

Analytic Memo Examples

The following represents a complete set of three analytic memos completed by a graduate preservice teacher in a kindergarten classroom in an urban school setting. The children were primarily African American; the graduate preservice teacher was White. The study was a curriculum analysis of a scripted reading program. The critical question was, “How does the scripted reading curriculum represent race, socio-economic, and family structure and how might this influence teaching and learning in my urban school?” This combined set of memos shows the progression of data collection and ongoing analysis. The memos are unedited, except that all names are pseudonyms. There are several ways to read and learn from the memos; it may be useful to read with the criteria for trustworthy preservice teacher action research in hand; or read and then use the scoring guide for analytic memos; or read and act as the teacher/researcher’s critical colleague.

Analytic Memo Example 1

(1 of 3)

Critical Question: “How does the scripted reading curriculum represent race, socio-economic, and family structure and how might this influence teaching and learning in my urban school?”

As a pre-service teacher I’m learning that understanding who you are teaching is imperative to becoming an effective teacher, and goes hand-in-hand with knowing what you are instructing. To thoroughly investigate how the scripted reading curriculum at Jefferson Elementary School influences teaching and learning in my classroom, I wanted to explore what and who the curriculum represents. This is the purpose and objective of my first data collection.

I began by creating a table that defines several possible racial groups, socio-economic statuses, and family structures that could be represented within the curriculum and its materials. I used this table to calculate and clearly illustrate who is being represented by the curriculum.

I have quickly realized, however, the challenge in creating such a tool. One of my greatest struggles was choosing which terms were most appropriate for the study and equitable to all. I sought the help of a critical colleague who is studying social work and advice from one of the graduate professors in multicultural education. Both provided valuable assistance and reference materials. The professor suggested that I use the terms of my school district. I felt that this was an excellent option since these are the accepted terms of the district. They are as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, Multi-Racial, and White. These terms are more inclusive than others for this study. For example, referring to people as black, opposed to African American, includes individuals who are not American or who are not of African descent. This is also important to my study because I accept materials at face value, illustrations will not explain to me the ethnicity of an individual, but the perceived race of an individual will represent who is included within the curriculum.

There is a second dilemma to using terms to categorize individuals into people groups. Dr. Tatum (1997) explains this best when she writes “my dilemma about the language to use [in my book] reflects the fact that race is a social construction” (pg. 16). She continues by referencing Van De Berghe’s definition of race as; “‘a group that is socially defined but on the basis of physical criteria,’ including skin color and facial features” (pg. 16.). This means that people will define and view racial terms in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, “the original creation of racial categories was in the service of oppression” (pg. 17), and this is not the intent of my study! Rather, I hope that by providing and defining racial terms, I can use this vocabulary to explore who is most represented

within the scripted reading curriculum. With this information, I will review how effectively the curriculum is relating to the student population at Jefferson.

To collect data I used the Teacher’s Edition of the Level K: Unit 4 scripted reading curriculum text. I read the first five days of instruction within this unit, as well as the additional materials, and counted the number of times a particular race, socio-economic status, or family structure was represented. I included my collected data in a table for each lesson. However, below I have created a table which depicts the results from the total of all five days.

Results Totaled From Individual Lesson Tables:

At a glance, the data reveals that out of six categories	Curriculum Materials Analysis	
	Level: K	
	Unit: 4	
	Theme: Wind	
	Race, Socio-Economic Status, Family Structure represented:	Number of times each is represented in materials used:
	Black	3
	Hispanic	3
	White	6
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	1
	Multi-Racial	0
	Upper Class	3
	Middle Class	0
Lower Class	0	
Single Parent/Guardian	0	
Homosexual Parents/Guardians	0	
Extended Family Guardians	0	
Heterosexual Parents/Guardians	0	

es of race, four were represented. Of these four categories, the race with the highest percentage of representation was White (46%), followed by Black (23%) and Hispanic (23%), and finally,

American Indian/Alaskan Native (8%). With this information I could easily conclude several

things. For instance, that a person who is White will be represented twice as many times as someone who is Black or Hispanic. By looking at the rest of my data I could also surmise that only individuals of upper class socio-economic status are represented and no families are included. However, if I were to come to these conclusions I would be making very poor assumptions.

