CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the College of Education of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

Master of Education

Matthew S. Hollstein
August 2006
This thesis entitled
CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES

by
MATTHEW S. HOLLSTEIN

has been approved for
the Department of Teacher Education
and the College of Education by

Frans H. Doppen
Associate Professor of Teacher Education

Renee A. Middleton
Dean, College of Education
ABSTRACT

HOLLSTEIN, MATTHEW S., M.Ed., August 2006. Integrated Social Studies Education
CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES (92 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Frans H. Doppen

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which preservice Integrated Social Studies teachers defined, implemented, and understood critical pedagogy. Questionnaires were administered, from the returned questionnaires, ten participants were chosen for further analysis. These ten were split into two groups of five, one group that indicated an understanding of critical pedagogy and a second group that indicated a lack of understanding. All ten participated in an initial oral interview. The five participants who indicated an understanding of critical pedagogy were asked to create a lesson plan implementing critical pedagogy after which they participated in a follow-up interview. The questionnaires, lesson plans, and interviews revealed that the participants in this study were unable to correctly define, implement, and understand critical pedagogy. Furthermore, the participants’ responses indicated all ten believed critical pedagogy to be the equivalent of critical thinking. The results of this case study showed that much needs to be done to correct misconceptions and misunderstandings that preservice teachers have of critical pedagogy.

Approved:

Frans H. Doppen
Associate Professor of Teacher Education
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and give thanks the following persons who were all an integral part to the completion of this thesis. To Jennifer for her encouragement and support to do what I felt was right and for her editing assistance. Large thanks goes to Dr. Frans Doppen for his immeasurable guidance and assistance in writing my thesis and for sticking with me through each difficult draft. Dr. Najee Muhammad (Doc) for his mentoring words of encouragement and for making me aware of the existence of critical pedagogy. I want to thank Dr. Goufang Wan for her guidance and encouragement through this process, even when it seemed bleak. Finally, my parents who always encouraged me to do the best I could and always remind me that success is found through the acquisition of knowledge. To all of you who assisted in helping me complete this process: the result is just as much yours as it is mine.

Thank You!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................................. 4

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................................................... 5

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................................... 8

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................... 9

- BACKGROUND ............................................................................................................................... 9
- STATEMENT OF PROBLEM ........................................................................................................... 13
- RESEARCH QUESTIONS .................................................................................................................. 13
- RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS ............................................................................................................. 14
- PURPOSE/SIGNIFICANCE ............................................................................................................... 15
- DELIMITATIONS .......................................................................................................................... 16
- LIMITATIONS .............................................................................................................................. 17
- DEFINITIONS OF TERMS ............................................................................................................... 18
- ORGANIZATION OF STUDY ......................................................................................................... 21
- INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................... 23
- SUPPORTIVE PERSPECTIVES ...................................................................................................... 28
- CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES .......................................................................................................... 37
- APPLICATION IN EDUCATION ..................................................................................................... 40
- SUMMARY ....................................................................................................................................... 45

METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................................... 48

- INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................. 48
- PARTICIPANTS ................................................................................................................................ 48
- DATA COLLECTION ........................................................................................................................ 49
- DATA ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................................ 54

FINDINGS ............................................................................................................................................... 58

- INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................. 58
- QUESTIONNAIRE ............................................................................................................................. 58
- INTERVIEWS .................................................................................................................................... 59
  Question 1: Were the participants able to define critical pedagogy? ................................................. 59
  Question 2: What, if any, misconceptions did the participants who stated they understood critical pedagogy have? .................................................................................................................................................. 59
  Question 3: To what extent did participants who stated they understood critical pedagogy, have a deep understanding of its essence? .................................................................................................................. 65
  Question 4: Did the participants who stated they had a deep understanding of critical pedagogy actually apply it in their lesson plans? .............................................................................................................................. 66
  Question 5: Are there any identifying characteristics in the personal background of the participants who showed a predisposition towards critical pedagogy? .................................................................................. 71
  Question 6: Were there any identifying characteristics among the participants who expressed a lack of an understanding of critical pedagogy? ................................................................................................. 72
- SUMMARY ....................................................................................................................................... 72

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..................................................................................... 75

- INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................. 75
- CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................................................................... 75
- IMPLICATIONS .............................................................................................................................. 79
- RECOMMENDATIONS ..................................................................................................................... 81

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................................... 83
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1: PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Background

Preservice teachers face many issues as they prepare to enter the work force and become licensed teachers. They are faced with the task of learning educational theory and creating practical applications. In social studies, critical thinking is stressed as an essential skill for individuals to possess so that they may become effective and productive teachers.

