



Culturally Sustaining Literacy Pedagogies within an Anti-CRT Climate: A Mediated Discourse Analysis

Kelsey Deklerk

Abstract

This paper uses a mediated discourse analysis when viewing the action of a student after their involvement in a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach to literacy instruction. The instruction took place in a time where the political push was an anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) narrative that claimed these lessons were aimed for “indoctrination”. However, this student wrote a letter to the District Board of Education in response to the anti-CRT rhetoric, asking the Board of Education to continue to allow lessons involving culture to be allowed at their school. This mediated action is analyzed for the discourses, historical bodies, and interactions that helped to shape the action. The findings emphasize the need for educational practices to integrate culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017) and address power dynamics to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments. Recognizing and addressing the influence of historical bodies and discourses (Gee, 1990) can help educators and policymakers develop strategies that better support diverse student populations and challenge systemic inequalities. Future research should investigate how historical bodies, discourses, and power dynamics within interactions shape educational experiences across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Additionally, studies should explore effective strategies for integrating mediated discourse analysis findings into teacher training and policy development to enhance educational equity and inclusivity.

Keywords: Mediated Discourse Analysis, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, Culturally Inclusive

Introduction

The 2020-2021 school year was one like no other. If students were in person, they began their year wearing masks, many coming from tumultuous experiences from the onset of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic earlier that year. While on break from in-person learning at the end of the previous school year, Americans, including many school-aged children, witnessed the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent civil right movement take shape. Schools, community organizations, and individuals alike were questioning how we got to this point and how we could work to make things better. But like any civil rights movement in history (see for example Finley, 2003), the countermovement started to become apparent within the school year as well.

The push for civil rights from within, and on behalf of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and their communities around the nation led to an evaluation of education practices, curriculum and teaching strategies. Teachers, schools, and communities alike looked for ways to improve the quality and outcomes of the education system for those outside of the dominant culture and language. Likewise, when it seemed like these efforts would result in an inspection of the education system, or unjust practices in place, opposition labeled many of these efforts as racist and divisive. Critical Race Theory (CRT) became the trigger word of divisive indoctrination under which all other inclusive pedagogies were labeled (Green, 2022) and continue to be undermined. In a time when many were asking for a reevaluation of teaching practices, an opposition formed, aiming for most of its focus on classroom inclusive, equity pedagogies aimed to avert disparities in educational outcomes between white and BIPOC students. In other words, the opposition was aimed at pedagogies and teaching approaches that were working to support the inclusion of cultures and languages outside of those of dominant European American culture. When equity pedagogies were noticed they were often labeled as CRT and divisive, saying these approaches were putting blame on white students, or making white students feel guilty for their privilege (see legislation such as the Stop CRT Act, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Asset-based approaches to education emphasize the strengths, skills, and cultural knowledge that students bring to the classroom, rather than focusing on perceived deficiencies or gaps (Carter & Welner, 2013). This educational philosophy views students' cultural backgrounds, languages, and community experiences as valuable resources that can enhance learning. Rather than adopting a deficit perspective that sees students from marginalized communities as lacking, asset-based approaches recognize and build upon the rich cultural capital that all students possess (Carter & Welner, 2013). By leveraging the assets that students already have, educators can create more inclusive, responsive, and effective learning environments that affirm and sustain students' identities and experiences (Moll et al., 1992).

Culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) goes further in asking for explicitly multicultural and multilingual student academic outcomes (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014; Paris, 2016). CSP builds on previous asset pedagogies which recognize the cultures and languages of students as valuable and important (Ladson-Billings, 1995, see also Gay, 2018; González et al., 2009). CSP asks for teachers to not only respond to student's cultures and languages (Gay 2018), or for them to be viewed as relevant to their education (Ladson-Billings, 1995) but for the languages and cultures of our students to be sustained and to be built upon.

As defined by Paris and Alim (2017), culturally sustaining pedagogies challenge the notion of assimilation and instead promote the idea that schools should be sites where students' cultural and

linguistic practices are maintained, expanded, and celebrated. These pedagogies are rooted in the understanding that students' cultural backgrounds are not deficits to be remedied but assets to be leveraged in the learning process. By fostering an educational environment that sustains and values diverse cultural practices, culturally sustaining pedagogies aim to create more equitable and inclusive educational experiences (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Discourses and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Discourses refer to the various ways in which people communicate, think, and understand their experiences in the world (Gee, 1990; 1999; 2018). According to Gee (1990), discourse is not just a way of speaking, but a way of being in the world that encompasses language, culture, and social practices. He argues that we all participate in different discourses, or social languages that shape our thinking, our actions, and our understanding of the world around us. Gee (1999) analyzed the ways in which discourse shapes and is shaped by social practices, cultures, and power.

Gee (1999) defines discourse as a “social language” that is made up of a set of practices and ways of thinking that are specific to a particular group or community. These practices and ways of thinking are often unconscious and implicit, but they shape the way we understand and interact with the world. Different discourses are associated with different forms of social power, and that the ability to navigate and participate in different discourses can give individuals greater access to social power and opportunities (Gee, 1999; 2004). Much in the same way that different cultures and languages are associated with different access to power (Alim & Paris, 2017). Learning and understanding the dominant language, or discourse can support student’s access to a lifetime of growth (Alim & Paris, 2017; Gee, 1999; 2004).

When researching culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017), discourses become crucial because they help us understand how language and cultural practices are intertwined in educational settings. Culturally sustaining pedagogies aim to maintain and develop the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices of students, particularly those from marginalized communities (Paris & Alim, 2014). By focusing on discourses, researchers can explore how educational practices either support or undermine the cultural identities of students.