This is because I realized that one lesson reflects very few people in the instructional materials. Most of the activities include games or songs that reference letters and objects much more often than people. If there are nine months with approximately 20 days of instruction each, that would total 180 days of reading instruction. This means that five days of instruction is less than 3% of the school year. For my data to be more accurate, I would have to review many more lessons, perhaps a month's worth, to begin to make a more precise reflection. For my second data collection I will be reviewing ten more days of instruction. My hope is that this will provide me with more data, to increase the validity of my findings.

Yet, there are other reasons why my data is inconclusive. For example, each tally that I made denoted a racial group or socio-economic status that was represented within a material. Each person who was depicted was not counted as a tally. Instead, each race or socio-economic status was marked. To illustrate this further I will use a hypothetical situation: Imagine that one children's story has ten people within it. Seven of these people are Hispanic and three are Asian/Pacific Islander. Instead of marking a tally for each of the seven individuals who are Hispanic, I marked only one. I would also report one tally mark for the racial category of Asian/Pacific Islander. If in the same lesson, another activity referred to a person who is Hispanic, then I would mark a tally within that category again for that day. This data does not accurately portray which racial groups are being represented. To improve this I could add data that shows how many individuals of each race, socio-economic status, and family structure, are presented in the curriculum. I will update my

second data collection method by counting the number of individuals that are represented for a race within the ten lessons that I observe. I will update my first five lessons to include this data as well.

The data set also does not exemplify any reference to family structures. Perhaps this is a section that could be removed from my inquiry? Yet, I still feel that this is important. Family is often the reference point for most children's understandings of the world. If only one type of family structure was being represented within the curriculum, it may mean that students who did not grow up with a family of this type, may be less connected to the material or even feel left out. I have learned that many students live with single parents, specifically mothers, or are cared for by extended family members. I would be concerned if the reading curriculum was not, or misrepresenting single-parent families, thus I feel it is crucial to continue researching this issue. Examining more lessons may bring about better data, as well as observing the material as it is being taught. I look forward to making more discoveries during data collection two by examining a total of 15 lessons and by interviewing my mentor teacher and the reading coach.

It is also clear that few clues to an individual's socio-economic status are provided. The few people that are shown seem to have characteristics of having a higher socio-economic status; exemplified by a clean neighborhood with large houses and lots of acreage in the country. If after my second examination I find this is the most frequent socio-economic status illustrated, then many of my students will not be represented. Most of the students at Jefferson live in an urban setting amidst city blocks, neighborhood parks, and the noise of traffic. A large percentage also lives in poverty. Their frame of reference comes from this setting and lifestyle and it may be more difficult for them to understand material when it is being taught in conjunction with unfamiliar reading terms. Books can be outlets to new worlds that children can explore from the comfort of a familiar place, like in the laps of their parents or within the safety of a classroom, yet some books must speak to them

about things which are familiar so their interest is not lost along the way (Adapted from Sims and Buchwald). Yet, if most of the people depicted within the reading curriculum are living in different worlds from them, then the students may not be benefiting as much as they could. I am eager to investigate further which socio-economic status is being depicted most often. I hope children are being exposed to a good balance of unknown worlds and familiar ones.

Reviewing my data causes me to ask whether the reading curriculum is portraying diverse peoples or whether my methods of data collection are inefficient. To explore this I will examine more of the curriculum and in a variety of ways. I believe this will increase the trustworthiness of my research.

I am also wondering if I have considered all of the aspects of a student that should be included within an effective and positive reading curriculum. I have not questioned what multiple intelligences the curriculum most frequently instructs to. Nor have I collected data about what genders or settings (urban, rural, suburban) are reflected within the curriculum. An abundance of reference toward one of these areas, or the lack of attention given to one, could cause student interest to wane or for their learning to be more difficult. These are the ideas I will explore more when I complete my second data collection to see how the reading curriculum influences teaching.

