kyle: Yes. Not putting in my moral issues, so.
(Cross talking) Erica: Not trying to alienate them.

Kyle: Yeah. And having been in that class, I knew the dynamic—and with that I would have, you know, separated myself from almost half the class. So I just, you know, mentioned it—and didn't mention any of the moral issues that I saw on it. And, uhm, moved on. But that was, I mean that's definitely something you would want to look at with these after school programs, you know, [is] what's the actual root of the issue. So.

Erica: Mm hmm.

Kyle: And can we fix *that*? No! But that, that's kind of where I took it. Can we fix the issues? No, that's silly. But I can make a difference in the kids' lives.

Erica: Right.

Kyle: And the issue that—their family issue doesn't have to determine who they are, their destiny, you know, like, life plan's gonna be.

HCS in this study did not bring up significant social issues that would have classmates grapple with complicated sociopolitical factors; instead, they engaged in politeness strategies in

order to maintain face. In communication theory, politeness is a behavior that is used to maintain positive and negative face needs. Politeness theory situates *positive face needs* as a desire to be viewed positively by others while *negative face needs* include the desire to be autonomous in doing as we wish (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967; Goldsmith, 2007; Holmes, 1995). Persuasive speech speakers helped their classmates maintain both positive and negative face when they carefully selected topics and positions that implicated no one (positive face) and allowed them to speak respectfully about everyone and when they avoided imposition on the hearer (negative face) by advocating for actions that let everyone off the hook, as if they could “choose whether to be involved in the life of our society and the consequences it produces” (Johnson, 2006, p. 124).

Aye Aye, Sir: Limited by Institutionalized Definitions of Action

Some HCS did not present topics they were *as* passionate about due to the fact that they felt limited by specific actions that they could encourage the audience to take. For example, Allan said he “wanted to talk about international politics but there wasn’t really anything persuasive about it” that would allow him to “really convince anybody in the class to *do* anything” and so he chose another topic. Another student, Sherri, said that she “originally wanted to talk about the organization, He-For-She,” which she described as a “campaign” with “men advocating for women’s rights” promoting gender equality. Sherri stated, “There’s nothing really that you can actively *do* for it besides say ‘I support it’ so...even though it was a topic that I really liked and really was passionate about, it just didn’t have all of the check-offs, basically”; so, she chose a different topic. A third student, Ivy, expressed that she felt that advocating for increased critical awareness of the social stigma surrounding autism “would have been really persuasive” in her speech but that she advocated for volunteerism and donations because she felt that there was a “strict guideline” for persuading. Both the comments reportedly made by the professor and the bolded underlined wording appearing twice in the assignment guidelines, which read “**do something**,” championed such an understanding of action. While HCS felt empowered

to speak out on their social issue topics, they also felt oppressed by the (perceived or real) requirement that there be a call to action that included something specific that others could *do*.

In persuading the audience to take certain actions, most HCS interviewed indicated that promoting volunteerism or donations was an overused tactic in the persuasive speech presentations during the SPCH 2713 class and that they felt uninspired by such calls to action from classmates. However, of the nine HCS interviewed five encouraged volunteerism and/or monetary donations in their own speech. Several students reported that the instructor suggested “volunteerism” as an appropriate action for which to advocate and they indicated that the suggestion influenced their decision heavily. Sherri described how an aspect of caring was something that was suggested by the course instructor when she stated the following:

Dr. [Sims] had told us that it's easiest if, to pick a topic that, you uhm, that's kind of like a service project or a caring project; something that makes you care or makes someone else care, because then it's easier to, uhm, get the point across and make people care about your project. So.

Adherence to the instructor's advice demonstrates compliance to the power of the professor and indicates the reasons for persuading the audience toward certain actions stemmed from the students' perceptions as to what constituted appropriate “specific action” as required for following the assignment. In an effort to maintain peaceful relations with the professor and to ensure a great grade, HCS complied with what they perceived to be the professor's “strict guidelines” (Ivy) for action. For most of the HCS interviewed, the act of persuading the audience to take a specific action to address the social need was more of an academic exercise to tick-off-a-box for assignment points than it was a genuine interest in encouraging the specific action they advocated. Sam wrote the following when responding to this finding in the research summary for participants:

Thinking back, this was entirely true for me. Obviously I would have liked to see some of my classmates decide to come work at camp, but that was not my chief concern in the presentation. Rather, I cared that fulfilled the rubric so that I could get a good grade.

Seasick: Man Overboard!

The expression “seasick” captures the feelings HCS described when speaking about the overuse of calls for volunteerism and donations in the persuasive speeches of classmates. A few of the students interviewed reported that they acted on their feeling by giving extra consideration to the way they could meet the assignment criteria for “specific action” without calling for volunteering or donations. They were not trying to rock the boat but were trying to make a splash by being a little different with the impact in their speech. The expression “man overboard” captures reports about a few classmates who jumped ship and traveled a different path by advocating for something outside dominant ideas of action. For example, Sam recounted a memorable speech that he felt was unique. He said that the speaker promoted friendliness and encouraged classmates to say “Hello” to people in elevators. Sam commented on the effectiveness of that speech and felt that it would be a good idea for the speech instructor to explain, “It’s not just, like, *do* something for an organization, it can just be, like, a lifestyle change and you end up with more than this.” Sam felt that the instructor should have announced to the class that social action could involve more than service to an organization. Tara commented on a memorable speech that she felt “was probably the most ‘controversial’ topic” from her class. She wrote, “One student in my class did his speech over being more accepting/tolerant of atheism on campus, but he started his presentation by saying he was not trying to persuade us to become atheists only to be more open.”

Teach Them to Swim: Throw Out the Lifeline

Dialogue with HCS revealed a belief that better knowledge results in better choices. Influenced by their belief, HCS exhibited a passion for raising awareness of the situations about which they were speaking. Most HCS felt that simply informing classmates of organizations and needs would motivate their classmates to support causes whenever they had an opportunity. HCS expressed a strong preference toward speaking informatively over speaking persuasively to classmates. Bailey commented,

I would say I had the most success in making people aware of the issue. Uhm, and while that wasn't necessarily the goal of the persuasive presentation, because the goal is to get them to *do* something about it, I think it's the first step in getting people to do something about it because, hah, I don't think you'll meet very many people who get told about this big problem and immediately they're like, "Yeah, we need to go and *do* something right at this moment." It kind of takes a couple of times.

HCS believed that good information was the best form of persuasion and felt very comfortable informing the audience about their topics and the needs surrounding the significant social issues. Working within their comfort level was an act of resistance to the social activist approach to learning put forth by the professor, which asked Honors College students to move away from the comfort of sharing information and toward a persuasive form of speaking.

Obedience to the Law of the Land

HCS attempted to provide solutions to significant social problems working within existing social structures. Where social structures were implicated in producing unfavorable social conditions then HCS expressed compassionate understanding. For example, when talking about ending product testing on animals, Bailey described how the United Kingdom (UK) was able to ban all animal testing but said that for the European Union (EU) "that was impossible" to do. Bailey declared, "So, it's hard to vilify every company when they're just doing what they're allowed to do by law; but, 'where's the line?' I guess. It's hard to say." While Bailey recognized the ability to make major societal changes (as demonstrated in the UK) she also expressed an awareness of the difficulty of bringing diverse interests (across all of the EU) in line with the positive social changes she wished to see.

Another example of working respectfully within existing social structures was evident when I asked Kyle, who encouraged volunteering in after-school programs, if he considered the possibility of restructuring the whole schooling system to better align kids' days with parents' schedules. Kyle said, "I didn't actually give it any thought" and he went on to state,

I mean, it's definitely something to think about, you know, "Why do we have it that way?" Like, uhm, how could we, you know, "Is that something we could do instead, instead of trying to create an after school program?" so. Definitely something to think. I've never. That didn't even cross my mind, that didn't. Just because I, you know, to me, I was like, "Well, this is how school's been done," you know, "for how many years," like. Yeah.

Even as Kyle was beginning to considering new possibilities for a changed educational system, he was limited in his imagination by his adherence to the current educational and social structure, which became evident in his next statement, "And so, there's only so many days in. Or, so many hours you can keep kids in a classroom, too, so. Do you start later? Do you...? You know."