The social studies curriculum aims to encourage young adolescents to develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good, by acting as citizens of a culturally diverse and democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 1994). Human interactions create many positive aspects of human existence. Unfortunately, things such as hatred, bigotry, racism, and sexism are also outcomes of human interaction. These issues are often addressed in the social studies curriculum. However, requiring preservice teachers to address them in their personal pedagogy is something that is not always achieved. Preservice social studies teachers may not consider these issues when developing their own personal pedagogy. One goal of critical pedagogy is that it attempts to make inequality known. This goal aligns with the aim of the social studies curriculum described above. A teacher who seeks to implement critical pedagogy aims to expose students to these issues of racism, sexism, hatred, bigotry and oppression because by acknowledging them, students can begin to change them. Critical pedagogy is an educational theory that aims to make students conscious of the many institutions that exist to facilitate and perpetuate systematic forms of oppression, both within and outside
the classroom. Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire was among the first to articulate critical pedagogy in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1970. Freire discussed the conditions he encountered while educating peasants in Brazil and used these experiences to formulate his theory of a critical pedagogical approach to education. Today, there are numerous works on the use of critical pedagogy in the classroom such as Jose Calderon’s discussion of combining critical pedagogy with learning and civic diversity. Calderon (2003) discusses the notion of critical pedagogy as the guiding educational philosophy in community-based education. Milner’s article “*Reflection, Racial Competence, and Critical Pedagogy*” (2000), examines how preservice teachers can begin to pose critical questions regarding race through critical pedagogy. Many of these scholarly articles examine the inequity of race that exists in education. In other cases, issues of gender, ethnicity, and cultural inequalities are addressed. Discerning these inequalities is essential for bringing about change in society.

Today, Ohio’s *Academic Content Standards* for social studies emphasize the importance of critical thinking about a variety of issues. Critical thinking is emphasized through the *Social Studies Skills and Methods* standard, but only so far as to elicit critical thinking based on the state’s own guidelines (Ohio Department of Education, [ODE], 2006). Nonetheless, it is up to social studies teachers to help their students develop these skills. One of the means by which a teacher can help students to think critically is through critical pedagogy. Critical thinking is a fundamental component of critical pedagogy but critical pedagogy extends beyond critical thinking by helping students become aware of injustices, challenge the status quo, and take active steps towards
creating a more just and equitable society (Freire, 1970). Through critical pedagogy the inequalities in education are brought to the surface to bring about positive change in society. (Ahlquist, 1990)

Students exist in a very complex and constantly changing world. It is the responsibility of social studies teachers to prepare students to live in this world. By implementing critical pedagogy, teachers can help students develop the essential skills they will need to deal with a complex and ever changing world, making them better prepared citizens, participants, and human beings. These skills will prepare students to question the status quo, critically examine the hidden power structures that exist in society, and enable them to facilitate change in order to create a democratic, equitable, and fair world.

The use of critical pedagogy is not a new concept in education in the United States. Most recently, since the early 1980s, it has been implemented by teachers such as Robert Peterson (2000). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, emphasizes “closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, and disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (United States Statutes at Large 1425, 2002, pp. 107-110). More than 30 years ago, Paulo Freire addressed similar issues in rural Brazil and brought them to the world in an effort to raise consciousness with regard to the plight of the oppressed (Freire, 1970). Recent federal educational policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, make note of the achievement gap and offer suggestions such as standardized testing, which is not critical. This is supposed to provide a tool for general assessment to
address the inequality found in the United States suggesting, this educational act will fix the current achievement gap that exist and will States (*United States Statutes at Large* 1425, 2002, pp. 107-110). This is where one must question to what degree a state, such as Ohio, sanctions critical pedagogy in public school classrooms (Eggen, 2005).

It is important to distinguish between critical pedagogy and critical thinking. Critical thinking is being critical of information that is being presented so further analysis of the information can occur. It is a broader term describing reasoning in an open-ended manner, with an unlimited number of solutions (*The NPEC Sourcebook on Assessment*, 2000). Critical pedagogy refers not only to critically examining information but also critically questioning who is providing it and what his or her interests are (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003). However, while critical pedagogy does look at ‘the who, the why, and the what’, it specifically and profoundly looks into “the how.” While it questions who is providing the educational information and what her or his interests are, it specifically investigates *how* did she or he come to their interests by exposing or seeking to expose the contradictions in their interests (Dr. Najee Muhammad, personal communication, June 30, 2006).

Before I learned of the concept of critical pedagogy, I believed that critical pedagogy and critical thinking were the same. My misunderstanding was due to the fact that I had learned a great deal about critical thinking and its relevance in education but I had not been introduced to the concept of critical pedagogy. This suggests a fundamental question: Why did I not know about critical pedagogy?
Globalization has greatly increased the interconnectedness of people around the world and its impact is becoming increasingly apparent to students in the United States. As we become more connected, inequalities in the world will become more apparent than ever before and this must lead to a self-evaluation of the inequalities that exist in the United States. When such inequalities are exposed, the next logical question should always be to ask why the power structures are what they are and what can be done to correct them (McLaren, 2003).