To investigate all of my questions I have created a plan for my second data collection. This collection period will include two interviews that detail how the curriculum influences teaching and student learning. I will also re-review the first five lessons of Unit 4, as well as the following ten. By further investigating these lessons for who is being represented and how many times they are portrayed, I can look at how and what the students are learning, and design an appropriate way to assess how the curriculum is affecting student learning within my third data collection. To thoroughly accomplish this, I will use a checklist that analyzes bias in children's literature, to

review the curriculum reading materials. It suggests how to look for stereotypes, tokenism, sexism, and other areas of bias in which an author may be unjustly conveying a group of people. Finally, I will look into how the curriculum is structured, to more extensively assess how it affects teaching. This will include an analysis of the timeline and organization of the curriculum. With this information, I will be able to further deconstruct the implications of using a scripted reading curriculum within my urban, kindergarten classroom.

Analytical Memo 2

(2 of 3)

“Whatever failures I have known, whatever errors I have committed, whatever follies I have witnessed in private and public life have been the consequence of action without thought.”

[Bernard Baruch](#)

Critical Question: “How does the scripted reading curriculum represent race, socio-economic, and family structure and how might this influence teaching and learning in my urban school?”

The importance of critically thinking, reviewing, and deconstructing my data collection is summed up by Bernard Baruch’s quotation. If I desire to see student learning and my teaching positively impacted, then I will put much thought into these ideas. With this objective in mind, I begin to review my second collection of data.

One of my first goals was to give more trustworthiness to my previous data findings by updating and expanding it. I did so by revisiting the first five lessons of Unit 4. I added, in red, totals that included any race, socio-economic status, or family structure represented that I had not counted before. In my first data collection, I tallied for every individual that represented one of these areas.

However, if there were multiple characters in a story, and several of the same race I only counted

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the race as being represented once, even though it was exemplified multiple times by the number of characters. I noticed that only a total of four more characters needed to be accounted for. However, all four characters were white, which makes the findings more significant because it added to the already large percentage of whites who are represented within the curriculum. I will reflect on these findings later.

In addition, to revisiting the first five lessons, I also used surveys for the next 15 lessons, which completed a review of the 20-lesson unit. I wanted to increase the likelihood that family structure and socio-economic status would be represented. I also hoped that by increasing the trustworthiness of my data as I collected more of it, I would further discover insight into what percentage each race was being represented. Each lesson is labeled with black ink if the data was not already represented by a material. For example, we read one story four days in a row. I felt that counting the data from each day, but from the same material would be inaccurate. Some could argue that if the same story is being read again and again, that it is reiterating the representation of a racial group, socio-economic status, or family structure, which may inaccurately reflect to students a higher value in who is being shown. Yet, I chose not to count the same materials numerous times because it was not adding quantity, but instead repetition. In other words, it was not revealing the variety (or lack of variety) of individuals being represented, but the adding tallies to our figures which already reveal who is being portraying within the data. I will revisit this important issue again in a later section. For now, as in my earlier data collection, I have included a table combining the tallies from each of the 20 lessons.

Results Totaled From Individual Lesson Tables:

Curriculum Materials Analysis Level: K Unit: 4 Theme: Wind		
Race, Socio-Economic Status, Family Structure represented:	Number of times each is represented in materials used:	
Black	16	
Hispanic	3	
White	72	
Asian/Pacific Islander	10	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	7	
Multi-Racial	0	
Upper Class	4	
Middle Class	8	
Lower Class	2	
Single Parent/Guardian	2	
Homosexual Parents/Guardians	0	
Extended Family Guardians	0	

The numbers are quite differentiated and when they are converted to percentages (the total number of a sub-category compared to the total number of individuals), they reflect some staggering findings.

From this unit, 128 individuals are portrayed. Of these 128 people, 16 are Black (12.5%), 3 are Hispanic (2.3%), 72 are White (56.2%), 10 are Asian or Pacific Islander (7.8%) and 7 are American Indian or Alaskan Native (5.5%). Comparing who is represented within the scripted reading curriculum, to who is represented at Jefferson Elementary, is what makes these findings so significant.