Kyle's comments demonstrate his struggle to find solutions within the existing framework of school and work life and shows how his adherence to the current social structure limits even what he can imagine to be possible. A strong challenge to the existing social system might have resulted in questions like, "What should a learning environment (classroom) look like?" or "How long should a parent's work week be?" or "What can society do to better meet the financial needs of families, so that a child never has to come home to an empty house due to a parent's work schedule?" For HCS striving to work inside current social structures, tackling big questions (such as these) can be outside the realm of what is possible. The idea of fixing the "deeper issue" was something that Kyle thought was not possible; he said it was "silly" to think "we" could fix the issues. He did, however, believe that he could impact kids' lives. Kyle was operating at the level of *semi-transitive thought* by recognizing only surface level reforms and one's ability to make social change (Freire, 1974; Mulcahy, 2010; Shor, 1992).

Merrily We Sail Along, Over the Deep Blue Sea

Since cultures of "niceness" and "Whiteness" are characterized by a failure to examine how social inequality is (re)produced and sustained (Elmore, 2007; Haviland, 2008; Johnson, 2006; McIntyre, 1997) and because HCS were not required to critically consider root causes for the significant social issues they presented in persuasive speeches in order to achieve success with

the assignment, they did not dive deeply into the significant social issues they presented. Instead, HCS sailed over the deeper social issues and considered only surface level reforms and actions; in doing this, HCS were able to comply with the professor's instructions and achieve a good grade while also resisting the power and authority of the professor with "glazed over" (as Kyle stated) discussions of significant social issues that were more informative than persuasive, which made the HCS more comfortable.

Making Waves

I wanted HCS to practice *critical-transitive thought* where social conditions are considered in light of the larger contexts of power in society and humans feel empowered to make active changes that disrupt the oppressive social structure (Freire, 1974; Mulcahy, 2010; Shor, 2012). In order to move our discussions to a higher level, I used the research summary for participants to try to make some waves that move thinking forward. The ten-page research summary contained a review of the major findings of the study (organized into themes) and contained my conclusions and a discussion. In one part of the ten-page research summary for participants, I wrote,

Data analysis uncovered social, educational, political, and economic elements that seem to work in ways that limit the imaginations of HCS and hinder their ability to ADVOCATE for social change.

HCS recognize their privileged position (as an honors student) within the university and they also recognize how hard they must work to maintain it (their standing). Pressures of success and conformity keep HCS too busy to look closely at the social structures that continue to produce inequality. Keeping HCS engaged in busy-ness supports *business as usual*.

Who benefits from the way things are? Privileged social groups benefit from keeping existing social structures intact. Power dynamics are implicated in all of the situations HCS described. Continuing to do the same things over again with the hope of a producing a different result is the definition of insanity; however, for those who are not looking for change, continuing to do the same things over again makes perfect sense.

Near the end of the summary, I wrote the following:

All of the HCS interviewed for this study were a member of at least one dominant (privileged) social group. Many of the HCS were a member of more than one dominant social group. Some of the HCS interviewed could claim membership in every privileged (dominant) social group (meaning those students are White, middle class, male, heterosexual, Christian, well educated, young, and able-bodied). When HCS speak out for change that leads to more equitable conditions for all, then individuals who might otherwise have dismissed the calls for action and reform as the attempts of others to better their own situation hear them.

I also wrote,

The persuasive speeches of HCS demonstrated their knowledge of the material differences between those they were trying to serve and themselves. While the needs of individuals were made clear, what was not made clear was how and why the situations exist as they do. Discussion that examined material differences in relation to race, class, and gender were noticeably absent from most of the speeches examined. Silence on these topics allows the social situations to continue.

Sam wrote the following in response to my statement:

Probably for 2 reasons: A. These are huge issues, which I view as difficult to impact as an individual (this is probably the view of the established social structure haha). B. I'm on the winning side of these issues as a middle class white male, so I have no reason to advocate for them.

Sam's comment about being on "the winning side" of the issues demonstrates what Johnson (2006) had discussed about dominant groups being shielded from the consequences of oppression, which makes it hard for members of dominant groups to pay attention.

Sam and Kyle both made comments that indicated a general belief that some significant social issues are too big for an individual to impact. The mindset stems from the cultural value of individualism in the United States, which works to maintain the status quo by making collective efforts of individuals that can lead to significant social change invisible (Kohl & Zipes, 1995).

Although Sam may have been feeling less than powerful when he wrote, "These are huge issues, which I view as difficult to impact as an individual" his parenthetical addendum indicates a shift in his thinking "(this is probably the view of the established social structure haha)." Sam's comments were offered near the end of the critical inquiry and they demonstrate how he began to interrogate

the reasons behind why he views the social issues as too large to impact and he implicated “established social structures” in shaping his thoughts.

Sam’s comments about his status “as a middle class white male” indicate that he had begun interrogating how social structures privilege and oppress individuals while examining his positions in them. Sam wrote, “I am hesitant to advocate for change in our social structure, which could potentially detract from my privileged position” and then he visualized a new reality, as shown in his following statement:

Moving forward, I plan to focus on putting myself in other peoples’ shoes and trying to see situations from their perspective. Hopefully this will stop me from nonchalantly dismissing situations that have a major impact on others as not a big deal or not an issue.

Through dialogue and reflection on his privilege and oppression, Sam experienced transformations in his thinking that led him to declare that he planned to interrogate multiple perspectives and the consequences of his actions, or inactions, on others, which made me happy since a goal of the critical research was to raise critical consciousness.

Kyle began to consider his privileged and oppressed positions in society during the critical inquiry into his persuasive speech. He wrote the following after reading the ten-page research summary,

Participating in this research has actually caused a lot more internal conflict in me than what I ever could have anticipated. In fact, I did not even think that I would experience any sort of internal conflict while participating. I just figured I would supply my information, do an interview and be done. Let me be clear, when I say internal conflict, I am not referring to something negative. I simply mean that going back and reviewing what I presented on and then discussing it has really made me think about my life goals and where I see myself going.

I knew that I was privileged, but when I read all the categories that I fit into, I was like, “Wow, how can I just sit by and live in luxury?” I realized that I have some choices to make. I can either simply sit by and live in my privilege and associate myself with people who are just as privileged, or I can be the change that I want to see and use my “privileged” status to be able to help and fight for others who could be considered “oppressed.” I realized that the power lies in my hands as to if I simply reproduce the privilege that I have been blessed with or if I take what has been given to me and use it to help others.

For Kyle, engaging in the critical inquiry resulted in transformations in thinking that enabled him to ask difficult questions and begin to imagine new solutions. He wrote,

I believe that moving forward, I will begin to look at situations and scenarios with a more critical eye. Instead of simply going with the flow, I will ask questions such as, “Why have things always been done this way?” or “Do things have to stay the way they are or is there a better solution?” For me personally the most oppressive force that limits me is my mindset of trying to keep the peace. Being afraid to rock the boat often stops me from speaking out or taking action on something that I feel passionately about. I believe that recognizing this is a first step in the right direction to combat a force that limits me.

Examining his position in society during the critical inquiry helped raise Kyle’s critical awareness to a level not normally experienced. Kyle began to feel more empowered and to recognize embedded mindsets that have limited his ability to act for social change and he set a course to change it.

Conversely, Pete was already quite aware of the nature of social structures in producing privilege and oppression and when responding to how his participation in the critical research study impacted him and his understanding of the forces that reproduce privilege and oppression (inequality), he wrote,

My perception has not largely been impacted because I have experienced inequality first hand and know about the fear to act in situations.

Moving forward I will continue to ignore the oppressive forces slowing me, while attempting to help others the best I can. In the future when I have the resources I hope I will be able to help more.

Pete’s less privileged working-class status factored largely shaping his reality of privilege and oppression long before participating in the critical research study. Pete’s knowledge of oppressive social structures that limit individuals in their pursuit of a fuller humanity was reinforced.

Participating in the critical inquiry complicated Tara’s understanding of privilege and oppression, which she worked to sort out. Tara reflected on her gendered oppression and White privilege and in response to the research summary she wrote, “The section on privilege was particularly interesting to me. As a woman in a scientific field, it’s sometimes easy to feel like

the outsider, but reading your summary reminded me that I am part of a very privileged group.” Tara felt that participating in the critical research study “helped remind” her that “saying what you believe in and are passionate about” are important in “learning and teaching” with others.