**Statement of Problem**

The aim of this study was to evaluate the extent to which preservice social studies teachers in their senior year of undergraduate studies at Ohio University, and immediately prior to their student teaching experience, understood, adapted, and used critical pedagogy in a lesson plan format. The central problem that this study attempted to answer pertained to the following question: What misconceptions of critical pedagogy, if any, did the preservice social studies teachers in this study have as they tried to implement it a lesson plan?

**Research Questions**

This study focused on six major research questions:

1. Were the participants able to define critical pedagogy?
2. What, if any, misconceptions did participants have who stated they understood critical pedagogy?
3. To what extent did participants who stated they understood critical pedagogy, have a deep understanding of its essence?

4. Did the participants who stated they had a deep understanding of critical pedagogy actually apply it in their lesson plans?

5. Were there any identifying characteristics in the personal background of the participants who showed a predisposition towards using critical pedagogy?

6. Were there any identifying characteristics among the participants who expressed a lack of an understanding of critical pedagogy?

The variables for this study included: age, class rank, and gender. These variables defined the participants’ background and may have influenced their responses and participation in this case study.

Research Hypothesis

This case study hypothesized that many of the participants did not fully understand critical pedagogy and therefore could not incorporate and/or implement it into their lesson plans. Critical pedagogy requires individuals to examine their personal social context and to truly evaluate their position in the social hierarchy (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). This process of self-examination may sometimes reveal personal ideologies of which the individual is not aware. This case study hypothesized that most participants did not have a thorough understanding of critical pedagogy.

The research questions and the working hypothesis for this case study were based upon my own personal experiences and the current literature pertaining to critical
pedagogy. I was first introduced to critical pedagogy as a graduate student. Until then I had never been exposed to the concepts of critical pedagogy and was not aware of the way it questions the status quo. I did not realize that all information serves a purpose. I simply believed that information was neutral. I had been taught to think critically and believed that such was enough to effect change in society. However, after learning about critical pedagogy and its use which requires individuals to question and expose hidden power structures, as well as attempt to facilitate change, I became excited about the possibility of creating a better world through the use critical pedagogy. Based on those experiences, I believed that I was not alone in my lack of knowledge of critical pedagogy and for that reason I chose to conduct this case study. I believed that if I did not have prior knowledge of this methodology as a graduate student, than others, especially at the undergraduate level, also might not.

**Purpose/Significance**

The significance of this study is twofold. First, this case study sought to expose the participants’ misconceptions of critical pedagogy. Understanding the participants and their misconceptions may provide cause for an introspective look at the ways in which preservice teachers are being educated with regard to critical pedagogy. Second, this case study sought to determine whether preservice teachers who understand critical pedagogy were able to implement it in a lesson plan. Analyzing the participants’ beliefs about critical pedagogy may potentially expose their misconceptions and help to improve their practice.
The practical outcomes of this study address two areas. First, the methodologies by which preservice social studies teachers in this study have been educated with regard to understanding and using critical pedagogy. Second, this case study may call for an examination of the methodology used by preservice teachers to implement critical pedagogy and thus change their understanding of critical pedagogy.

This study differs from other studies by focusing on the participants’ understanding of critical pedagogy and how they included it in their lesson plans. Persons using the information from this case study may be teacher educators interested in a self-evaluation of their personal philosophy with regard to critical pedagogy. Teacher educators may deem these findings beneficial because they can serve as a reference for evaluating the curriculum they offer to preservice social studies teachers. Middle school and high school social studies teachers may also use the findings to evaluate their own lesson plans.

**Delimitations**

The first delimitation of this study was the selection of the participants because this could potentially alter the outcomes if the same study were to be repeated in a different setting. The setting of this study, the age of its participants, and their particular program of study all constitute elements of this delimitation.

A second delimitation of this study is the wording of the questions which might have had an effect on the answers the participants gave. Research conducted with
alternative wording of the research questions might have resulted in different interpretations.

A third delimitation of this study is the time frame of the research. I chose to conduct the study during Winter Quarter 2005-06 and if I had chosen a different time during the academic year, there possibly could have been different results based on the participants’ exposure to new information in additional coursework. For example, if the study had been conducted in Spring Quarter, the participants might have been exposed to practical applications of critical pedagogy during their student teaching experiences.

**Limitations**

Limitations that were beyond the control of the researcher in this study included the following:

- Getting the participants to respond thoroughly and honestly to the questionnaire they were given at the beginning of the study. The participants were instructed to be as forthcoming in their responses as possible. If any of the participants held something back or gave incomplete answers, this might have altered the findings.