At Jefferson, the student population consists of predominantly African American (60.4%) and Hispanic (24.3%) students. The remaining students are White (10.6%), of Multiple Ethnicities (2.1%), Asian (1.7%), and Native American (0.9%). If the majority of our school population most naturally relates to reading materials that present individuals who are Black or Hispanic, then it seems it would be best to be able to differentiate the curriculum materials to better represent the school population. However, I reviewed a month of the core scripted reading curriculum which is

taught to every kindergarten student and the student population is clearly underrepresented. This causes me to question many issues such as: why this curriculum was adopted by this school district, how well the students are relating to or benefiting from the materials, and how as a teacher I could better differentiate a scripted program that is supposed to be followed within a strict guideline? Within the district, we are expected to be on the same lesson within the same grade level at all schools. Yet, different types of learners learn at a variety of paces and as Bronfenbrenner's ecological model reflects (pg. 27, Daniels & Meece) students also have different understandings of the world depending on how, who and what they have been exposed to within their closest spheres of influence (family, peers, and school). Two studies created from the responses of current teachers, critique the lack of differentiation to accommodate for a variety of learners within the curriculum. In one article "[teachers] faulted the program for containing only whole class instruction ... [and as being] too low-level and not including critical thinking activities" (pg. 6, Peck et al.). This study also states that this particular scripted reading program is designed for native English speakers, it holds a quick pace, and negates to include appropriate background knowledge needed for comprehension. The other reiterates and expands upon these ideas by saying:

Tomlinson (1998) further contends that teaching materials do not cater for "... different types of learners and different preferred styles of learning" (pg. 337). He concludes that textbooks only provide for and reward students "who can focus on discrete chunks of information, who can analyze and categorize, who can memorize and retrieve consciously, who are systematic and sequential in the ways they learn ... [and] that language materials do not make adequate provisions for other categories of learners such as experiential, auditory, tactile or kinesthetic."

(pg. 203, Ajayi)

Also, if students are primarily from low socio-economic statuses (95.7% receive free lunch), then why is the curriculum reflecting a high percentage of upper and middle class individuals (86%)?

How are these representations of race and socio-economic status influencing students' ability to comprehend (picture clues are critical to early reading), not to mention, self-concept and perception of worth? Tatum explains the construction of identity as

a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I? The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am?

(pg. 18, Tatum)

I would add to her list of questions "Who do my teachers say I am?" In my third data collection, I will investigate these ideas by specifically reviewing how *student learning* is influenced by the scripted reading curriculum.

Returning to the topic of how teaching is influenced by the curriculum, I have completed an investigation by interviewing teachers. The survey was given to two teachers and it is comprised of six, open-ended questions. The questions are as follows: Are there aspects of the scripted reading curriculum that you feel are beneficial for teaching? Are there negative aspects of the curriculum? Does the curriculum encourage success for a diverse group of learners? How does it reflect different racial groups, ethnicities, family structures, and socio-economic statuses? How do you feel about the structure/implementation of the scripted reading program? What other feelings or comments do you have about the scripted reading program?

Both instructors have taught for over ten years. One currently teaches in a general education classroom, and the other is the reading coach, who previously taught in a general education classroom. For confidentiality reasons, each teacher is given the pseudonym of simply 'teacher'.

When each teacher was asked if there were any benefits to the scripted reading curriculum, both replied yes and acknowledged it as having an organized format. One teacher explained that the activities are engaging and fun, and that the alternation from life science to physical science themes is favorable. The other teacher emphatically compiled a detailed list of the positive aspects of the curriculum. The benefits listed were: lots of examples for student practice, explicit instruction techniques especially for blending, work book supports, CD-ROM stories, anthologies, provided comprehension skills and strategies, teacher resources, sound spelling cards, decodables, and the concept/question board method.

When asked if there are negative aspects to the curriculum, one teacher noted that they couldn't think of any, while the other made only one complaint – that there is not enough challenge for students who need it.