Discourses shape and reflect power relations in society (Gee, 1990). They play a key role in defining whose knowledge, language, and culture are valued in educational settings. Culturally sustaining pedagogies then challenge dominant discourses that marginalize certain groups (Alim & Paris, 2017). Culturally sustaining pedagogies emphasize the importance of students' home languages and cultural practices (Paris, 2016). Discourses provide a framework for understanding how language is used to either include or exclude students based on their cultural backgrounds (Gee, 1999). Understanding the discourses present in educational settings helps educators create environments that validate and sustain students' cultural and linguistic practices. Examining discourses allows researchers and educators to critically reflect on the underlying assumptions and ideologies that shape educational practices. This reflection is essential for developing pedagogies that are truly culturally sustaining, as it requires challenging and changing the discourses that perpetuate inequities in education. By critically analyzing these discourses, researchers and educators can work toward creating more equitable and affirming educational practices for all students.

Research Approach/Role

During this school year, I engaged in an active, collaborative role with classroom teachers across an urban school district, focusing on the integration of culturally sustaining pedagogies into literacy instruction. Moreover, my collaboration with teachers extended beyond classroom instruction. I

facilitated workshops and provided ongoing support to help educators around the district to critically examine their existing teaching practices, curricula, and materials. Together, we explored ways to make these elements more inclusive, ensuring that they reflected the diverse cultural narratives and languages of the student population. This involved not only incorporating texts and materials that resonated with students' lived experiences but also fostering classroom environments where students felt empowered to share and celebrate their cultural identities.

Throughout the school year, I served as a resource and advocate for culturally sustaining pedagogies, helping teachers to reframe their approach to literacy instruction in ways that validated and built upon the cultural knowledge and linguistic strengths that students bring to the classroom. This work was guided by the understanding that culturally sustaining pedagogies are not merely add-ons but are essential components of an equitable and effective educational practice. By partnering with teachers in this endeavor, we collectively sought to create learning spaces where all students could see themselves reflected in the curriculum and feel valued for their unique cultural contributions.

Research Participants/Setting

For the purposes of this paper, I focus on a single sixth grade elementary classroom, and actions that occurred during the 2020-2021 school year. The classroom was located within one of the more diverse schools within the district I was working in, though the population in the region is much less diverse than other areas. This school was one of the Title I schools located in this suburban city. 54% of students at the time were receiving free or reduced lunch. There was an English Learner (EL) population of 11% within the school, as well as a homeless student population of 14%. The overall student body at the school was also characterized by racial diversity, with 49% of students identifying as racial minorities. The classroom in focus consisted of 18 sixth-grade students, whose demographic composition closely mirrored that of the larger school population. This setting provided a rich context for exploring the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies, given the diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students. The classroom environment, with its varied student needs and identities, served as an ideal microcosm for examining how culturally sustaining pedagogies can be effectively integrated into literacy instruction to create an inclusive and affirming educational experience. Through this focused case study, insights were gained into how these pedagogical approaches could address the unique challenges and opportunities present in such a diverse learning environment. But here, I take a closer look at how this setting, the participants and the environment, both inside and outside of the classroom, influenced the actions of a student during the study.

I collected data within the classroom through multiple perspectives. Methods included observations and conversations, lessons conducted by the teacher or me, surveys, interviews, and student work. These different sources of data were used as a reflection piece to guide instruction with the classroom teacher. By changing my role during the research, this allowed a space for me to research on a continuum, from the lens of an outsider to that of an insider (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

To facilitate a smooth entry into the classroom and connect with the students, I conducted an initial visit to introduce myself, explain the research I was undertaking, and outline the research process. During this visit, I engaged in a brief conversation to learn more about the students. This served as a foundational step in building relationships, which would support their engagement in future activities and discussions when I returned. I also collected data from social media and current public sources as I addressed the larger conversations happening in the community around culture in the classroom.

For the purposes here, I focus on a single piece of data collected in the classroom, that of a letter written by a student. Additional data has been extracted from social media posts outside of the classroom to analyze the layers of influence the classroom experienced.

Research Questions

In collaboration with the classroom teacher, I conducted research and gathered data on the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies. In a period marked by significant national political divides, particularly around inclusive pedagogical practices often mislabeled as Critical Race Theory (CRT), this research seeks to answer the following question:

1. How do external forces beyond the elementary classroom influence the incorporation of culture in an education setting, such as culturally sustaining pedagogies?

Mediated Discourse Analysis

In order to examine varying layers of classroom influences, within the classroom and outside of it, I used a mediated discourse analysis (MDA) approach. MDA is a way to study the relationship between discourse and social interactions, focusing on the ways in which discourse shapes our understanding of power relations, social and psychological phenomena (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). “Mediated discourse theory unpacks how bodies, actions, and materials activate raced and classed expectations in discourses that converge within a local place and how these expectations circulate along the currents and undertows of global histories and imagined futures that swirl into and emanate from a given moment.” (Wohlwend, 2021, p. 12). Different levels of social, political and cultural expectations set up expectations of what was appropriate within elementary, literacy classrooms (Wohlwend, 2009). This determined how teachers and eventually how children participated in literacy practices in the classroom. In this context, literacy practices eventually became a “contested site where competing discourses overlap and invoke conflicting expectations, creating dilemmas for teachers who want to do what they believe is best for children and fulfill their school’s writing targets” (Wohlwend, 2009, p. 341).