Allan’s heritage as a Native American played a role in shaping his view of oppressive social structures, which instilled in him a drive to overcome them and to succeed. However, his social positioning as a young, White, able-bodied, Christian, male complicated his identity as a Native American. Participating in the critical inquiry inspired Allan to interrogate more deeply some of his positions and ideas through reflective journaling. A few weeks after his formal dialogic interview Allan wrote,

I have been frequenting my journal, as it has aided me in the process of dissecting your research. I enjoy journaling. I enjoy aiding in the research process. More poignantly, your suggestion of such practices has sharpened my ability to think critically, and has also furthered my understanding of the ideas suspended in my consciousness.

I concluded the research summary for participants with the following:

What more can HCS *do*?

1. Insist on an education that promotes critical thinking over technical skill
2. Continue to speak out and work for change
3. Do not be absorbed by a dominant reality that submerges consciousness
4. Work against constraints that limit your imaginations and recognize that our situations limit what we can imagine
5. Imagine more than you are and become more than you imagine
6. Seek out new possibilities that spark new ways of thinking and doing things that enable the pursuit of a fuller humanity

To quote one HCS, “it’s not just, like, *do* something for an organization, it can just be, like, a lifestyle change and you end up with more than this.” The goal is to imagine and make the small changes that are need so that everyone can end up with more than this.

In response to the research summary, some of what Allan wrote follows:

Your mention of the limitations I was faced with, by the institution, the social norm, or otherwise, was received well on my part, and promulgated further introspection.

Your emotional call to “imagine more than you are and become more than you imagine” has expedited a personal inquiry, a trend of frequent introspection, [and] propagated a burning passion to succeed. While a student at a state [university] in the

Midwest may not be the first to come to mind when we think of the world's greats, I want to defy these societal constraints. I want to be great.

If I want to achieve my true goals in life, I will not lay victim to the greater societal labeling of what I am, or of what I am not. We are all created equal; therefore our equality of opportunity should be likewise.

Moving forward, I will commit myself to daily introspection, to the manifestation of intellectual success, and to the development of a critical awareness. My goals are to earn a scholarship that will allow me to attend an Ivy League University, to learn mandarin, and to create substantive US foreign policy. Along the way I hope to instill dynamism into those around me. I believe that the principal component of equality is the equality of opportunity.

Allan's passion to continue to work against oppressive social structures (such as the Oklahoma government which he described in our formal interview as "reaching in and taking the liberty away" by attempting to "discontinue" Advanced Placement US History) was reinforced as a result of his participation in the critical research study.

Travel Summary

The described classroom conditions seemed optimal for critical literacy engagement: a group of high-ability learners, a supportive avuncular instructor, opportunities for students to select social issue topics significant to them, mutual respect, and opportunity for dialogue and thoughtful action proposed to address significant social issues. However, the pleasant class climate and the close relationships that were developed in the Honors SPCH 2713 class actually worked to hinder the development of authentic dialogue and reflection, which limited HCS in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change. In contrast to Nussbaum's (1997) assertion that "a dedicated instructor can enliven the thinking of students in almost any curricular setting" the professor's effort to engage a social activist approach to learning was thwarted by skill building measures of success, demonstrated by grading rubrics, and the attempts of HCS to maintain a peaceful cultural climate through politeness strategies.

The strategies HCS used to maintain peaceful relations were small acts of resistance to the power and authority of the professor enacted through their retreat from the social activist approach to learning presented. HCS did not grapple with significant social issues and positions that might make them uncomfortable. HCS chose what they viewed as safe, non-controversial topics for persuasive speeches and assumed middle ground stances that fit their perceptions of the people in the room. They advocated for social action as a perfunctory task while holding a real agenda to inform. They checked their personal values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences at the door in order to manage impressions, decrease separation anxiety, and enact politeness strategies while respecting authority and existing social structures. In this case, the strategies worked in ways that helped maintain the status quo by creating a false sense of hegemony, or like-mindedness and sameness, that offered no real chance for authentic dialogue and reflection that leads to increased social awareness.

HCS recognized human agency for effecting social change; however, they did not address nor attempt to transform underlying issues related to the social problems they described as significant in persuasive speeches. They did not interrogate the role of social structures in producing and sustaining inequality. In learning to think, write, and speak persuasively on a significant social issue for an Honors SPCH class, students focused on maintaining peaceful relations and on earning points for a good grade rather than focusing on solving real social problems through authentic dialogue, reflection, and action. Given the importance to society in developing citizens who can think, write, and speak critically about significant social issues it is imperative that this situation be remedied.

Engaging in authentic dialogue and reflection during a critical inquiry into their literacy learning experience, HCS began to see how social structures shape their understandings in ways that limit what they can imagine. Participation in the critical inquiry seemed to inspire HCS to continue reflecting and to begin conversations with others about the social issues they viewed as

significant, which met one purpose of the study: to engage HCS in authentic dialogue and reflection that raises critical awareness. The second purpose of this critical inquiry was to produce a critique of the social and educational elements that limit HCS at OSU in reaching their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change, which the writing of this chapter was meant to accomplish.

CHAPTER VI

TRANSFORMATION

The sun was shining on the sea,
Shining with all his might:
He did his very best to make
The billows smooth and bright—

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass
and What Alice Found There*

The authentic dialogue that Freire (1970/2009) described, which allows individuals to question what is known and develop new thoughts that can lead to change (p. 90), is not easy to achieve; it is difficult to question personal perspectives and sometimes easier to question the perspectives of others (Halx & Reybold, 2005). I engaged HCS in dialogue with a purpose to share worldviews and increase critical awareness, theirs and mine. I kept a research journal to help me dialogue and reflect. In listening closely to HCS, I attempted to increase my understanding of others' worldviews. In speaking, I tried to encourage HCS to stretch their thinking. I tried to think about perspectives that may not have been considered and broached those perspectives with Honors students. Engaging in this critical inquiry with HCS at OSU, I began not only to better know how this small group of HCS at OSU develop their intellectual capacity as leaders for diverse communities and the world, but began to better know myself. I can imagine a future world that is more just and equitable and I am encouraged to make the small changes needed so that everyone (to quote Sam) can “end up with more than this.” In this chapter I illuminate challenges and transformations that occurred as a result of my dialogue and reflection with HCS.

Difficult Dialogues

During conversations with HCS at OSU, I was challenged to think about my positions and worldviews and to consider where I stand. Many times HCS, spoke about topics that caused me to pause and reflect and to consider my life. Sometimes I shared my reflective moments and sometimes I kept them to myself; I suspect the same is true for the Honors students. I drew on my life experiences to help me try to engage HCS in dialogue and reflection that would push thinking forward. When speaking with Pete, who saw no controversy surrounding blood and plasma donations, I used my intimate knowledge of Jehovah's Witnesses' stance against blood transfusions, blood plasma, and other blood related treatments and donations, and my knowledge of the medical directives they carry which read "NO BLOOD," to bring up the topic in a small way. Our dialogue progressed as follows:

Erica: Do you think anyone went and donated plasma, or do you have any idea what was the impact of the speech?

Pete: I think people went. Because after the class everyone came up to me and started asking me further questions about, like, oh...like, "What do I need to do there?" Like, "When is it open? What are the hours? How long does it take?" And they just kept asking me questions along those lines, and it seemed like a lot of people were willing to do it. But some people wouldn't do it because they're scared of needles or, you know, don't like blood too much.

Erica: What are some other reasons that you think people wouldn't want to donate plasma?

Pete: Uhm, some people may think it's a health risk; but uh overall, it's really not that much. Some people—yeah, I think it'd probably just be the health risk—is the biggest —Or, maybe they don't feel right selling part of their body to science or hospitals, in some way. And I mean that's fine. But I just tried to focus on, like, how minor it is for you to lose this, but how beneficial it could be for someone in need.

Erica: Mm-hmm. Is there anyone else, you think, that would take the opposite position of you, and argue that you shouldn't donate plasma?

Pete: I mean, I don't really think so. Because I think it's, at this point, people who know about it...it's basically as important as giving blood. And because you can like – Blood is a six-week, I'm pretty sure, it's a six-week cycle between donations; but plasma is a three-day cycle. –I don't think anyone would really be that against it because it's basically donating blood and there's not really any counter arguments to donating blood.

Erica: Mmm. Mostly would be just personal or religious.

Pete: Yeah, it would just be along those lines. But I don't think it will be like anything big enough that someone would have to take an adamant stance against it. It would probably, just take like a personal or family stance against it.

Erica: Right. Right. What would you say to those people, uh, that did take a personal or religious stance against it?