In response to whether the curriculum encourages success for a diverse group of learners one teacher explained that the curriculum is “meant to be delivered to a whole, heterogeneous group” but when asked how well the curriculum reflects racial groups, ethnicities, family structures, and socio-economic statuses, this teacher suggested that the anthology stories could be better at this. The other teacher reviewed unit texts and found that the curriculum offers techniques for supporting work with English Language Learners (ELL) students which can also support students who are struggling. However, as the work of Peck et al. suggests, the curriculum's support for ELL students may be limited. This teacher also felt that the curriculum themes are age-appropriate and hold all the children's interests. Yet, when asked about who the curriculum is reflecting, this teacher felt that “the diversity appears to be superficial. Some illustrations are diverse but the stories are more to the white majority. Many of the stories use animals to skirt the issue altogether. In my opinion the

stories are slanted towards the middle class with little or no topics related to low socioeconomic society.”

For the final question, both teachers noted that they like the curriculum. One specifically stated that it is fun and engaging, and easy to prepare for and implement. This teacher also mentioned that “occasionally lessons are too long or they assume you have materials at your disposal that you do not.”

To thoroughly reflect over these responses, I have to be honest and acknowledge my surprise. I feel that both teachers responded more positively to the curriculum than I believed they would. This is important for me to recognize, because I do not wish to be holding a negative slant which could sway the way in which I collect and deconstruct data. However, as a pre-service teacher, I also am observing the curriculum in a different light. These teachers have been teaching in this school for at least ten years and have adapted to the curriculum, its expectations and workings. They understand the ins-and-outs of the curriculum that I am only beginning to understand. However, my perspective is important as well, because I have a passion for social justice and I am currently learning how to assess curriculum and teaching strategies. I will continue to take all ideas into account with those of my critical colleagues to strive for the best assessment of the curriculum.

The positive remarks from both teachers may also reflect the fidelity each one has been asked to keep toward the scripted curriculum by their school district. For job stability, they may not wish to speak negatively about a curriculum that they are required to use daily and to support in every way. Also, our school has become a “lighthouse” school. This means that as a Reading First school, they have been recognized for their achievement at implementing reading instruction effectively.

Specifically, this means children are doing well on certain standardized tests. The school will have

weekly visitors begin to observe their classroom this year and the next. Sharing that they are unhappy with the curriculum during this pivotal moment would not be wise. Being a “lighthouse” school is considered a successful accomplishment that reflects well upon the school and the curriculum. However, in my next interview, perhaps I could ask how they are defining reading success and who is deciding on this definition. I would like to consider finding answers to these questions in my final data collection.

In sum, it seems that to these teachers organization, student engagement, and materials are valuable aspects of the curriculum. While lack of student advancement, diversity, and time are three unhelpful characteristics. Peck et al. refers to the ease of implementing the curriculum, especially for new teachers, as a positive piece of the curriculum (pg. 15, Peck et al.). However, I have to question whether ease of use is worth sacrificing other positive teaching techniques. Perhaps, the curriculum is easy to use compared to other reading programs, and this would place it as a top choice between curriculums. Yet, my critical question asks how it influences teaching *and* learning. If also the anthologies are not representative of the student population, are they worth the convenience? My third data collection will address the issue of how learning is being affected by the curriculum, which will allow me to see if the benefits outweigh the negatives.

Prior to my third data collection, I need to understand how the lesson objectives are meeting the needs of the teachers, and how they are meeting the needs of the students. I want to also look at how the lesson objectives aid or conflict with best teaching practices.

I compiled a list of five days of lesson objectives. Each day seems to stress and clearly specify phonemic awareness goals. For example, one lesson’s objectives in this area were: TSW identify names of the days of the week, TSW hear and say initial consonant /s/ in words, TSW review the

long a sound, and TSW attach the /s/ sound to the letter Ss. These objectives are imperative for beginning readers to be learning and mastering. The activities that accompany these activities did allow for practice of these objectives.