Mediated discourse analysis looks at social action and discourse as being impossible to disentangle while also understanding that these connections are “sometimes not at all direct or obvious, and therefore in need of more careful theorization” (Scollon, 2001, p.1). Scollon (2001) exemplifies mediated discourse in the common practice of grabbing a cup of coffee with a friend from a popular, global chain. In this example, one could say that the single action of grabbing a cup of coffee is taking place. On the other hand, Scollon (2001) argues that this can also be viewed as a complex, nested sets of actions taking place like standing in line, ordering, paying, waiting, receiving your order, selecting a place to sit, having a conversation, and cleaning the area or disposing of your cup. Just like action, one can say that the discourse in place is having a conversation with a friend, or that many complex and interconnected discourses are taking place at once. These discourses may include the marketing and branding of the coffee in question, the different language uses and patterns present, and so forth. Wohlwend (2021) draws further on this example by asking how something as ordinary as getting a cup of coffee may “enact core beliefs about belonging and the literacies we use to make sense of actions, materials and spaces” (p. 4).

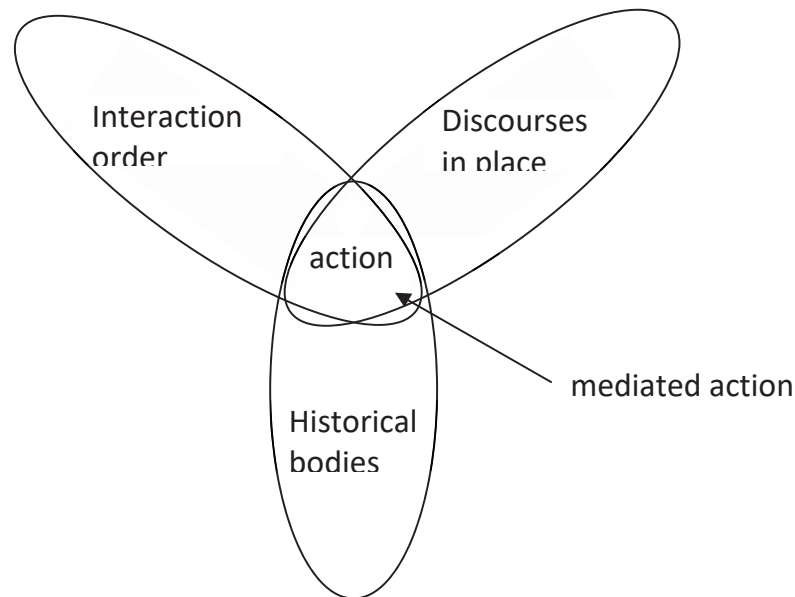
In the classroom, actions may be viewed from the surface, like grabbing a cup of coffee, or as the complex, many, and constant actions taking place. Classroom discourse can be viewed as the single classroom under observation, or from the complex, outside discourses that may also influence the discourse of the classroom and the actions taking place within it. “Mediated discourse analysis is a position which seeks to keep all of this complexity alive in our analyses without presupposing which

actions and which discourses are the relevant ones in any particular case under study” (Scollon, 2001, p. 1). This allows the researcher to uncover some of the inherent issues of power, social practices, and positioning present in everyday classroom practices (Wohlwend, 2021).

With multiple layers of influence and discourses in mind, I used mediated discourse analysis to evaluate all the levels of discourses that were present within the classroom of focus. These discourses could, at times, be visible. Others could be outside discourses with an influence on the classroom. Analyzing the data from the understanding that these multiple discourses influence the classroom setting situates the data within the understanding of a nested design (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The nested design understands that multiple layers of influence exist outside of the classrooms, therefore, mediated discourse analysis takes this into consideration within the data analysis process. Wohlwend (2021) notes that mediated discourse analysis “uniquely equips you to understand how bodies, actions, and global discourses come together” (p, 11). It provides a space to analyze the intersections of discourses, literacy practices, and culture present in the classroom (Wohlwend, 2021), as well as how these practices are situated within overlapping and intersecting social situations (Wohlwend, 2008). It also allows for analysis of micro-actions present within the classroom and how they are linked to macro-discourses (Scollon, 2001).

In order to analyze the data from the classroom, while also having looked at the larger bodies of discourse outside of the classroom, I also sought to understand how an action or moment is shaped and influenced by three components: interaction order, discourses in place, and historical bodies (Scollon, 2001). Interaction order can be understood as being who or with whom the interaction is taking place and for what purpose. This allows a closer examination of social relationships and their convergence in the discourse. The examination of discourses in place allows for an understanding of which discourses are present and even contesting with one another. Finally, the historical bodies of what actions are expected. Historical bodies, being actions that are so often used, often become automatic, including the engrained or learned cultural actions or knowledge. Each component “molds an action through a set of expectations for who should act and how things should be done in a particular place” (Wohlwend 2021, p. 28). Each action can then be viewed as that moment as well as each component’s influence on that action. Figure 1 below demonstrates the overlap of these three components on an action, and how this overlap will be viewed and examined. The overlapping has been configured to examine the overlapping systems nested within the classroom.

Figure 1. (Adapted from Figure 2.2 *Three Flows that Constitute Mediated Action*, Wohlwend, 2021)



Mediated Action Within the Data

To analyze the mediated actions within the data, I focus on a specific moment during the school year that reveals the complex interplay of influences both inside and outside the classroom. This moment stands in stark contrast to similar actions which took place in the community, such as the push for anti-CRT classrooms. However, I argue that the action within the classroom, along with those occurring outside of it, were largely shaped by the same interactions, historical bodies, and discourses. The specific action I have analyzed is that of a student who wrote a letter to the School Board of Education about the research we were conducting and the lessons which took place within their classroom.