- Another limitation was the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpreting critical pedagogy. It is possible that a participant felt that he/she had a general understanding of the subject but in reality did not. This could not be addressed because it would no longer have enabled the researcher to be an unbiased observer. Had the researcher addressed and corrected any misconceptions that the participants displayed, the researcher could have created bias amongst the
participants. The bias simply being that the participants could have taken the corrections given by the researcher and then made them their own. Therefore the responses given by the participants would not have been genuine and the results could potentially be invalid due the researcher’s interference.

**Definitions of Terms**

This case study includes several descriptive terms whose conceptual framework the reader must understand.

*Critical pedagogy*

For the purposes of this study, the definition of critical pedagogy is based on the following fundamental assumptions derived from the research literature:

- In society, and subsequently the classroom, as a microcosm of society, there exists a hidden curriculum that either helps or hinders an individual’s education but is at no point neutral. This structure is naturally oppressive to all who participate (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003).

- This hidden curriculum holds a fixed amount of power, meaning it can not increase or decrease but can shift between groups. Those individuals, who have power, whether consciously or subconsciously, do not want to give up their positions of power (Freire, 1970).

- The aim of critical pedagogy is to facilitate education in such a way that it attempts to make students aware of the inherent inequalities and oppressive systems in the world (McLaren, 2003).
Critical pedagogy encourages students to acknowledge the inherent inequalities that exist and go forward and attempt to change them through social reconstruction (McLaren, 2003).

Consequently, critical pedagogy is defined as:

An education methodology that seeks to increase student awareness of the hidden curriculum’s inherent inequalities and multiple forms of oppression that exist in society, and encourage them to take active step towards creating a more democratic and equitable society.

**Banking Method**

Freire (1970) suggests that the banking method is a system of education in which the teacher is seen as having all of the knowledge and the students are simply empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. In this model, the teacher is active and the student is passive in the “learning” process (Freire, 1970). It suggests that students do not have any prior knowledge and that the teacher is the source of all information (Freire, 1970). Understanding this term is important because it is a methodology that is often used in schools.

**Critical**

Being “critical” means questioning information and not accepting its legitimacy based merely upon its originator. Therefore, individuals should have their own reasons for legitimizing information (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003). Simply put, being “critical” is the act of critiquing sources of information.

**Pedagogy**
Simon (1987) defines pedagogy as “the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, and evaluation, purpose, and methods” (as cited in McLaren, p. 187). Thus pedagogy, refers to all the aspects of educational practice that come together in the realities of what happens in a classroom (McLaren, 2003).

**Culture**

Culture is an amalgamation of an individual’s history, experiences, geographic location, fears, hopes, and thoughts (Freire, 1970). Simply put, culture comprises all of those things that make an individual who he or she is.

**Official Curriculum**

For the purposes of this study, the official curriculum is defined as a set of courses and the content of those courses as stipulated by governing bodies and educational institutions (Freire, 1970, McLaren, 2003).

**Hidden Curriculum**

The hidden curriculum refers to a collection of all of the messages and intentions of academic institutions that are not detailed in the official curriculum (Freire, 1970). These messages and intentions can cover a broad range of issues that pertain to academic, political, economic, and any other number of issues but will always have an effect on the students of the academic institution.

**Deconstruction**
Deconstruction is the process of exposing and breaking down the hidden social/academic institutions that exist to oppress and bind individuals in society. This is done by acknowledging their existence and offering a means for change (Freire, 1970).

Reconstruction

Reconstruction is the process of reforming and reshaping deconstructed social/academic institutions, so that they are democratic, inclusive, and equal to all (Freire, 1970).

Negative Dialectics

Negative dialectics are the constant interplay and interactions between individuals and society that focus on non-observed interactions, as opposed to perceived interactions (Gibson, 1986; Marcus & Tar, 1984).

Authoritarian Personality

Authoritarian personality refers to an examination of the individual in society, with a primary focus on the psychology of the individual and subsequent social interactions (Gibson, 1986; Marcus & Tar, 1984).

Democracy

A democracy is an institution in which the participants exercise direct or representative control.

Organization of Study

The introduction of this section outlined the major themes that guide this case study. The statement of the problem was developed next as well as the hypothesis. Next,
the limitations and were discussed. The data for this case study was collected using questionnaires, lesson plans, and interviews. The findings are only valid in so far as the participants provided honest responses. Finally, definitions were offered to provide the conceptual framework for this study.

The next, the literature review will present an analysis of the literature. A description of the methodology used in study will follow the literature review. The final two section of this thesis will present the study’s findings and implications, as well as conclusions while offering recommendations for future research respectively.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review of the literature will present research findings on the impact of critical pedagogy on education. It will present findings that do and do not support the use of critical pedagogy. The final section of this review will briefly summarize the research as it applies to the use of critical pedagogy in the current academic environment. The aim of this study was to evaluate the extent to which preservice social studies teachers in their junior year of undergraduate studies at Ohio University, and immediately prior to their student teaching experience, understood, assimilated, and used critical pedagogy in a lesson plan format.