A second focus area within the curriculum is reading comprehension. Here is an example of a set of objectives from one day: TSW participate actively in the reading of a Big Book selection, asking appropriate questions and listening attentively, TSW identify print and book features, TSW recognize and tell the use for quotation marks, TSW identify dialogue in a story, and TSW use the reading comprehension strategies of Monitoring and Clarifying and Predicting. What I've noticed during my own four weeks of teaching the reading curriculum is that the objectives are to be taught in a very short period of time, and this period of time does not allow any time to address student management. (It assumes children are always on task and have no other life issues.) When I attempted to address every goal, it seems overwhelming for me. I wonder if it is effective to teach this many skill to children in such a short time. I say this because developmentally at five and six years old, no more than three step directions are expected to be followed (pg. 55, Colker et al.). Yet, in each story students are asked to practice making predictions, to listen for new vocabulary words, to answer focus questions, and to take in the general plot of the story all at the same time! This is expecting that they are interested in the provided story and that they can sit on the floor and listen to it for at least 20 minutes.

With our short amount of time to implement the curriculum each day (45 minutes per student group), we have not been completing the other three content areas: language arts, writing process strategies, and English language conventions, though they are provided ways to practice writing outside of the reading curriculum instruction in the afternoon. I have included the lesson objectives

for each of these areas in my data for observation, but have chosen not to review their influence because I have not had the opportunity to observe them being taught.

After gathering information about lesson objectives, teacher feedback, and how individuals are represented, I can form some final questions to consider for my third data collection. After reviewing the lesson objectives I see that teachers are able to address the phonemic awareness goals through the provided activities. They also are given objectives for teaching reading comprehension, though teaching within a tight time-frame is challenging. Since student success is tied closely to engagement, I would like to look at how interesting these areas are for students and also how they are relating to materials that often do not reflect their race, socio-economic status, or family structure. Also in regard to this, I would like to devise a method for assessing how students perceive their worth or what they believe is important for a person to act like, look like, or have, and why they believe these ideas. If students do not feel valued, they may feel less motivated to try or learn things they believe to be beyond their ability. I would like to see how self-worth is tied to the curriculum, because it is an area that a standardized test does not measure, yet crucially impacts students.

Analytical Memo 3

(3 of 3)

Critical Question: “How does the scripted reading curriculum represent race, socio-economic, and family structure and how might this influence teaching and learning in my urban school?”

After reviewing the curriculum and how it influences teaching, I was excited to then investigate the impacts of the scripted reading curriculum on student learning. After all, this is the main purpose of my study, in an attempt to improve my practice as a teacher.

I began by defining the objectives for this final data collection period, and with the guidance of a critical colleague and my advisor, I designed my research methods. My first goal was to observe student interest during the reading of a story. Routman (2003) states that “if we want our students to be excited about literacy, they need to have teachers who love coming to work, who are literacy learners themselves, who find ways to make curriculum relevant to children’s lives, and who can put high-stakes testing in perspective” (pg. 1). Yet, as mentioned in my second analytical memo, the scripted curriculum is not representing all children. Then, in regard to Routman’s comment, it seems that the curriculum may be limiting the interest of students because the curriculum is not always relevant to their lives.

Carr (1999) provides her students with a classroom library area which “holds approximately thirty tubs of books – about 800 titles – categorized by beginning-reader books, fiction, nonfiction, and author sets” (pg. 5). This allows her students to choose stories that fit their developmental level and curiosity. The scripted reading curriculum chooses books for the students to listen to and read, which could limit student engagement and teacher interest, and affect learning and classroom management, and often the curriculum schedules reading the same story at least four days in a row. I know that my interest is less captivated when this occurs, why wouldn’t the students’ interest also wane? I further investigated the interest of students by observing them as they listened to stories, which were chosen specifically with this group of children in mind as opposed to those assigned by the scripted reading curriculum.