The Letter

At the end of the year, a few students wrote letters to the District and State board of Education to discuss the lessons in which they had taken part during the school year. This occurred during a period marked by a peak in anti-CRT sentiment within the community. One student in particular wrote:

Dear Board of Education

I am an 11-year-old girl, mixed and have loved being more open to culture. In Ms. D's class we were able to talk about ourselves openly. Although I've been open about my culture before, I've never related to a lot of it. My mom is white yes, but I mostly like involving myself in my dad's culture. Because I grew up surrounded by my Mom's.

Most of this school is white and I've always felt like the odd one out. I look like my Dad and you can't always tell that I'm half white. Our school is diverse and I don't feel like I've been treated differently, but this class has still helped amazingly. Not only has Ms. D's class made me feel less closeted [about my culture] but [my teacher] too. They have always honestly talked with us and have made me realize how different cultures are, and how amazing it is to learn about them. There's not much I would change but may be in the future there could be more activities or programs like this that We could participate in to learn more about us,

Thanks for your time.

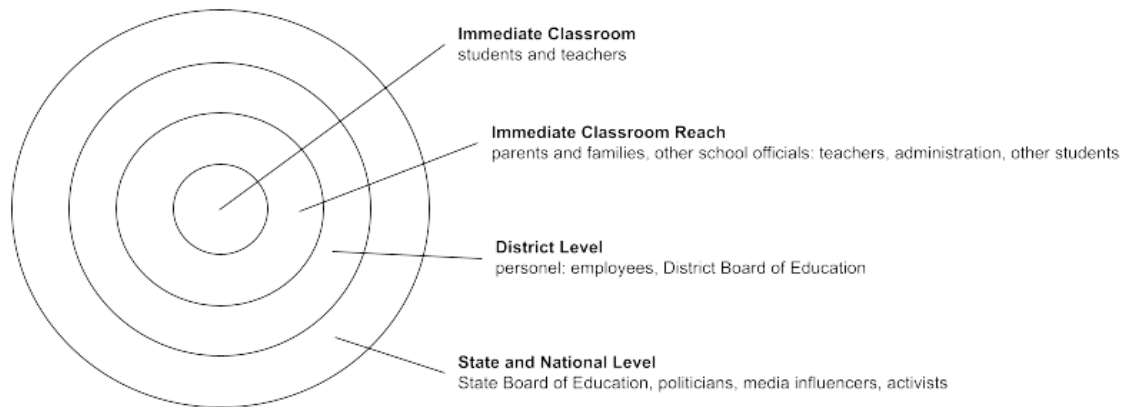
The classroom teacher and I worked diligently to keep the anti-CRT narrative out of the classroom and continue lessons as usual. However, after several school board meetings at the district level that were commandeered by large groups of parents with the narrative that we were “indoctrinating” children, the students started to notice some of the rhetoric taking place. In response, they inquired about how they could get involved and how they could share what it was “really like” to participate in the lessons that were being highlighted as examples of indoctrination.

Mediated Discourse Analysis of the Data

In analyzing the data, I focus on this single mediated action, arguing that this action was influenced by the same historical bodies, rhetoric, and discourses that were present within the classroom and the broader community. By examining the components of mediated discourse analysis—interaction order, discourses in place, and historical bodies—we can see how these factors shaped the student's decision to write a letter to the school board of education. This action was deeply intertwined with the broader sociopolitical climate and the ongoing debates surrounding culturally sustaining pedagogies (though it was debated along with Critical Race Theory). While this letter represents a positive affirmation of the classroom experience, it was nonetheless shaped by the same external pressures and narratives that fueled opposition to inclusive educational practices or pedagogies.

Interaction Order

In the case of this classroom, interactions took place on multiple, varied levels. The most meaningful level of interaction occurred in the immediate classroom. This interaction included the students, the classroom teacher, and at times, myself as a visiting district level teacher. The next layer of influence involved those with immediate classroom contact, though outside of the classroom. This layer included parents and families of those in the immediate classroom, but also other school officials and personnel (teachers or administrators) who also had frequent interactions in the classroom. Next, there was a district level of interaction. This included myself when not an immediate part of the, but it also included my colleagues at the district level. This included personnel like the district level Board of Education as well. Finally, we have a state and national level of interaction. Though this interaction level was the most removed from the classroom, it also had a great influence because of its interaction at all levels as well. The people interacting from a state and national level included the State Board of Education members, politicians, as well as media influencers and activists. These individuals had the ability to greatly influence this classroom through interacting with various levels of influence, like district personnel, parents, families and even the students themselves. See figure 2 for an example of these layers and their level of interaction with the classroom.

Figure 2. (Adapted from Figure 1.1 *Classroom Layers of Influence*, Deklerk 2022)

Within these levels of influence, were parameters that influenced the mediated action of the said student. The interaction order dictates who or with whom the interactions are taking place and for what purpose (Wohlwend, 2021). The student wrote a letter after the interactions had taken place in the immediate classroom between the other students, the teacher, and myself as the researcher. Interactions, however, also took place between the parents of this student and others. There were parents in question who were active within the district and contributed to the anti-CRT narrative that lessons involving culture should be removed from the classroom. Arguably, this interaction was also influenced by the state and national levels. Shortly before this mediated action, a new State Board of Education member issued a statement directed to my employment and work in particular. The board member publicly posted on social media saying,

Warning Parents: The Edgewood School District has Culture & Diversity (indoctrination) Specialists that have begun doing classroom training sessions... If you are not okay with this, write an opt-out form saying you do not consent to your child participating in lessons, programs, activities, trainings or discussions on the topics of: Cultural Proficiency/Competency/Relevance, Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, Privilege, White Fragility, Intersectionality, Anti-Racism, Systemic Racism, Bias (conscious or unconscious), Critical/Crucial Conversations (i.e. Critical Race Theory), Racial Justice, Social Justice, Black Lives Matter, 1619, etc., etc.