Historical Antecedent

As a philosophy of education, critical pedagogy has deep historical roots. The foundations of critical pedagogy can be traced along a general timeline that begins with Karl Marx (Gibson, 1986). After Marxism, came the philosophy of the Frankfurt School and the precursor to critical pedagogy, critical social theory (Gibson, 1986). Prominent educational philosophers such as George C. Counts and John Dewey began calling for social and educational reform, similar to those of Marx and the Frankfurt School (Marcus & Tar, 1984). Later, these theories spanned to influence modern educational philosophers such as the late Paulo Freire and current prominent academic Peter McLaren (McLaren, 2003). This section will provide a brief history of critical pedagogy and its origins within critical social theory and a discussion of its contemporary form.
Marxism is a political/economic view of society based upon the writings of 19th century German philosopher Karl Marx (Gibson, 1986). In this philosophy, a critique of society is essential to achieving the ultimate goal of a revolution, culminating in an egalitarian society and economy based on socialism (Marcus & Tar, 1984). Marxism is critical of capitalism and sees it as an ill society that must be dismantled to achieve equality of the people and economy through socialism (Marcus & Tar, 1984).

Marx’s writings have been read and used by numerous individuals all around the world to critique and call for reform of society (Marcus & Tar, 1984). Marxism was the foundational philosophy of the Frankfurt school (Gibson, 1986). The Frankfurt School was founded in 1923 at the University of Frankfurt by sociologists who “drew upon, challenged, revised, and added to Marx’s theory” to develop critical social theory (Gibson, 1986 p. 20).

Critical social theory was developed by three scholars, Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse (Gibson, 1986). Critical social theory as a theory attempts to critique society and knowledge in a holistic and complete way that facilitates fundamental change in all parts of society (Gibson, 1986). Max Horkheimer suggested using critical social theory to analyze the relationship between the individual and society, to more deeply understand Marxist writings through society, and to explain the relationships linking consciousness, culture, and society (Gibson, 1986). Adorno’s two primary perspectives on critical social theory were negative dialectics and the authoritarian personality. He suggested that negative dialectics are the constant interplay and interactions between individuals and society (Gibson, 1986; Marcus & Tar, 1984).
Adorno also differentiated between perceived and non-observed interactions, with a focus on the latter (Gibson, 1986; Marcus & Tar, 1984). Authoritarian personality refers to an examination of the individual in society, with a primary focus on the psychology of the individual and subsequent social interactions (Gibson, 1986; Marcus & Tar, 1984).

Herbert Marcuse was the most famous of these three sociological philosophers (Gibson, 1986). He suggested that individuals achieve personal emancipation through self-gratification (Gibson, 1986). Marcuse determined that gratification creates “better individuals, better personal relationships, and a better society” (as cited in Gibson, 1986 p. 30). The second of Marcuse’s ideas was a critical theory of society (Gibson, 1986). This idea suggested that technological advances and capitalism lead to submission to material wealth and not to personal freedom because the individual becomes one-dimensional and gives up on social justice (Gibson, 1986; Marcus & Tar, 1984).

Critical social theory seeks to examine the nature of society and how the individual fits into that schema (Gibson, 1986). The application of this theory is achieved through a social critique of society and an acknowledgement of the injustices that saturate it, which is akin to critical pedagogy (Gibson, 1986). The Frankfurt School’s focus was on society and not education but prominent educational philosophers, such George C. Counts and John Dewey, helped to transition the ideas of the Frankfurt school and critical social theory to education (Gibson, 1986; Spring, 2004).

George C. Counts’ ideas were similar to the Frankfurt School’s critical social theory, although Counts applied his theories of reform and reconstruction specifically to education (Counts, 1978; Spring, 2004). In *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?*
Counts addressed the inequities that exist in society and subsequently in education. In this work, Counts (1978) suggested that humans are not born free and that it would be bad if this were true because it would make them void of any culture. Counts argued that culture is the primary conduit through which individuals learn and are given purpose, most especially in education. He was also critical of the idea that education is a sanctified place that is free of political or economic influence. Rather, he suggested that education was a reflection of society and, therefore, would inevitably be influenced by it. Counts was very critical of capitalism, much like the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, and suggested that its economic framework led to the wasteful, inefficient, cruel, and inhuman treatment of people (Spring, 2004). He further suggested that schools reflected the ills of social inequality and that their goal should be to reshape society to allow collectivism to prosper. He argued that social change should begin within the schools (Counts, 1978; Spring, 2004).