I noted students’ comments and mannerisms as they listened to the children’s picture book, *Duck on a Bike* (Shannon, 2002). (This is not a story from the scripted reading curriculum). Many comments were made during the story that were on-topic. On-topic comments show interest because students

are thinking about the events taking place in the story. Children stayed engaged during the story, even though they were eating their breakfast. Two students followed the normal breakfast routine by throwing away their garbage and finding a book of their own, but as *Duck on a Bike* was being read, they kept looking up at the pictures, and eventually put down their own stories to listen. One boy kept a smile on his face through the entire story and one girl exclaimed; “I wish we could read another one!” I found similar excitement when I read *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (Willems, 2003). At the end of the story one girl even asked if she could read it, my cooperating teacher picked it up soon afterward to read through it, and as he read the book out loud, a few students gathered to listen to it again. With their great interest for this book, I brought in a second book about the Pigeon the following day. They showed a matched enthusiasm for this book as well. The draw that a story has increases the learning of a student. If we can hook our students into learning by reflecting their interests in the curriculum, it will not only improve their success, but it will most likely lessen challenging behavior. Understanding this, I wanted to further understand what type of stories would fit the interests of my students.

I directly asked each student; “if you could tell me any story, who and what would it be about?” I felt that by asking students to freely tell me what they wanted, that I could find out what they find interesting and important – thus, what they may be interested in reading about. Of course, a child may be interested in many other subjects beyond what they can share when answering one question, however, this provided me with some insight. I think the quote by Rudine Sims Bishop is so important, “All children need to have the book as mirror – to mirror their physical self, their lives, and family experiences but they also need to have the book as the window – the book that takes them into other worlds, that expands their horizons.” I hoped that by interviewing each student, I would discover what they see in the mirror, or what they wish to be seeing outside of their window.

I used an open-ended question because it allowed students to answer freely, not restricting them to only choose from some pre-selected options.

I interviewed 20 kindergarten students using my original question. Many students answered by using only a few words, so I prompted them by asking if “anything else would happen?” I also inquired on the descriptions of characters if students mentioned make believe characters or friends that were outside of school. To do this I asked students to “tell me what he or she looks like” or if they needed further prompting I would ask them to “tell me what his or her skin, hair, eyes, body, and clothes look like.”

Immediately, I began to notice a pattern in the responses: students were consistently naming family members as the characters in their stories. By the end, 13 of 20 students (65%), said that at least one family member was in their story. This shows the frame of reference through which the students are viewing the world, because their families are what they know best. This makes the data I obtained during the second collection period even more profound because if most students within the Kindergarten classroom are not being reflected within scripted curriculum’s story choices, how are they relating to them? Again, how might their self-worth be shaped if they continually hear about stories of White Americans with middle to high socio-economic statuses if they are a minority, or have a low socio-economic status?

I found it interesting that one student who is African American told me a story not of her family, but of a princess. When I asked her what the princess looked like she said: “[she] was pretty. Kinda like you. She has a magic necklace with birds on it.” (Like I was wearing the day I interviewed her.) Of course, I felt this comment was very kind and sweet, but it also reveals something significant; that her idea of what a princess is, is being White, well dressed, possibly even with blond hair and

blue eyes. I completed an image search of the word “princess” on the internet using a popular search engine named Google. The site address is www.google.com/images, and I used it to see who the internet most often represents as a princess.

The first page pictured 46 images of “princesses.” Of these 46 individuals and characters, only ten were not White, and five of those ten people came from a posting of someone’s personal photo. Evidently, the view of a “princess” is a young girl who is White. Astonishingly, 32 of the 46 images were of “Disney Princesses.” It seems then that Disney, a corporation geared toward children could be one factor shaping young girls’ visions of what a princess is; however, the goal of this analysis is not to dig deeper into this issue now. Instead, I want to explore the challenges of the scripted reading curriculum of only representing primarily students who are White, and who live in middle or high socio-economic statuses.

Now my hypothesis here may seem quite forward, however, my personal experience in this school also brings me to such ideas. One specific instance comes to mind. I was watching two girls play with some building toys during recess. One girl asked me to play house with them, and I agreed. One of the girls said that her “doll” (plastic building toy) would be Black, while the other said that hers would be “White.” The same girl then proceeded to say that we should all be White. I asked her why she thought that and she said it was because I was her favorite teacher. Again, what a kind thing to say, yet if I am an adult figure that she is looking up to, and I am of the dominant culture, could that hinder the view she has of her own self worth being that she is Black? Of course, this could be an innocent coincidence, and she just chose for us to be White, however, I have seen other examples of children choosing to pretend they are White. In addition, many of the popular children’s shows predominantly portray White characters.