Here is one example of how Critical Race Theory was used as a “catch all” term for any lessons taking place in the classroom, no matter how loosely tied they were to an actual CRT approach. Shortly after this post, among others, the attitude within the district, the classroom, and among parents started to change. This is when we observed protests at school board meetings, I received threatening emails, all the time while trying to negate large amounts of misinformation on what lessons we were teaching. This course of action demonstrated the influence that the state and national levels had within the classroom, the district and the parents through social media and other avenues.

These same levels of influence impacted students and parents alike. However, their reactions to the interactions varied greatly. For some parents, this resulted in angry emails and phone calls, claiming indoctrination. For the student who wrote the letter, their experience with these interactions differed greatly. This student interacted with the immediate classroom. The experiences at this level influenced the experiences they gained, which prompted them to write the letter. Some of the angry

emails I received were from individuals outside of the classroom who had no interactions with students, the teacher, or myself.

As the student mentioned through their letter, their interactions in their home also differed compared to other students, or community members, based on the racial makeup of their parents and the cultures they embodied inside of their home. This interaction in the home may have influenced their action based on their experiences, beliefs, and culture(s) held in the home. These could have influenced the student’s feelings about the lessons and conversations taking place within the classroom. It is also evident that the student was influenced by the anti-CRT rhetoric and the District, State and National levels of influence because they noted some of the protests, board meetings, and other attributes shaping the future of culturally sustaining pedagogies and other inclusive practices in the classroom. Their reaction to these interactions was to support the inclusion of culturally sustaining pedagogies in the classroom and reach back out to the District and State Board of Education to offer their input to what culturally sustaining pedagogies was really like in the classroom. This student recognized the influence happening within the multiple layers, and these layers’ impact on the classroom, and took steps to ensure culturally inclusive teaching such as culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017) could continue.

An examination of interaction order allows for an examination of social relationships in and outside of the immediate classroom and their convergence in the discourse within the classroom. Each experience, belief, and interpretation of interactions at each level influenced the ultimate action of this student. The same way that these interactions influenced the parents with opposite reactions. The School Board Member’s post, and the student’s letter juxtaposed to one another demonstrate the social relationships in and outside of the classroom and how they converge on the classroom and those involved. See table 1 for a summary of the interaction order of the mediated action below.

Table 1. *Interaction Order Elements of the Mediated Actions*

Interaction Level	Mediated Action: Writing a Letter
Immediate Classroom	teacher classmates myself (district employee in the classroom) experiences within interactions influenced action
Immediate Classroom Reach	parents and family other students at the school other personnel at the school: administration, teachers, volunteers, etc.
District Level	myself (employed at a district level) my colleagues at the district other district personnel: employees, superintendent. District Board of Education and their interactions with parents and board meetings
State and National Level	policy makers and politicians The State Board of Education activist: anti-CRT, Black Lives Matter

Discourses in Place

The examination of the discourses in place within interactions allows for an evaluation of which discourses are also present in the classroom (Scallan, 2001). These discourses present can impact events and actions that take place within the classroom (Wohlwend, 2021). In the case of the mediated action, when we observe the various discourses in place, we can pinpoint discourses which may have had an impact on the action.

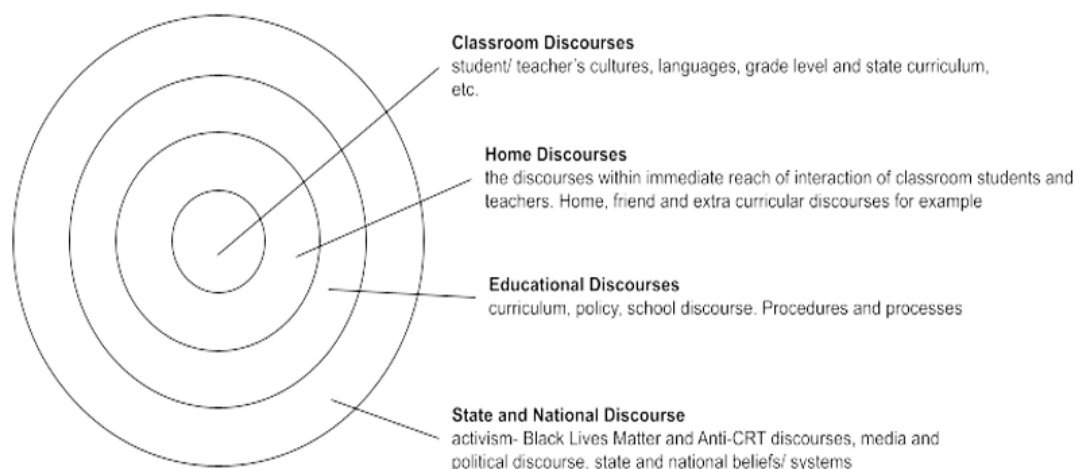
The various discourses in the classroom for instance, can include the various discourses of everyone in the room. This could also include the discourses for students' families or friends who are not in the room. For example, the student who wrote the letter drew on their parent's racial and ethnic backgrounds and the influence these cultures, language, and power relations have on them as they speak of their experience interacting with and learning of culture. These discourses and the interactions within these discourses also shaped the experience and meaning this student gained while engaged in our classroom lessons.