John Dewey was another educational reformist in the United States in the early twentieth-century. Dewey’s educational philosophies were child-centered and progressive minded with the implied goal of creating a reformed and more democratic society through schools (Spring, 2004). Dewey’s progressive educational ideas focused on a child-centered philosophy that emphasized the individual and not the intentions of the school (Spring, 2004). Dewey saw the school as a means to remedy the social problems of society by providing social services (Spring, 2004). He suggested that schools were the ultimate avenues to achieve social change because they were the most basic level to
reach people and effect social change within the confines of the democratic system in the United States (Spring, 2004).

Counts (1978) had major criticisms of child-centered progressives like Dewey. He suggested that “their naïve belief in education free of social content was in fact a subtle but effective assent to the status quo because it ignored the reality that all education by necessity has a social dimension” (p. ix). Counts further argued that child-centered progressives did not reform education and/or society but rather subverted change (Counts, 1978). He argued that “to ignore this fact was to serve the interests of existing social elites” and that “child-centered progressives were not social progressives but [rather] unwilling social conservatives who masked their social views with child-centered language” (p. ix).

Today, Paulo Freire and Peter McLaren are two prominent names in critical pedagogy. Freire’s philosophy is akin to that of the Frankfurt School, Counts, and Dewey (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003; Gibson, 1986). McLaren’s writings on critical pedagogy and education are also amalgams of all of the previously mentioned schools of thought (McLaren, 2003).

Social studies has long been thought to serve the purpose of instilling in students a common set of beliefs and personal philosophies. It seeks to promote personal and independent development of the individual, much like the proposed teachings of the Frankfurt School, Counts, and Dewey (Case & Clark, 1997). Its purpose, according to some, is also to facilitate social reformation (Case & Clark, 1997; McLaren, 2003). Case and Clark (1997) suggest that citizenship education may well serve to help initiate social
reformation because students are taught to be critical of information. Case and Clark (1997), however, also note a difference between social action per sé and reformist social action because the first implies limited action in which students discuss relevant social issues and methods of reconstruction but do not take action beyond classroom dialogue. Reformist social action suggests action meant to achieve social change, much like Freire (1970) described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Case & Clark, 1997). Understanding this difference is important to achieving reform because social action per sé instills a false sense of achievement that does not lead to actual reform, whereas reformist social action, similar to Freire’s social reconstruction, does. (Case & Clark, 1997; Freire, 1970).

**Supportive Perspectives**

There are two forms of education in which I will examine the importance of critical pedagogy: teacher-centered education and community-based education. Teacher-centered education is an educational system in which the teacher dictates what is being taught and how it is to be learned. The teacher is the central or key figure and activities such as formal lecture prevail. Individual students have little control over what they learn, the order in which they learn and the methods they must use. In this approach, learning is passive rather than active and similar to a banking method. Freire suggested the banking method as a system of education in which the teacher has all of the knowledge and the students are simply empty vessels waiting to be filled with information, suggesting they do not have any prior knowledge and the teacher is the source of the information for all students (Freire, 1970).
Based on his research at Pitzer College in Pomona, California, Calderon (2003) argues that community-based education benefits the students as well as the community. In his model of education the students in his undergraduate education class at the same college were the key figures who had control over their own learning while implementing their education in the local community. As part of their coursework Calderon’s students were required to complete field-service work within the community to examine contemporary problems and inequities and suggest solutions for them. Having learned about the struggles of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union, his students visited the United Farm Workers Union’s headquarters to listen to first-hand stories from the leaders of the movement and farm workers themselves. In one illustrative case Calderon’s students learned of a decision by the city of Pomona’s intention to fine day laborers $1,000.00 and give them six-month jail sentences for soliciting daily work. As a result the students helped to create the Pomona Day Labor Center, a non-profit community based program that offers assistance to day laborers seeking employment in Pomona. These experiences made Calderon’s students realize they have the power to change a society.

According to McLaren (2003 “school knowledge is historically and socially rooted and interest bound,” and “is never neutral but … rooted in the notion of power relations” (p. 196). This key assumption underscores why critical pedagogy is beneficial in transitioning from teacher-centered to more community-based education. If knowledge taught in schools is bound by a particular interest that supports individuals in positions of power, students must be equipped with the tools necessary to understand that these
institutional forces bias their education. The critical approach to education must begin with preservice teachers and teachers because it is they who conceptualize democracy in the classroom (Marri, 2005).

A democracy is an institution in which the participants exercise direct or representative control. Therefore democratic education must be modeled in such a way that students are participants in the process rather than separated from it (McLaren, 1999). This is in contrast to the concept of teacher-centered education where there is no democracy and participants do not exercise control but are instead controlled. By empowering students through critical pedagogy, teachers can begin to move from a paradigm of non-critical thought to one that fosters critical examination. Students will begin to see themselves as part of the solution rather than merely part of the system (Mayo & McLaren, 1999). By evaluating themselves and their place within a system of education, students will begin to see how they fit into the community beyond the classroom. This allows them to begin to effect change outside of their system of education in their own communities.