My observations and findings are consistent with a well-known study that assessed racial identity formation. (Williams and Morland, 1976). In *Cultural Competence*, Diller and Moule (2005) review the findings of this longitudinal study:

Third, racial evaluation was assessed by asking the young subjects to choose a figure (light- or dark-skinned) in response to a description that included a positive or negative adjective (for example, choose the good parent). Both Euro and Afro [terms used within the study] preschoolers overwhelmingly assigned the positive features to the light-skinned figures (pro-Euro response) at a rate of 90 percent and 80 percent, respectively. These same patterns repeated for both groups through late elementary school. In junior high school, however, the Afro students' responses changed dramatically to pro-Afro (that is, assigning positive adjectives to dark-skinned figures), ending with a rate equal to that of Euro junior high students.

(pg. 95)

When I first learned of this study several years ago, I was alarmed. I was just beginning to learn and reflect over the concept of "White privilege," and I didn't understand how a child could view race, their peers, or themselves in this manner. With study and reflection, I'm understanding this more, and now asking myself: how can I as a teacher encourage a positive self-image for all of my students, especially for minority students, when I am of the dominant culture? Though I cannot claim to have a full grasp on how to do this, there are some choices I can make as a teacher to best represent and encourage all of my students. The first, is to continue to seek out information. By asking questions of my students and their families I can help orient myself to a community that may be unfamiliar, and more importantly, understand them as individuals within their context. In addition, reading current literature and research allows me to assess my practices, and evaluate whether they are efficient. Third, by carefully reviewing my classroom materials, I can make sure they reflect people justly. For example, there is an enormous amount of children's literature, but it

does not all represent people groups fairly. Offering a good variety of literature that reflects people positively can influence positive self-esteem when students can relate to similar role models.

At a recent professional development day, I attended a workshop titled “Embracing a Racial Dialogue.” A suggestion was made by one of the class instructors to invite successful people into their classroom, especially successful individuals who are of the same race as students within a classroom. Bringing positive individuals of all races into the classroom will allow students to relate with people from their own cultures, it will allow them to see someone from their own culture maybe with a much different background, and it will allow students to view successful people of all races. In addition, it shows acceptance and friendship of the teacher with people from all backgrounds.

The final step is to encourage the self-worth of each of your students. This refers to the first step, and that is getting to know each student, and celebrating their unique qualities. Why is validating a child or youth’s self-worth important? Well, imagine that you feel as if your teacher, coach, employer, or even pastor, does not believe in your ability to succeed or devalues your culture or race. Even if these are simply perceived, and in fact are not true, unless you observe the contrary and feel validated, you most likely will feel demoralized, unable, or unwilling to work or learn. Students must feel accepted by their teachers in order to be successful.

Beverly Tatum (1997) emphasizes this by illustrating a student choosing not to learn from a teacher who they feel devalued by. She calls this not-learning and coins the term from Herbert Kohl (as cited in Tatum, 1997) who explains that:

Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity. In such situations, there are

forced choices and no apparent middle ground. To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject their world.

(p. 26)

As a teacher, this would be my ultimate failure; to have a student feel that I have rejected so much of who they are, that they find their only sense of empowerment in the classroom to be choosing not to work or learn. Likely, this is happening all over the nation, but teachers who have already demoralized a child's value, see it is a failure of the child's, rather than that of their own responsibility.

The scripted reading program may be helping children pass standardized exams, but the data I have collected and the readings I have done make me conclude that it also impacts student learning in ways that standardized tests simply do not consider. I need to spend more time with my data and the readings to further understand this. I do know this, that as a teacher within the era of scripted curricula, it will be my job to find value in my students, and to teach to their abilities, and to find ways to represent them in the curriculum, particularly when they are not represented within the curriculum.