The various discourses surrounding education and the broader educational system are also deeply embedded in the classroom environment. Some of these discourses include facets like the curriculum, but also the discourses involved in the creation of curriculum and lessons, the language expectations, hierarchical power structures, and the roles of individuals employed at the school or district level. These discourses shape and are shaped by perceptions within the classroom. In the student's letter, for example, the mention of the school's racial makeup and the feelings of isolation it could cause reflect how these discourses can influence student experiences at school. The student's reflections in the letter suggest an awareness of how these discourses affected their senses of belonging and engagement within the classroom. The power dynamics and linguistic expectations embedded in these discourses played a significant role in shaping the student's experiences and their subsequent action of writing the letter.

These classroom discourses were also influenced by broader discourses at the state and national levels. For instance, political discourses, such as those surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement, intersected with and influenced the anti-CRT rhetoric prevalent in the community and across the country (Furrey, 2023). These larger political and social discourses shaped, and were shaped by the political landscape, language, and the various layers of discourse that permeated the educational environment through the layers of influence in the interaction order.

The student who wrote the letter was situated within these many layers of discourse, each with its own language, implications, power dynamics, and experiences. The classroom, as a microcosm of these broader societal influences, was subject to the complex interchange of discourses from local, state, and national levels, all of which impacted the student's perception and actions. The classroom is subject to influence nested within the multiple layers of influence that exist outside of the classrooms (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). See Figure 3 for an illustration of the layers of discourse that influenced this class and the student's ultimate decision to write the letter.

Figure 3. (Adapted from Figure 1.1 Classroom Layers of Influence, Deklerk, 2022)



Historical Bodies

The final component for analysis within mediated discourse analysis are the historical bodies in place. In the context of historical bodies, mediated discourse analysis looks at how media texts construct representations of historical events and people and how these representations shape our understandings of the past. Historical bodies are actions that are so frequent and expected that they can become ingrained and gradually automatic (Wohlwend, 2021).

Historical bodies play a significant role in shaping media representations of historical events and people. The dominant groups in society, with their access to power and resources, often shape the media's depiction of marginalized groups, which lead to biased and distorted representations (Hall, 1992). This results in a perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and limited perspectives that marginalize certain groups and uphold the status quo. For instance, the media's portrayal of people of color has often been characterized by negative stereotypes, such as criminality, inferiority, and danger, which serve to justify systemic oppression and discrimination. Over the summer of 2020, protests through the Black Lives Matter movement were often portrayed in the same light. These representations have lasting impacts on how people perceive marginalized and dominant groups and reinforce and perpetuate systemic inequalities (Hall, 1992). Thus, it is crucial to examine how historical bodies influence media representation and to challenge these distorted depictions in order to promote more equitable and accurate representations.

Education plays a crucial role in challenging and changing historical bodies. A culturally sustaining approach, which incorporates a diverse range of voices, perspectives, and experiences, and an analysis of societal norms and expectations, can help to challenge dominant narratives and provide alternative viewpoints (Alim & Paris, 2017). These kinds of practices can help to disrupt the automatic and ingrained nature of historical bodies and open up spaces for new and critical understandings of the past. By exposing students to a range of perspectives and narratives, education can promote empathy and understanding. Welcoming students' primary languages and cultures while also providing access to the dominant language and culture, fosters a more nuanced understanding of historical events and people. Culturally sustaining pedagogies actively work to center students' cultures, languages, and perspectives, and can help to disrupt the power dynamics that often shape media representations of the past (Paris & Alim, 2014). This can lead to a more equitable and just society,

where broader histories and cultures are incorporated into the dominant narrative. However, I would argue that because of the dominant discourses that were in place and the historical bodies from the dominant culture in this research study, the lessons that were working to challenge these actions became a battleground of political divides. The removal of access to culturally sustaining or inclusive pedagogies was a common tactic to remove pedagogies that could challenge the historical bodies. This was evident through the introduction of legislation meant to ban “CRT” or any other discussions on racism, sexism, or other systemic inequities (Schwartz, 2024).

Historical bodies and connections exist for the student of focus’ action within this research. In this case, the student was asking those in positions of power to uphold the adjusted curriculum. The student was advocating to allow for marginalized voices, representation and critical issues to be allowed within the parameters of education. At the same time, certain politicians, and conversations around historical bodies in place pushed back on the idea that racism, injustices, or even a need for representation existed. Van Dijk (1992) found that though instances and reproduction of racism were prominent in media and society, as was the denial of its existence, especially among elites and those in power. Van Dijk also identified several denial tactics, including the use of disclaimers, euphemisms, excuses for racism, victim blaming, and the reversal of accusations by claiming that those in power are the true victims of racism or discrimination. Additionally, van Dijk found instances of positive self-promotion embedded within negative discourse and discussions about those combating or experiencing racism. This rhetoric was present in the historical bodies experienced by the student in this study as well. These experiences, interpretations, and even denial tactics within the experiences of racism are dramatically influenced by power. This power is also a historical body with an expectation of who has access, and how one behaves with or without said power. When educational systems worked to challenge the historical body and powers, they were often labeled as CRT, and efforts were made to remove these practices.

For the student in this study, it could be argued that the experiences of racism and marginalization led to their letter and their asking for continued support through the curriculum, something outside of the historical norms for their experiences in the classroom. On the other hand, it could be said that the existence of racism, and thereby, the denial of its existence and the denial rhetoric in our society led to an even larger push back by those in power and by some of those within dominant discourses.