Pete: Uhm, I would probably just try to tell them about how much it could help and that because, you know, it comes back and it's a great way to help others. But generally, like if they don't want to do it because of that, it's fine. Because there will be people who are willing to do it.

Erica: There's enough other people.

Pete: Yeah, there's enough other people. More numbers help but not doing it won't kill anyone.

I thought to myself that if *everyone* took the same stance as Jehovah's Witnesses then, very likely, it would kill someone; however, I did not mention it. I interpreted Pete's words as meaning that everyone is entitled to have and hold their own beliefs as long as other people are free to have different beliefs. I was able to learn about his worldviews and I hope, in a small way, I was able to challenge him to consider a perspective he might have overlooked; but I did not push the conversation as far as possible. I pulled back. It was not easy for me to bring disruption to happy ideas of a harmonious world. I suppose I did not want to "threaten the calm of assumed amiability that governs much of our interactions with one another" (Browne & Freeman, 2000, p. 309).

For Pete's Sake!

My dialogues with HCS did not always work out as I hoped; sometimes, I used my power as the researcher to shift conversations away from topics that were uncomfortable for me; and frequently, I concealed my own experiences and viewpoints. Employing the poetic form as a transcription method during data analysis helped me gain insight into how I used my power as a researcher to shift the conversation away from some things that were difficult for me to hear and toward topics that I was more comfortable probing.

When Pete told me about the scars and holes in the crooks of his arms, and sharing the story of how he had gotten involved with giving plasma because of a lack of money for family groceries and other expenses, I had a strong emotional reaction. I was hyper aware of the voice recorder and the heavy echoing in the empty classroom where we held our formal dialogue. I was aware that there were other people in the building who might overhear our conversation. I was aware that I was feeling emotional; however, I was not aware that I shut down the dialogue and a created space where I could recover from my emotional distress until after I had transcribed his narrative in poetic form. Pete shared the following:

Every single college
bill
I get from
Just
the Bursar
I just pay it with that.

I just build up funds
during the summer
from donating
to pay off
any bills
I have

I gained money
here in Stillwater
because
they do it
on a debit card
So, I have one debit card
that's always empty

and one
that's filled up.

That's depending on
what time of the year it is.

To Pete's emotional narrative I replied, "Makes it easy [giggle] to budget that way. Okay, tell me about your visual aids that you included. Mostly, there wasn't—a lot of images. Tell me about creating your images." I was more comfortable hearing about the visual images he made to accompany his speech than exploring social issues surrounding his economic circumstances.

From my experience working as an Academic Counselor for HCS, I already knew that Honors students concern themselves with doing things the "right" way, which sometimes causes tension for them when their views do not align with institutional and professor expectations. I often served as a sounding board for Honors students to vent their frustrations. I already knew, from my analysis of Pete's visual aids, that he had not followed the directions for their creation. I knew that turning the conversation toward the creation of the visual aids would give me time to suppress what, felt like to me, was my overly emotion response. Pete took the bait and articulated the struggle I expected to find. He passionately talked about losing points for not conforming to requirements set for the visual aid, which gave me time 'check' my emotions. Our dialogue proceeded as follows,

Pete: If I say the process then I needed to clearly define the process, because this is something that people may go into and be surprised like, "Oh, I didn't know that! I don't want to do this anymore." So, it was really important for me to have information, and for that information to stay there [on the slide].

Erica: Right. Right.

Pete: But I felt like my, like other topics, it was like, "Yeah, you could show pictures the whole time." But mine, I needed the information to be there at all times. And I got counted off for that.

Erica: Okay. So, did you have a blank slide in-between each one? I know some people did that [pulling out printed copy of the slides], I can't remember if you did or not.

Pete: I didn't have blank slides in between it because most the points, most of these points [pointing to printout of slides], it was bullet points that would appear one at a time.

Erica: Okay, yeah.

Pete: Because I figured the best thing to do is...be like...well this one's like, "Oh well, what does it cover? It covers burns." and then *click* "shots" that, that. And pop it up on the screen. It wasn't just like a slab of text there. Like, the point I was talking about would appear on the screen when I was talking about it. And the next one would appear after that. And I think that worked well for like, a list of things that I had to talk about.

Erica: Right.

Pete: Then when I reached the end, "And it can make you" *click* "that much money."

Erica: Exactly. Right.

Pete: And I was like, "Oh and how can..." and "Would you ask yourself, what is plasma?" *click*, "Well plasma is this."

Erica: Right.

Pete: And then, it's just like, "It's 92 percent water" *click* "and the rest of the eight percent is that."

Erica: Then they come up one at a time.

Pete: Yeah. But that's not what he wanted.

Erica: Right.

Pete: But it's what I needed to do.

Even though I used the moment to recover emotionally, the dialogue we shared was important to Pete. I realized this later when I emailed him and asked, "What changes occurred (in your thinking, feelings, and/or actions) as a result of reflecting on our dialogue-interview? Or, if no changes occurred, then how were your previous thoughts, feelings, and/or actions reinforced?" He emailed the following statement to me:

I did not have any change in opinion after the interview. My previous thoughts on the subject were reinforced because I was able to talk about all of the good aspects of why i give plasma. Also after the interview i had a stronger belief that my outline and presentation was good because i was able to understand and re-give the presentation based solely off of the powerpoint and general knowledge.

I recognized that our conversation made Pete feel validated in his speech performance and reinforced for him why he “took the hit” on the points for the grade.

Bailey’s response to our formal dialogic interview was similar to Pete’s. Bailey wrote,

I would say that because of our talk, my thoughts did not change greatly. However, it did interest me in thinking more about pharmaceutical testing on animals. Talking through my thoughts and ideas reaffirms that fact that I know what I am talking about and am comfortable discussing these views.

Bailey was inspired to think through her issue more deeply and to interrogate her stance, which I believe was a result of our dialogues.

During Sherri’s formal dialogic interview, we moved from speaking about her individual persuasive speech on poverty to speaking about her group speech because she expressed how “nerve-racking” it is to know that your grade is riding on the performance of others in the group. Sherri said that her group took up the issue of Sex Education in Oklahoma schools and they felt that something needed to be changed to prevent the high rate of teen pregnancies in our state. Sherri did not know that my daughter was delivered when I was sixteen-year-old, nor that I lived in poverty, nor that I love to travel the world. She did know that I was trying to complete a doctorate, late in life. Our dialogue occurred as follows:

Sherri: In eighth grade, boys are giggling every time they hear the word penis and just ...stuff like that. And it [sex education] was just abstinence taught. And it was—I don't know, I just feel like this is—it's a very important thing that needs to be talked about.

Erica: Right.

Sherri: It's – we can't do the whole shyness thing anymore. I don't know.

Erica: Do you know any people that—was teen mothers?

Sherri: Yes. I had a lot of girls in my high school who were teen moms. And I mean, of course, most of them – I didn't really meet any of them that didn't – but most of them, you know, are so happy to have their kids. You know, they love their kids, of course. They won't hate their kids because they got pregnant while they're in high school. But, it definitely hinders your ability to, to do more.

Erica: Right.

Sherri: Because you're stuck kind of taking care of this other human being, that – you don't have the time to yourself anymore. And it's huge lifestyle change. And you can't go back to where you were.

Erica: Right.

Sherri: And I mean, that's something that I feel like teenagers need to know, like there's no other... You can't *not* tell them these things, because then they could accidentally ruin their lives.

Erica: Mm hmm. Yeah. So, do you see a connection between, uhm, [pause] teen parents and poverty?

Sherri: Yes. [Both laughing that our dialogue had returned to where it originally started]. And that's another thing because—we talked about how poverty increases the risk of delinquency—there also shows that there's risks, or increases, of teen pregnancy in poverty because either the kids don't know, which, I mean, isn't necessarily their fault but—or they just, they don't have the access to those things that are needed for safe sex, for your birth control, or for condoms, or things like that.

Erica: Right.

Sherri: But, I mean, once you are in poverty and you become pregnant then your child lives in poverty, too. And it's *very hard* for a child living in poverty to escape poverty.

Erica: Mm-hmm.

Sherri: I think there's, also, studies for that as well. And so, it just continues on.

Erica: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So, when you think about the term “ruining your life,” uh, what’s...what's all wrapped up in that?

Sherri: Uhm, not being able to follow your dreams, I guess. I mean, you, you end up with different dreams, which doesn't – I guess I shouldn't have said, “Ruined your life.”