Community-based education’s extension of learning for students beyond the classroom to foster change in the community begins with the students’ self-awareness (Calderon, 2003). Community-based education allows students to place the praxis of education in themselves and their community (Calderon, 2003). Freire (1970) explains the idea of praxis as the ability to create culture and history and find the “source of knowledge and creation” through reflection and action (p.101). Critical pedagogy is important in this type of learning because it encourages students to be critical of their
immediate surroundings and thoughts (Calderon, 2003). Fabillar (2002) argues that students will achieve two fundamental advancements as they begin to engage themselves. They will develop a critical interpretation of the past, and they will transform their consciousness to facilitate personal empowerment. Bassey (1996) argues that this empowerment occurs in preservice teachers by experiencing it rather than being instructed about it. These advancements are rooted in a critical pedagogical point of view. While Calderon (2002) offers change beyond the classroom, Fabillar (2003) fosters a transformation of consciousness. Both these transformations start with the students and teachers themselves. Bassey (1996) recommends that any change in preservice teachers must be discovered from experience.

To become active, conscious, and critical of one’s environment means being democratically involved. As students become critical they begin to develop a sense of where they fit into the whole scheme of culture. According to McLaren (2003), the idea of culture often refers to the culture of the majority but the goal is to have students relate through their own culture. Culture is relevant to critical pedagogy because it is the conduit through which ideas are transferred (McLaren, 2003). Cultural awareness through critical pedagogy helps to develop critical thinking among preservice teachers (Bassey, 1996). By taking a critical pedagogical view, preservice teachers can gain a deeper insight in their own culture and personal history (Moss, 2001). With this deeper understanding preservice teachers can then learn to educate their own students in a manner that raises their level of critical analysis as well (Levine-Rasky, 2001). Critical analysis puts preservice teachers in a position to question whose beliefs, ideas, and
thoughts constitute the foundation of society and culture (Moss, 2001). Learning in a cooperative environment allows preservice teachers to develop critical pedagogical and multicultural methodologies and furthers their ability to implement these educational methods (Bassey, 1996).

Opinions of critical pedagogy vary and there are many ideas about its benefits and/or detriments in the classroom. McLaren (2003) is one of the most outspoken proponents of critical pedagogy and sees it as the means to ask ourselves why we are the way we are. He argues that “critical pedagogy poses a variety of important counterlogics to the positivistic, a-historical, and depoliticized analysis employed by both liberal and conservative critics” (p. 184) and that it is beneficial to education and even more so to society.

Today, in education the banking method is often found disguised as a ‘back to basics’ movement (Peterson, 2000; Ahlquist, 1990). This method of education is counter-intuitive to democratic education because it denies students their role as active participants. As Peterson notes, “in Freire’s model, questions and not answers are at the core of the curriculum; open-minded questions prod students to critically analyze their social situation and encourage them to ultimately work towards changing it” (Peterson, 2000, p. 157). Enhanced understanding of information transfer and acquisition allows students to empathize with the plight of others through a curriculum that uses critical pedagogy (Bassey, 1996). Through Freire’s model students can be empowered to raise their personal consciousness and awareness of their surroundings (Ahlquist, 1990).
One important factor of critical pedagogy is its ability to raise racial awareness. Today teachers often do not reflect the race or ethnicity of the students they teach (Spring, 2004). In a multicultural classroom teachers and students must be aware of racial and ethnic diversity (Milner, 2003). Milner (2003) emphasizes the relevance and importance of critical pedagogy in achieving racial awareness by promoting completeness. This is significant to pre-service teachers because it encourages viewing students as complete persons with histories and knowledge that existed before and outside of the classroom (Milner, 2003). Bassey (1996) argues that making preservice teachers more capable of dealing with culture in the classroom can be achieved through critical pedagogy that is “transformative, relevant, and emancipatory” (p. 43). As students strive to achieve a higher consciousness that is critical and evaluating of themselves, general knowledge, and others teachers should elicit reactions to enable them to understand why they have certain preconceived notions about themselves and others (McLaren, 2003).

Critical pedagogy aims to expose other issues as well that are detrimental to students’ education, such as racism, sexism, and classism (McLaren & Mayo 1999). Critical pedagogy’s ultimate aim is to enhance the well-being of students and increase their inter-connectedness to show the good and humane side of existence and not merely the negative aspects from the world (Schugurensky, 1998). Doing so allows pre-service teachers to expose students to their ability to foster change in themselves and others (Bassey, 1996). Having a higher cultural awareness that makes students more aware is a struggle for them as well as their teachers. This struggle can be eased by creating an
environment that is welcoming of a critical analysis of the one’s own ideas and beliefs as well as those of others (Bassey, 1996). Teachers should be trained to go beyond the basic instruction of students and instead begin to see them as people who can grow to facilitate change in themselves and others (Ahlquist, 1990; Schugurensky, 1998).

