

# Exploring Critical Literacy in a First Grade Classroom Through Multimodal Texts

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## Research Questions

- How do students in one first grade classroom respond to an invitation to
  - critically reflect on the ways in which diversity is depicted in family-oriented magazine advertisements?
  - Critically examine techniques that print advertisements use to sell their products/services?
- What factors impact how these first grade students respond to these invitations?

## Theoretical Framework

**New Literacy Studies:** With a focus on both multimodal reading/writing and critical literacy, this study embraces a new literacy studies (NLS) perspective which recognizes literacy as a social practice that involves positioning and issues of power (Gee, 1996; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, Street, 1984).

*NLS recognizes the multiplicity of literacies, acknowledging that different texts are associated with unique social, cultural, and historical norms, and thus, to be a "literate" producer or consumer of a text requires an understanding of that text's norms.*

NLS proponents challenge a singular emphasis on the alphabetic sign system, arguing that linguistic print is just one sign system in a world that is relying more and more heavily on other modalities to communicate meaning (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Hull & Shultz, 2002; NCTE, 2008).

### What is critical literacy?

A critical literacy curriculum makes diversity and difference visible and helps teach children to critique their world (Lewison, M., Flint, A. S., & Van Sluys, K., 2002).

### What are multimodal texts?

Multimodal texts present information across a variety of modes including visual images, color, written language, and other semiotic resources (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).



*"We were not born critical of existing society. There was a moment in our lives (or a month, or a year) when certain facts appeared before us, startled us, and then caused us to question beliefs that were strongly fixed in our consciousness -- embedded there by years of family prejudices, orthodox schooling, imbibing of newspapers, radio, and television. This would seem to lead to a simple conclusion: that we all have an enormous responsibility to bring to the attention of others information they do not have, which has the potential of causing them to rethink long-held ideas" (Zinn, 2005).*

Howard Zinn (1922 – 2010), American academic historian, author, playwright, and social activist

## Instructional Unit

The 8-hour unit (two hours per week for four consecutive weeks beginning the week of April 22) in which students are invited to engage will include instructional activities that are designed to help the first-grade students answer the following questions:

- What is an advertisement?
- What do advertisers do in order to try to persuade their audience to buy their product/service?
- How and why is/isn't diversity depicted in photographs that accompany advertisements?
  - Ethnic diversity
  - Family diversity (i.e., traditional and non-traditional families)
- How might people of different ethnicities and/or belonging to different kinds of families feel about the ways in which they are/are not depicted in family-oriented magazines advertisements?
- How might advertisers be persuaded to include more diversity in their advertisements?

The unit will culminate with the students creating their own advertisements.

## Subjects/Context

### Subjects:

- 25 grade 1 students (ages 6 and 7)
  - 17 Caucasian students
  - 8 Hispanic students (all English Language Learners)

### Context:

- Subjects attend an elementary school (K-6) in an urban Southern Indiana town:
  - 630 students (approx. 90 per grade level)
  - 64% of student body receives free/reduced lunch

## Data to Be Collected

### DATA COLLECTION BEGINS ON APRIL 22.

The following data will be collected during the four-week instructional unit:

- All student work related to the project (including advertisements that they create),
- Field notes taken during instruction and student engagement in project-related work,
- Audio-taped conversations of one purposefully selected focus group (of 3 students),
- 25 fifteen minute audio-taped interviews at mid-unit with individual students, and
- 25 fifteen minute audio-taped interviews upon completion of the unit

Disparity Between Ethnic Representation in Magazine Advertisements and the US Population (2006)

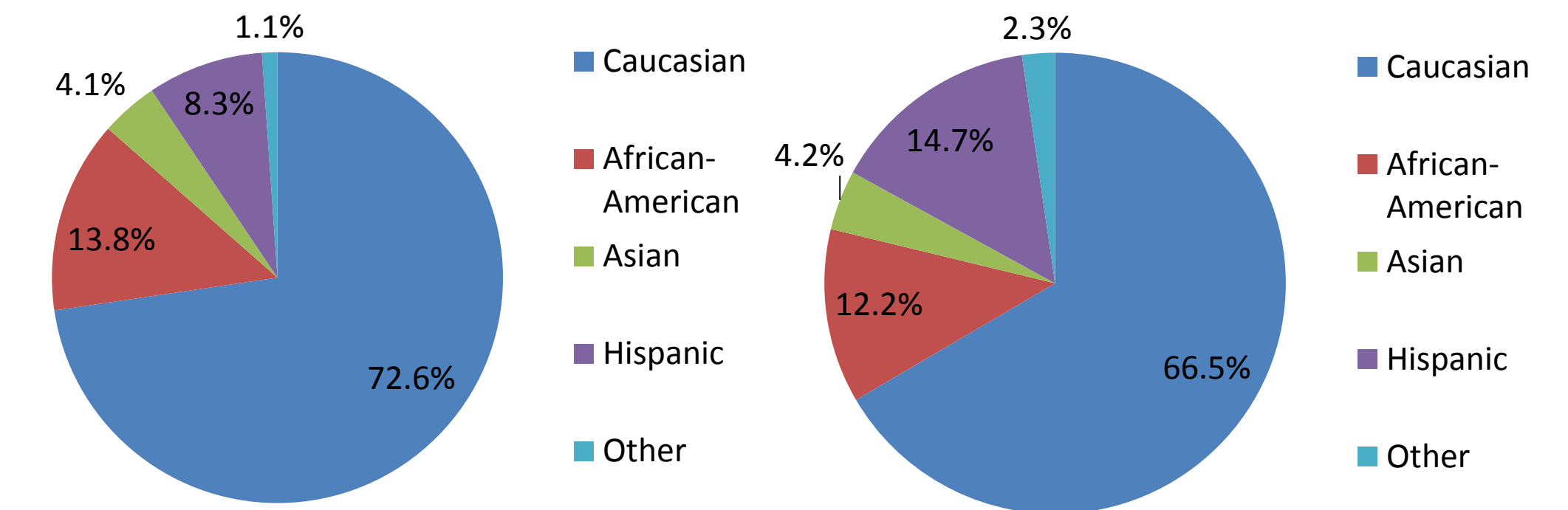


Chart 1. Ethnicity of advertisement models in 4 editions of 9 general audience magazines (Joiner, 2006)

Chart 2. U.S. population by ethnicity in 2006 (U.S. Census, 2006)

## Qualitative Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using the processes and procedures of **grounded theory** (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which involves analyzing data recursively with data collection. Data analysis involves:

- Open-coding: Data chunking and data naming
- Developing conceptual categories
- Constant comparison method
- Analytic memoing

## What is the difference between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies?

Criteria	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
<i>Purpose</i>	To understand social phenomenon	To test hypotheses, look at cause/effect, and make predictions
<i>Group Studied</i>	Smaller & not randomly selected	Larger & randomly selected
<i>Type of Data</i>	Words, images, objects	Numbers, statistics
<i>Forms of Data</i>	Interviews, observations, field notes, reflections	Precise measurements using validated data-collection instruments
<i>Results</i>	Particular or specialized findings that are less generalizable	Generalizable findings that can be applied to other populations
<i>View of Human Behavior</i>	Dynamic, situational, social, & personal	Regular & predictable

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