Erica: [Chuckling]

Sherri: [matter-of-factly] Because it's not ruined. It's just changed drastically.

Erica: Absolutely.

Sherri: Uhm, because maybe you wanted to be a doctor, you can't do that...or it would take many, many years to be able to do that if you have a child, and lots of...

Erica: It results in different choices.

Sherri: Yes, it results in different choices. Or, you...maybe you want to travel the world, to visit every single country and, uhm, it's hard to do that with the five-month-old.

Erica: Right. Right, yeah.

Sherri: And so, it's just...it doesn't ruin your life. It's a blessing. Uhm, children are a blessing, most of the time.

Erica: [Chuckles].

Sherri: But it does – it changes everything. And most of the time, your life will never be the same. And it's just, it's hard to do the things that you wanted to do before you had a kid. And that—I mean some people actually go into, might go into poverty, because of children. If they have children—they didn't realize how expensive it would be or how much they would have to take off work for them. Then they might lose their job or lose their income and end up being in poverty, which—that brings us right back to the beginning.

Erica: Right, right. [pause] Okay, let's see what else I had [shuffling papers].

Sherri: I guess we've come full circle.

Erica: Oh, yes [chuckles]. It brings us right back to the end.

Sherri and I talked for awhile after the audio recorder was turned off. Eventually, I told her I had been a teen mom and a little bit about what that was like for me. Weeks later she was still thinking about our conversations when she wrote,

After our conversation, I thought about how I might have said some things that could have offended you, since my group presentation is closely related to your personal life. It made me think about how I use my words, and how my words might be interpreted by others. As a result, I've been more conscious of the words I choose and how I phrase them. This is probably more of a personal reflection than what you were looking for, but it is the one that I've had. :)

I assured Sherri many times that I was not offended in any way by anything that she said. I was happy to hear her thoughtful contemplation of the social issue. However, the fact that she vividly depicted a scenario that closely resembled my life experiences may have made her feel a little troubled.

Taking the time to talk together about important issues and asking HCS to really articulate and interrogate their points-of-view allowed for an exploration of new thoughts and ideas, which made for meaningful moments. Sam and Kyle both felt “surprised” at their reactions to our discussions. Sam wrote,

I was surprised by how thought provoking our interview was. After I gave my presentation I didn't really give much thought to the project as I listened to the other speakers. My main thought then was that the presentations were mostly boring. During and after our discussion I realized that the reason most of the presentations were boring was because they were cookie cutter and non-controversial. The ones I enjoyed were the one about talking to strangers (very different from the ones encouraging us to volunteer for or donate to a charity) and the one that had a controversial topic in which a number of bold statements were made. As a result of this realization, I have recognized that in order to be engaging a presentation either needs to break from the mold or have a topic that treads on "thin ice", forcing the audience to question their position.

Kyle wrote,

I was actually surprised at how much reflecting on my speech during the interview made me think afterwards. One of the biggest things that it did was make me revisit and think about why I had chosen my specific topic.

More importantly though, it made me step back and evaluate what was important to me. After having this discussion, I realized that my passion truly lies in ministry and in helping people; which has in return made me really start thinking about what I want to do in the future and where I see myself going.

Although I had articulated clearly and multiple times that this critical research study was intended to be “transformative,” I do not think HCS really believed me.

Help, I Need Somebody

Re-reading my journal entries helped me to see that very early I was experiencing a sense of support and encouragement from the HCS who agreed to participate in the critical inquiry. The feeling that I experienced prompted my decision to formally ask HCS why they decided to participate in the critical inquiry with me. Although help and support was a major theme, some HCS were also interested in the research process. Their helpful intentions and my feelings of deep appreciation shaped our interactions together in, what I believe was, a positive way. Table 10 displays the reasons HCS gave for participating in the critical inquiry into their persuasive speeches.

Table 10

Participants' Reasons for Participating in the Critical Research Study

Tara	<p>I decided to participate in the study after I read your second email looking for participants. I read the first email, and I was interested and intended to reply and participate, but when I put the email to the side I completely forgot about it. When I read your second email, I thought about the two years I have spent doing research in the biochemistry department. Research was hard enough for me when I had to work with bacteria and trying to keep everything clean, but I can't imagine having your dissertation and future riding on whether or not a bunch of college students decided to help with your research.</p>
Sherri	<p>My main motivation in participating in this study was just to help out someone. I've been told I have a heart of service, and I guess it shows by how often I volunteer for things! I also thought about how I would feel if I were in your situation, needing students to volunteer and having nobody rise up, and I thought about how frustrating that would be. So, following along with the Golden Rule, I did for someone what I would have wanted them to do for me.</p>
Bailey	<p>I was motivated to participate in the study because I understand the struggle involved in research, especially in regards to getting volunteers to participate. For that reason, I try to volunteer my time as often as possible to help others in their research.</p>
Pete	<p>i decided to participate in the study because it was not a burden on me. So i thought it would be nice to help you with your report</p>
Allan	<p>My motivation for participating in this research, chiefly, is to further my understanding of the research process at the highest level. Moreover, I also hold strong contempts for the issue at hand; as we discussed, my sister is going through the Advanced Placement process as a sophomore at [Big Town] North. Also, and of lesser importance, this is the first research study in which I have participated.</p>
Sam	<p>My motivation for participating in the research study was two-fold. First, my friend [Allan Granahan] said that you're really nice and that I should help with the study. I also know that getting a PhD is difficult and that not many students would probably help, so this seemed like the right thing to do. My other reason was that I was genuinely interested in being a research study participant and possibly getting a better understanding of how I made decisions regarding my speech topic.</p>
Kyle	<p>My motivation for participating in the study was simply to help out. I knew that I had done well on my presentation and planning report in speech, so I figured that I should share my experience in the class for the good of the research that was being conducted.</p>
Hannah	No response
Ivy	No response

From the beginning of this research study, HCS and I never forgot that this was a dissertation project required for my educational attainment, which played a role in how the research study progressed and was viewed. There was a force gazing over us, silent and unseen but certainly not unfelt. I believe that HCS recognized the high-stakes involved with a dissertation project and that the knowledge made them work hard to do things the “right” way. For example, Bailey said that she was willing to engage in the formal interview all over again if something had gone wrong with the recording device. The statements and behaviors of other HCS also showed me that they were trying to participate in the research study in the “right” way. Sam broke off a story he was sharing with me in mid-sentence to check with me that it was appropriate for him to proceed. He said, “Uhm yeah, I guess one thing that kind of... Well, maybe I am getting a little ahead of you in questioning?”

HCS entered the critical inquiry with preconceived notions that supported dominant views of research processes, which were evident in many of the statements they made to me. Sam did not want to disrupt my “questioning” and Bailey recognized a need for an audio-recorded capturing of our conversation. Every HCS asked me about the number of participants that I was able to recruit. Even though I assured each participant that I was happy with the number of Honors students participating in the critical inquiry, I suspected some thought that I should have more and were recruiting for me. I suspect that Hannah and Ivy may have joined the study very late in the process because of encouragement from their peers. Students would say things like, “I know you can’t tell me who you’ve interviewed but I think you should try to talk to this student I know.” I felt very cared for and supported by my participants, which in turn made me want to care for and protect them, even more.

Knowing that HCS participating in this critical inquiry were more accustomed to dominant forms of research collection (most of the participants were majoring in natural sciences where positivist methods that include large sample sizes, controlled conditions, and structured procedures are strictly followed) and feeling that the participants were slightly more resistant to

methods which attempted to move beyond traditional forms of data collection (such as dialogic interviewing) altered how I approached dialogue during the formal interview sessions. Dialogic methods that best aligned with the critical research paradigm were modified during the formal dialogic interview to accommodate methods that seemed to be viewed as more common, or acceptable, to the participants. I employed a question and answer approach while continuing to encourage a more dialogic exchange. In every instance, communication occurred most dialogically when the audio recorder was turned off. I wondered sometimes if helpfulness, and politeness, resulted in statements students thought would best serve the study. I wondered if the reason for the strict adherence to the form and content of the descriptive narrative examples I sent was due to their attempt to get it “right” for me. I suspected that the research views that HCS held were a little disrupted by the transformative nature of our inquiry. In the end, I trusted that HCS provided faithful information in their attempt to “get it right” and I embraced the fact that all our narratives are incomplete and unfinished – even this one.