The analysis of historical bodies within Mediated Discourse Analysis reveals how deeply entrenched power dynamics and societal norms shape both media representations and individual actions. The student’s letter, which advocated for the inclusion of marginalized voices and critical issues in the curriculum, serves as a direct challenge to these ingrained historical bodies. It highlights the critical role education can play in disrupting entrenched norms by offering alternative perspectives and fostering a more inclusive understanding of history.

Findings

The findings from this research reveal the intricate ways in which actions are shaped by various factors, including historical bodies, power dynamics, and personal interpretations. Each of these elements, as examined through Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA), plays a crucial role in understanding how students navigate educational settings and respond to the discourses and interactions they encounter. Each component of MDA shapes an action through the expectations for how things should be done and who should act a certain way (Wohlwend, 2021).

The first finding highlights how actions are mediated by the complex interplay of historical bodies, discourses, and social interactions. The second focuses on the influence of historical narratives and legacies on students' actions and experiences, particularly in how these narratives frame their understanding of race and power. The third finding delves into the impact of power relations on shaping students' behaviors and responses to educational content. Finally, the fourth finding emphasizes the importance of personal interpretation and experience in shaping actions, showcasing how individual perspectives can lead to varied outcomes in similar educational contexts. Together, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of student actions within educational environments.

The analysis revealed that this student was influenced by historical bodies around race and power relations, as well as by the student's interactions with others. These interactions, although layered and multifaceted, significantly impacted the student's experiences and subsequent action. Though the student was influenced by each of these components, their experiences within these components, as well as the diversity of the experiences, backgrounds, discourses, and interaction led to their ultimate reaction and action.

Historical bodies, which include the legacies of past events and the representation of historical figures in media and educational content, play a crucial role in shaping actions. Understanding how historical events and representations influence individuals helps to interpret the factors shaping actions (Gee, 2014). For instance, historical narratives about race and power create frameworks through which students interpret their own experiences and actions. This influence highlights the importance of examining how historical contexts are represented and their impact on current educational practices. For students like the one in this study, inclusion of personal and cultural histories plays an important role in their experience in the classroom. These helped lead to the student's action of writing a letter.

Power relations also significantly affected the student's action. The historical bodies surrounding race and power, coupled with the prevailing discourses, shaped the student's perceptions and behaviors. These power dynamics are essential for understanding how students navigate and respond to educational content and societal expectations (Thomas & Aslanian, 2018). The student's action was influenced by the expectations established through these discourses and the layers of interaction both inside and outside the classroom. In the case of the letter, there was a level of request for a disruption to normal discourses and access to power to support students from various cultural backgrounds.

Finally, the study suggests that interpretation and personal experiences are pivotal in shaping actions. How individuals interpret and engage with different discourses impact their actions, which emphasizes the need to consider personal experiences in the analysis of educational practices (Wohlwend, 2021). By examining how students make sense of their interactions and the discourses they encounter, researchers can gain insight into the nuanced ways actions are shaped and influenced. The diverse experiences of the student revealed how different interpretations and interactions lead to varied responses, underscoring the importance of a comprehensive understanding of these components in educational research.

Implications

The findings of this study highlight several key implications for educational practice and policy, particularly in relation to how power dynamics and discourses influence student experiences and actions within the classroom. The implications demonstrate a need to consider the components of MDA in the classroom, acknowledging power relations, addressing and including culturally sustaining curriculum, supporting critical thinking and content, and the need for professional development and

equitable policy. Addressing the implications is vital for improving educational practices and policies. By acknowledging these influences and implementing strategies to address them, educators and policymakers can work toward creating more inclusive and equitable educational experiences for all students.

This study emphasizes the need to consider the intersections of different components of MDA, such as historical bodies, discourses, power relations, and interactions when analyzing actions. This can help to provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which actions are shaped and influenced. This also has implications for education and teacher training programs, as it underlines the importance of understanding the ways in which historical bodies and discourses shape actions and the need to consider the intersections of different components of MDA when analyzing actions. Disseminating this knowledge can help educators and teachers to be more culturally inclusive and to create teacher training programs that include the need to create more culturally sustaining approaches to teaching and learning.

This study underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the power dynamics that shape students' educational experiences. Thomas and Aslanian (2018) emphasize that power relations in educational settings influence how students engage with content and respond to pedagogical practices. Educators and policymakers must be aware of these dynamics to create environments where all students feel valued and supported. This involves critically examining how historical and societal power structures impact students' perceptions and interactions within the classroom.

The influence of historical bodies and discourses on students' actions suggests a need for curricula that are both culturally responsive and inclusive. Culturally sustaining pedagogies, as discussed by Paris and Alim (2017), advocate for educational practices that affirm and build upon students' cultural identities and experiences. Educators should integrate diverse perspectives and voices into the curriculum to better reflect students' backgrounds and to foster more equitable learning environments. This may involve considering the ways in which historical bodies, discourses, power relations, and interactions shape actions and experiences, and can lead to developing strategies to promote more equitable and inclusive actions. It may also involve providing teachers with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. To effectively address power dynamics and discourses in education, ongoing professional development and training for educators are essential. Professional development programs should focus on building teachers' understanding of the historical and social contexts that affect their students (Gay, 2010). Such training can help educators develop strategies for creating inclusive and responsive learning environments that support all students.