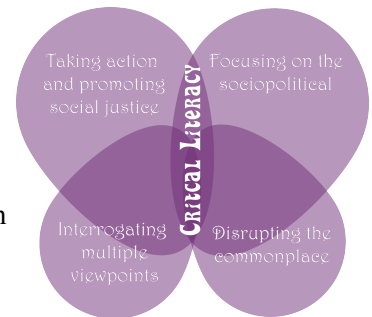
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

“Come to the edge," he said.
"We can't, we're afraid!" they responded.
"Come to the edge," he said.
“We can't, we will fall!” they responded
And so they came.
And he pushed them.
And they flew.

- Guillaume Apollinaire

As a society, people recognize the power of words and realize that words can have an impact on human behaviors, understandings, and attitudes. Current social issues are significant and the social situations are no less difficult today than they were in 1968 when Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F.



Kennedy worked for positive social change and more just conditions for all. Successful leadership must include a critical awareness of the nature of social structures in producing privilege and oppression. Leaders of today, and future leaders for tomorrow, must be able to critically consider significant social issues and take positive actions for social changes that foster just and equitable conditions for all, and they must persuade others to do the same. Otherwise, conditions that allow troubling situations will continue and escalate.

Consider, for example, current events surrounding the leadership of the University of Missouri (MU). A six-hour drive up the road from OSU, students and faculty banded together to demand change in leadership that they felt allowed a racist climate to exist—to continue unchecked—through the silence and inaction of its leader. Jonathan Butler, a MU student, began a hunger strike

on November 2, 2015, and the football team declared that they would not engage in football related activities, until a university leadership change occurred. On November 6, 2015, students approached the University of Missouri President, Tim Wolfe, outside a Kansas City fundraiser and asked him to define “systematic oppression.” The university president was reluctant to say anything and, when he did speak, his words escalated tension in the already tense situation. The exchange was caught on cell phone video and sent out in a Tweet by Twitter user @Qiana_Jade at 9:32 p.m. and within two hours it was re-Tweeted more than 500 times (Stewart, 2015). The dialogue that occurred outside the fundraising event between Wolfe and a black female student follows:

Wolfe: I would give you an answer, and I am sure it would be a wrong answer.

Female voice: You gonna Google it?

Wolfe: I would give you an answer, and I am sure it would be a wrong answer.

Female voice: What do you think systematic oppression is?

Wolfe: It’s—systematic oppression—is because *you don’t believe* that you have the equal opportunity for success.

Female voice: *You don’t*— [Outraged crowd shouting as Wolfe walks away]
[shouting] Did you just blame *us* for systematic oppression, Tim Wolfe?
Did you just blame Black students?

Wolfe’s words indicated blindness to the material consequences of social structures that produce privilege and oppression. Instead of acknowledging the students’ experience as an embodied reality of oppressive conditions that limit their life chances, Wolfe situated their experience in a state of mind where the students’ *beliefs* were the issue at hand. The president’s comments exhibited an embedded attitude that manifested itself in his inaction on hostile conditions that students had protested for months.

The collective actions of students and faculty at the University of Missouri resulted in a change of leadership at high and powerful levels; by November 9, 2015, the university Chancellor and President both resigned. In his resignation speech, President Tim Wolf stated,

...So the question really is, is: Why did we get to this very difficult situation? It is my belief we stopped listening to each other. We didn't respond or react. We got frustrated with each other, and we forced individuals, like Jonathan Butler, to take immediate action and unusual steps to effect change.

This is not, I repeat not, the way change should come about. Change comes from listening, learning, caring, and conversation. And we have to respect each other enough, to stop yelling at each other and start listening, and quit intimidating each other, through either our role, or whatever means we decide to use.

Unfortunately this has not happened. And that is why I stand before you today, and I take full responsibility for this frustration, and I take full responsibility for the inaction that has occurred.

I'd ask everybody, from students to faculty to staff to my friends, everybody—use my resignation to heal, and start talking again, to make the changes necessary. And let's focus on changing what we can change today, and in the future—not what we can't change, which is what happened in the past.

I truly love everybody here and the great institution, and my decision to resign comes out of love, not hate. I'd like to read some scripture that's given me strength [pause]. Ah, I hope it provides you with some strength as well, as we think about what's next. I have to also give credit to my daughter for reminding me of the Scripture. Psalm 46:1 'God is our refuge and strength and ever present help in trouble.'

We need to use my resignation—please, please—use this resignation to heal, not to hate. And let's move forward together for a brighter tomorrow. God bless all of you, and I thank you for this wonderful opportunity to have led the University of Missouri system. Thank you.

Wolfe said, "Change comes from listening, learning, caring, and conversation" and he spoke about his love for the people and the institution. Freire (1970) argued that dialogue must include profound love for the world and hope and humility and mutual respect. However, Freire (1970/2009) made it clear that authentic dialogue must involve critical thinking and efforts to entertain new perspectives that are shifting, tentative, and in formation and re-formation "without fear of the risks involved" (p. 92). Wolfe seems to have been unwilling to suspend his "own personal views of reality," his understanding of the world from his positions in it, "to fight

alongside the people for the recovery of the people's stolen humanity" (p. 95). He seems to have been reluctant, fearful, to challenge the institution that he loved.

To work for positive social changes, and to speak in ways that persuade others to do the same, an individual must first be able to critically see social problems that exist. The way individuals see, and read their world, shapes their actions (or inactions) in it; the actions then create the world (Freire, 1970). To participate in the transformation of society, individuals begin by looking critically at the social situations in which they find themselves, and then they act in ways that promote the positive changes they wish to see. If problems are not seen, or not acknowledged, then they cannot be changed. My ideological concerns revolved around the critical awareness of HCS at OSU and the circumstances in which they were educated and trained to speak out on significant social issues in an Honors SPCH 2713 class.

The struggle to challenge social inequality was the concern driving this critical research study with HCS; raising critical awareness in a way that allows the awareness to be turned into action was the goal. I cannot predict if HCS will become "leaders engaged with their communities and the world" (Vision, 2015). I cannot predict where, when, or if they will speak out for social justice. What I know is that nine HCS who felt they had positioned themselves in the "safe zone" for their persuasive speeches were willing to move down the continuum toward more choppy and uncertain waters in a critical inquiry with me. The nine students demonstrated a willingness to think critically and to increase critically awareness in themselves and others.

I entered this research study with the belief that elevated critical awareness can equip individuals to recognize and combat the reproduction of oppressive social patterns plaguing society and that critical literacy practices can aid individuals in increasing their critical awareness. Since literacy learning and teaching is never neutral, this dissertation study was political in nature. I do not want HCS to simply persuade others toward surface level actions that do not address the underlying causes of significant social issues. My desire continues to be for HCS to speak out in ways that promote social justice and that persuades others toward more equitable

conditions for all. I conducted this study with a transformative agenda viewed through a critical literacy lens. My research was a political attempt to change the way the system operates by altering the way that a person reads the world. Altering the way a person reads the world cannot be done with force and cannot be done on behalf of someone else. It cannot be assigned in a formulaic structure given no time for exploration, dialogue, and reflection. Altering the way a person reads the world develops from people engaging in authentic dialogue and reflection in an attempt to learn more than they each know (Freire, 1970).

This qualitative critical research study was a critical inquiry into persuasive speeches produced for an Honors SPCH 2713 class at Oklahoma State University. HCS who participated in this critical research study reflected on and dialogued about the circumstance in which they lived, learned, and produced the persuasive speeches in order to share their experiences and worldviews. I investigated what HCS did, why they did it, and the social and educational conditions under which they acted while I prodded dialogue and reflection in an attempt to expand perspectives.

Two main research questions drove the critical inquiry: (1) In what ways does dialogue with HCS at OSU about the circumstances in which they lived, learned, and produced a persuasive speech on a significant social issue raise critical awareness? (2) What social and educational elements limited HCS at OSU in realizing their full potential as advocates who speak out for social change? Three sub-questions helped focus dialogue that aided in answering the main research questions: (1) What topics did HCS at OSU address in persuasive speeches on significant social issues for an Honors SPCH 2713 class during the 2014-2015 academic year? (2) Why did HCS at OSU take up their specific social issue? (3) What were the conditions under which HCS at OSU produced persuasive speeches on a significant social issue? Answers to the research questions can help me and other honors educators and administrators better understand how HCS at OSU are developing their intellectual capacity as leaders for diverse communities and the world.