The student's response to educational content, as demonstrated in the study, highlights the importance of supporting critical engagement with learning materials. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), effective teaching practices should encourage students to question and critically analyze the content they encounter. By fostering a critical approach to education, teachers can help students navigate and challenge the discourses and power dynamics that influence their learning experiences.

The research suggests that interpretation and experiences play a role in shaping actions. This can help educators and researchers to better understand the ways in which individuals interpret and experience different discourses, which can inform the development of strategies to promote more equitable and inclusive actions and curriculum approaches in school. This suggests that the experiences of individuals within a given context are complex and multifaceted and that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective.

Finally, the study's findings also have significant implications for educational policy. Policymakers should consider the impact of educational policies on power dynamics and discourses within schools. Policies that promote equity and inclusivity, such as those that support culturally sustaining pedagogies and address systemic inequalities, are crucial for creating fair and supportive educational environments (Delpit, 2006).

Further Research

Further research is essential to deepen our understanding of how historical bodies, interactions, and discourses shape actions and experiences across diverse contexts and populations. Specifically, future studies should explore how these components influence educational experiences and outcomes in varying cultural, racial, and socioeconomic settings. Discourses emphasize the ways in which language and social practices are shaped by cultural, social, and institutional contexts and can support continued research (Gee, 1990). By examining these factors in different contexts, researchers can gain insights into how historical legacies and discursive practices impact student experiences and educational equity.

Research should also investigate how the findings from mediated discourse analysis (MDA) can be effectively integrated into educational practice and teacher training programs. This could include evaluating the effectiveness of various strategies for promoting equitable and inclusive educational practices. For example, studies could examine how integrating MDA findings into professional development can enhance teachers' abilities to create culturally responsive and equitable learning environments.

Further studies should focus on the implementation of culturally inclusive pedagogies and teaching strategies. These include Funds of Knowledge (FOK) (González et al., 2009), which leverage students' cultural backgrounds and experiences as valuable resources for learning; culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), which adapts instruction to the diverse cultural backgrounds of students; culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), which aims to affirm students' cultural identities while promoting academic success; and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017), which seek to sustain and build upon students' cultural practices and linguistic skills. Research should assess how these pedagogical approaches impact student engagement and achievement in diverse classrooms.

Additionally, future research should address how the interplay of historical bodies, discourses, and power relations can inform the development of more inclusive and equitable educational policies and practices. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing interventions that address systemic inequalities and promote fair educational opportunities for all students.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of a nuanced understanding of how actions are shaped by various factors, including historical contexts, discursive practices, and power dynamics. By advancing research in these areas, educators and policymakers can better support the development of equitable and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning. Continued exploration in these domains will contribute to more effective educational practices and foster environments where all students can thrive.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the author. The data is not publicly available due to the privacy of the participants.

References

- Alim, H.S., & Paris, D. (2017). What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and why does it matter? In D. Paris & H. S. Alim (Eds.), *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies teaching and learning for justice in a changing world* (pp. 18-42). Teachers College Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance*. University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches*. Fourth edition. CA: Sage.
- Deklerk, K. C. (2022). Practitioner experiences in enacting culturally sustaining pedagogies in elementary literacy classrooms [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New Press.
- Finley, K. M. (2003) *Southern opposition to civil rights in the United States Senate: a tactical and ideological analysis, 1938-1965*. LSU Digital Commons.
- Furrey, G. (2023) Political responses to Black Lives Matter in education. *Ethnic Studies Review*, 46 (3), 3-47. doi:10.1525/esr.2023.46.3.3
- Gay, G. (2018) *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice (Third Edition)*. Teachers College Press.
- Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. Taylor & Francis.
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling*. Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2018). *The social mind: Language, ideology, and social practice*. Routledge.
- González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2009). *Funds of knowledge theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Routledge.
- Green, P. (2022, February 16) Teacher Anti-CRT Bills Coast To Coast: A State By State Guide. *Forbes*. Retrieved September 22, 2022, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petergreene/2022/02/16/teacher-anti-crt-bills-coast-to-coast-a-state-by-state-guide/?sh=58c522144ff6>
- Hall, S. (1992). The politics of representation: dominant and marginalized group images in the mass media. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 223-237). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(3), 159-165. doi:10.3726/978-1-4539-1584-4/43
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 85–100. <https://doi-org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/10.17763/haer.84.1.982l873k2ht16m77>
- Paris, D. (2016). On Educating Culturally Sustaining Teachers. Teaching Works working papers. [http:// www.teachingworks.org/images/files/TeachingWorks_Paris.pdf](http://www.teachingworks.org/images/files/TeachingWorks_Paris.pdf).
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. Sage.
- Scallan, R. (2001). *Mediated discourse analysis: The nexus of practice*. Routledge.
- Schwartz, S. (2024). Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>. *Stop CRT Act* (2021) S. 2346 (USA).

- Thomas, D. A., & Aslanian, T. (2018). *Understanding the power dynamics in educational settings: Implications for practice and policy*. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 33(2), 145-161.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1307663>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1992). Discourse and the Denial of Racism. *Discourse & Society*, 3(1), 87–118.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926592003001005>
- Wohlwend, K. E. (2008). Kindergarten as Nexus of Practice: A Mediated Discourse Analysis of Reading, Writing, Play, and Design in an Early Literacy Apprenticeship. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(4), 332–334. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20068350>
- Wohlwend, K. E. (2009) Dilemmas and discourses of learning to write: Assessment as a contested site. *Language Arts*, 86(5), 341–351. Wohlwend, K. E. (2021). *Literacies that move and matter: Nexus analysis for contemporary childhoods*. Routledge.