Discussion

The nine HCS participating in this critical inquiry did not feel that they had chosen significant social issue topics that could be heatedly challenged; they did not see places where trouble could exist in their chosen speech topics. HCS were influenced by beliefs and values that permeate their school community. In an effort to maintain peaceful relations, all nine study participants attempted to engage in polite, non-confrontational discourse over assertive discourse when presenting their persuasive speeches: this hindered authentic dialogue. Other researchers reported similar findings when investigating critical thinking and critical pedagogy with faculty members (Halx & Reybold, 2005; Oppenheimer, 2004). When HCS decided to leave their personal values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences at the classroom door, their action produced a sense of like-mindedness that did not really exist. HCS indicated that they considered multiple viewpoints in order to best present information to the audience in a way that would cause the least amount of controversy, or disruption, to the existing thoughts and values of others. There was no exchange of ideas, as people working together to learn more than they know (Freire, 1970); therefore, authentic dialogue could not really occur. HCS conformed to the polite cultural climate and remained silent on differing opinions regarding important social issues.

I found that HCS used critical literacy in the construction of their persuasive speeches as a means to assess the climate of the class and then applied the knowledge gained from their critical assessment to avoid topics or discussion that might prove controversial to classmates. Their actions seemed to stem from a cultural belief that good education offers the best form of persuasion. When considering the literacy (thinking, writing, reading, listening, speaking) practices of HCS in this study using the four dimensions of critical literacy offered by scholars Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys (2002) as a framework, HCS at OSU who participated in this critical inquiry practiced critical literacy, only not in the ways most expected. They disrupted the commonplace in persuasive speeches by trying, very politely, to educate the audience with better information about the social issues they took up. They interrogated multiple perspectives in order

to maintain peaceful relations with classmates, but only to that extent. HCS focused on socio-political issues in order to make a difference in the lives of others but did not interrogate the deeper causes of the social issues they took up. They selected speech topics in which they were personally invested and involved, which indicated that they took action on behalf of the people and animals they were striving to help in order to promote social justice, although they persuaded the audience toward surface level actions.

I found that HCS created a cultural climate of politeness that enabled them to remain in their comfort zones while still performing successfully for the persuasive speech assignment. I noticed assignments structured to stimulate critical literacy; however, time for authentic dialogue and reflection was missing. Students did not report that they were required to question their assumptions nor did they indicate that any class time was devoted to working through ideas about significant social issues, which was data that was noticeably absent. Social and educational elements, such as politeness and compliance, seemed to work in ways that limited the imaginations of HCS and hindered their ability to advocate for social change. I viewed the circumstances and behaviors HCS described as conditions that stack-the-deck against their development as critically literate citizens who advocate for social change because such conditions depoliticize students in ways that encourage them to reproduce thoughts and behaviors that maintain the status quo.

Engaging in the critical inquiry with HCS over the course of several months encouraged them to re-think the social issues they chose for persuasive speeches as well as the actions they advocated. HCS seemed to be eager for the chance to talk about the social issues that were important to them and to explore the world in ways they might not have considered. As part of the data analysis process, I created a research summary for participants designed to start or continue our conversations about oppressive conditions that limit life chances (Hatch, 2002, p. 199). HCS were receptive to considering multiple perspectives and were receptive to change for increased social justice, even at the cost of their own privileged positions.

I found HCS more than willing to explore alternative perspectives and to consider new ways of imagining the world. HCS began to interrogate existing social structures and their function in society and made connections between the social problems they addressed in persuasive speeches and the larger social system as a result of engaging in the critical inquiry. HCS participating in this study indicated that they learned more about themselves and powerful forces that can shape their understanding of the world. HCS indicated such growth in statements about gaining new perspectives on their world that in turn caused them to re-evaluate their positions and life goals. Engaging in critical inquiry raises a person's level of self and social awareness, which can support the development of a critical consciousness (Mulcahy, 2010, p. 98). This work serves as an example of human existence and the local context in which our critical literacy took place as we interrogated our own understandings and pursued alternative perspectives and new ideas for social change.

Conclusions

Institutional constraints, perceived or actual, prevented HCS from taking up certain significant social issues for which they had a passion because students did not see how the topics could meet all the "check offs" for the assignment and stay within the safe zone. Further, institutional requirements, perceived or actual, worked to hinder the creative and critical thinking of the HCS in ways that prevented them from developing a critical awareness of the nature of social structures when composing persuasive speeches on significant social issues. The constraints HCS students experienced were real in their consequences. Most often, HCS offered volunteerism and donation as answers to the significant social issues they had taken up in persuasive speeches because the professor offered such actions as acceptable. HCS were well behaved, disciplined in the Foucauldian sense, and submitted to normalization with practiced "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977) by reproducing the same normalized solutions over again. The professor's attempt at a social activist approach to persuasive speech education, which would have students challenge existing social systems, resulted in small revolts that were manifested in

rebellion against choosing strong positions and delving deeply into root causes of significant social issues. HCS did not interrogate underlying social structures nor speak out for change that would lessen the unequal distribution of power. In enacting peacekeeping behaviors, HCS demonstrated domestication to the system and continued to feed the monster that guards the power of the status quo and keeps others in their place. The instructor's effort at making a positive difference for social justice fell victim to the power of social and educational systems and mechanisms designed to sustain privilege and oppression, such as blindness to one's own privilege and desire to be accepted by other members of privileged groups (Johnson, 2006).

The ability of HCS to critically consider and then speak out on significant social issues was not fully developed; thus, HCS were limited in reaching their full intellectual potential. HCS were limited by their own actions and institutional power relations, which enabled them to exercise power in (1) observation of others, (2) the establishment of standards of normal behavior, (3) judgment that sorts and classifies within established rituals of truth. Foucault (1977/1995) suggested that the chief function of disciplinary power is for correct training (p. 170). Institutions do not hold power; instead, power is a relational productive force that infuses human relations (Foucault, 1977/1995). People place themselves in positions to oversee rituals of truth and, also, they practice self-regulation; individuals become instruments of disciplinary power at the same time that they are subjects of it. As reality is formed by situations, it is in the space between "the determination of limits and their own freedom" that oppression occurs (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 99). In this study, HCS observed and questioned their peers about speech decisions, which led to perceived knowledge. The perceived knowledge led to the establishment of the appropriate, normal, polite, behavior for persuasive speaking in the honors course. Understanding the norm allowed HCS to sort and classify the behaviors of classmates and to recognize behaviors that deviated from the perceived understanding of action. The speeches the students remembered as impactful were the ones that broke the cultural norm of calling for volunteering or donations, such as the ones advocating for saying "Hello" in elevators or for more

open mindedness toward Atheists. Applying Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power helps illustrate how certain practices, such as peacekeeping discourse practices, became standardized in the Honors SPCH 2713 class in a way that produced a homogenous effect that limited HCS in their ability to imagine "more than this" (Sam) current system supports. Attempting to work respectfully within existing social structures limited HCS in re-imagining conditions for a more just world. It hindered their development as advocates who speak out for social change. If HCS are to develop leadership with a global perspective for diverse communities and the world then this is a condition that must be remedied.

Implications

In order to function as leaders engaged for diverse communities and the world, HCS must develop a critical awareness of the reproductive nature of social structures in sustaining inequality; without this understanding, difficult situations continue and intensify. HCS are high achieving and highly motivated students who have chosen to pursue an honors education meant to develop their intellectual capacity for leadership in a diverse world. They are future doctors, lawyers, ministers, business professionals, school board members, university presidents, and global citizens who have the potential to occupy potentially powerful positions where their voices can influence and persuade others. It is important to recognize that the social issues on the minds of successful, often privileged, individuals and the positions they take on social issues have the potential to shape their actions, or inactions, and our societies.

HCS at OSU must develop and hold on to critical awareness in order to speak out for social change that promotes social justice; however, it is difficult to do since the marks of our origin shape what we understand as common sense. Laitin (1986) observed, "What is commonsensical in politics is the core of the ideology of the dominant social groups" (p. 92). HCS at OSU are often members of multiple dominant social groups; critical literacy can help individuals transcend common sense understandings in order to read their world anew and to envision new ways of existing that might "energize the desire to do things differently" (Lather, 1986, p. 73). Critical

awareness involves the development of an understanding of the world that “transcends common sense perceptions” through recognition of the political nature of knowledge and the various forms of inequality that are socially produced (Mayer, 1986, p. 249). Authentic dialogue opens the way for thoughts that can create possibilities for new social and political structures (Freire, 1970, 1985; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Authentic dialogue is conversation between “people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they know” (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 90). In such dialogue with others, individuals can articulate their experience and transform the world through reading and naming and re-reading and re-naming (Freire, 1970).

In this critical inquiry, HCS shared their worldviews and I shared mine to the extent that rapport and circumstances allowed (Hatch, 2002). The process was imperfect; however, we were trying in our small way to create a better world. We pushed our thinking about unquestioned privilege, the reproductive nature of social structures, and the mechanisms that sustain it. There were many reasons not to do it, as Sam realized. He said, “I am hesitant to advocate for change in our social structure, which could potentially detract from my privileged position” and then he visualized a new reality in the following:

Moving forward, I plan to focus on putting myself in other peoples’ shoes and trying to see situations from their perspective. Hopefully this will stop me from nonchalantly dismissing situations that have a major impact on others as not a big deal or not an issue.

The best that any of us can hope for is our continued growth. “The goals of critical inquiry -the just society, freedom, equity- may appear utopian. Nevertheless, while critical inquirers admit the impossibility of effecting consummate social justice, they believe their struggle to be worthwhile” (Crotty, 1998, p. 157).

You Say You Got a Real Solution; We’d All Love to See the Plan

Dialogue and reflection with HCS revealed a few things that can be done in pursuit of greater social justice. In this section, I offer a few recommendations for practice. I also offer recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for practice

Interaction with HCS revealed a need for more time and space for authentic dialogue and reflection to occur. The next step is to create time and space for authentic dialogue and reflection that could further develop the critical awareness of HCS at OSU. Honors classes at OSU are designed to be smaller classes that can serve as a springboard for the development of new methodologies and cutting edge educational advancements, which can be extended to the entire university community (Mission, 2015). Considered in this way, honors classes are small testing sites for experimental teaching methods and subject matter that can have implications for the larger university. New honors classes in leadership training and service learning could offer HCS at OSU a supportive, dialogic environment that creates time and space for raising critical awareness. Innovative evaluation techniques could be developed that require successful honors students to focus more on their growth and development than on their grade. Opportunities for students to consider root causes of the significant social issues that they take up for persuasive speeches could occur in honors add-on enrichment hours. Successes from these types of honors classes could be researched and utilized to serve the larger student body. Resources at OSU, such as the *Difficult Dialogues Series* dedicated to fostering open and productive conversations on difficult topics across campus, can support students and faculty in starting and continuing the kinds of authentic dialogue that leads to increased social justice.

This critical research study demonstrates that HCS who participated in this study were willing to engage in critical dialogues and reflection on important social issues and were receptive to action that fosters social change, even at the cost of their own privileged position. However, HCS must move from semi-transitive thought to critical-transitive thought in order to develop their full intellectual potential and leadership for diverse communities and the world. One way to raise critical awareness is through explicit critical literacy instruction. Explicit instruction in critical literacy theory and practices could provide HCS with tools that help them develop, and hold on, to critical awareness. Students would learn to recognize injustices, acknowledge

privileging practices, consider multiple perspectives, and read the world in resistant ways that challenge societal norms. If explicit critical literacy instruction results in the loss of “politeness” that has created comfort among honors college students at OSU, then the result may be a discomfort that sparks critical awareness by making students pay attention to the reproductive workings of social systems. Johnson (2006) emphasized, “Systems of privilege do a lot more than make people feel uncomfortable, and there isn’t anything ‘nice’ about allowing that to continue. Besides, discomfort is an unavoidable part of any meaningful process of change” (p. 145). The cost of inaction is high because the consequences of failure to pay attention, of failure to be socially aware, of failure to prepare students for leadership roles for diverse communities and the world are high.

Recommendations for future research

This critical inquiry with HCS at OSU offers an examination of the capacity of authentic dialogue to raise social consciousness to systems of privilege and oppression. In attempting to answer the research questions in this study, however, more questions were raised. A future researcher might ask, “In what way does critical awareness support and foster transformative leadership in Honors College students?” The following questions should also be explored: What are the cultural norms, beliefs, and practices of HCS that conflict with or support a pursuit of social justice? How did the norms, beliefs, and practices develop? How are issues of race, class, and gender implicated or challenged in the literacy practices of HCS at OSU? What motivates HCS to advocate for significant social change?

HCS mentioned a few classmates who they reported took more risks in their persuasive speech presentations and rocked the boat to some degree. What prompts HCS to rock the boat? A case study on students who pushed against institutional constraints could offer additional insight on HCS and their critical literacy learning. Questions such as these constitute an ongoing process of inquiry.

Research with a goal of transformation for increased social justice provides an avenue for authentic dialogue, reflection, and actions that leads to change. Freire (1970) argued that reflection without action amounts to mere verbalism and that action without reflection amounts to mere activism. He asserted, “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradictions so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In pursuit of a fuller humanity, the same poles of contradiction must be reconciled for the researcher-researched relationship. Critical research allows individuals to work and dialogue together. Without such inquiries, many may have never had the chance to work and learn in dialogue and reflection together. In a critical inquiry the process of authentic dialogue, where all communicators are open to new ideas, is more important than attempts to change people’s minds (Freire, 1970; Johnson, 2006; Way, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015).

There is a vulnerability and risk associated with value-based research situated within a critical paradigm. I illustrated my own struggles in sharing my worldviews with participants. I used my power as the researcher to shift conversations toward more comfortable “safe zones” for me. Unintentional power relations were evident in the narrative descriptions HCS (re)produced following my example. Critical researchers may wonder, as I did, whether dialogue situated in a social system based on power structures can ever become the kind of authentic dialogue for which Freire advocated. To resound the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. (1965), my advice is not “to get bogged down in the paralysis of analysis” which inhibits an ability to act. “We all know” that “oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity” are deprived of many freedoms that more privileged social groups enjoy (King, 1965). The question is not *if* seasoned and novice researchers should engage in critical inquiry with a purpose for positive social change; the question is *why* wouldn’t they and *what* is preventing them from talking, listening, and reflecting *with* one another, as people attempting to learn more than they know. Moving forward, I recommend that researchers travel out of their safe zones and conduct more

critical inquiries into the lives and experiences of privileged and less privileged Honors College students.

When Shift Happens

Nine HCS and I were able to carve out some time to explore our shifting, developing, tentative understandings of our worlds and we explored, to the best that our privileged sensibilities would allow, new ways of thinking and knowing. When this critical inquiry came to a close, my conversations with HCS at OSU did not end. During the year, we formed a community of students who faced similar challenges and coexist in the same local spaces. I don't greet Pete by his pseudonym. He is a real person with a real name and so are the others. Our conversations moved away from panopticon gaze, surveillance, observation, and writing; but we were in the same boat navigating academic attainment in a hierarchical social system, as I strived to obtain a Doctorate and they a Bachelor's degree. We were subject, and subjected ourselves, to the instruments of power (hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination), which we knew to be tools of control. We danced the dance with practiced docile bodies and became domesticated (Foucault, 1977). In the future, making small changes in attempt to realize the reproductive nature of social structures (Johnson, 2006) may lead us to turn against such domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality (Freire, 1970/2009, p. 75). Though dialogue and reflection, we already started working for positive social change in our small ways.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, June 30, 2015
IRB Application No GC1512
Proposal Title: To do or taboo? A critical inquiry into the persuasive speeches and critical literacy of honors college students a Oklahoma State University
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 6/29/2018

Principal Investigator(s):

Erica S. Burns 221 Willard Stillwater, OK 74078	Sheri Vasinda 251 Willard Stillwater, OK 74078
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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Erica S. Burns

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: TO DO OR TABOO? A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO THE PERSUASIVE SPEECHES OF HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Major Field: Education: Professional Education Studies – Literacy & Leadership

Biographical:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December 2015.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Children's Literature at Roehampton University, London, England in 2006.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Art History at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2003.

Experience:

Lecturer, Aug. 2015-Present, Oklahoma State University

Honors Academic Counselor, Dec. 2013-Aug. 2015, Oklahoma State University

Graduate Teaching Associate, Jan. 2013-Dec. 2013, Oklahoma State University

PreK-8th Grade Principal, July 2012-May 2013, Agra Public Schools

Humanities Electives Teacher, Aug. 2006-July 2012, Stillwater Middle School

Academic Counselor, Feb. 2004-Aug. 2005, Spears School of Business at OSU

Professional Memberships:

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