Examining the system that resides within the individual rather than the individual as part of a greater system is a significant premise of critical pedagogy. It allows teachers to educate students in a revolutionary pedagogy that teaches them to view themselves as independent of the system (Curtis 1998). The goal of such a revolutionary curriculum is to promote education that is culturally responsive to all students in today’s classrooms (Curtis, 1998; Fischman, 1999). This is important because, as Avery and Walker found, “less than 20% of preservice teachers [are] willing to teach in diverse settings” and “40% [suggest] their training did not prepare them to teach in diverse environments” (as cited in Bassey, 1996, p. 38). Critical pedagogy attempts to liberate teachers and students from viewing the world through personal lenses so they can begin to view the world critically through the lens of humanity (Freire, 1970). Exposing students and preservice teachers to the reality of their world through this liberation is necessary to begin change (Mojab, 2001).

Race has historically been an issue in heterogeneous societies with one group subjugating another, especially in the United States. Critical pedagogy attempts to make the reality of racial inequality known so that teachers can educate students in a humane manner (Campbell, Daniel, Portelli & Solomon, 2005). Challenging students to question why they may be of one racial background but their teacher of another can be tough.
Students are often taught early to accept the teacher as an authority and not to question him or her (Curtis, 1998). Referring to preservice teachers, Curtis (1998) suggests they need to be aware that cultural conflicts occur everyday and they must choose to be either subjugated or be a subjugator. Students are taught early to accept the teacher as an authority and not to question that “the reality of cultural conflict exists and it is a reality they have to be prepared to face” (p. 135). Critical pedagogy instills a sense of pro-activity rather than reactivity because it enlists students to face the cultural battle straight away (Levine-Rasky, 2001).

As globalization increases connections among citizens of the world it creates a smaller existence and teachers must begin to acknowledge the inescapable transition of cultural homogeneity to cultural heterogeneity (Farahmandpur & McLaren, 2001) This increased interconnectedness allows for more cultural transactions, which Bassey (1996) defines as those exchanges of culture that occur on a daily basis every day. He further suggests that preservice teachers need to be trained to deal with a multicultural classroom because the demographics of schools are changing. Although globalization can lead to additional marginalization of peoples, critical pedagogy aims to give every person a voice through which he or she can tell his or her story and be heard (Farahmandpur & McLaren, 2001).

As the world becomes increasingly smaller, hatred, bigotry, sexism, and any other -ism are able to spread much more quickly. In the United States, schools are havens for these negative and malicious things (Lizotte, Pogarsky & Thornberry, 2003). The way to combat these is by transforming schools into institutions that embrace the complete
person with histories, experiences, and prior knowledge, rather than simply educate with the singular purpose of churning out more students (Spring, 2001). Today’s students are coming to school with a consciousness of “the other” meaning they view themselves as separate from portions of the school population because they do not reflect the same physical, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds of their teachers. This indicates that teachers must be sensitive and aware that their consciousness may be different from that of their students (Fischman, 1999). Critical pedagogy aims to move towards student-centered education that views students as complete beings (Schugurensky, 1998).

Liston and Zeichner (1987) argue critical pedagogy promotes seven attributes, as summarized by Knight and Pearl (2000): determination of important knowledge, nature of educational authority, ordering and inclusiveness of membership, definition and availability of rights, nature of participation in decisions of one’s life, equality, and optimal learning environment for students (p. 198). Freire (1970) suggests that reconstruction occurs when a person’s consciousness is awakened and he or she reconstructs his or her surroundings in a way that emulates humanity. This means finding the framework in the individual based upon acknowledging a person’s ability to act in a humane and compassionate way towards others (Schugurensky, 1998). Ahlquist (1990) argues that critical pedagogy enables people think critically so they can “grab hold of real life problems and construct solutions to them” (p. 54).
Critical Perspectives

A major criticism of critical pedagogy is that it only offers deconstruction and no direction. “Despite its unrelenting assault on the oppressiveness of schooling critical pedagogy may be guilty of diversion, division, illusion, and confusion, which are strong influences of oppression in a democratic society” (Knight & Pearl, 2000, p. 197). Some educational philosophers believe that critical pedagogy can be anti-democratic because it oftentimes exposes problems in education but fails to offer suggestions beyond raising awareness (Knight & Pearl, 2000). Knight and Pearl (2000) suggest that because critical pedagogy does not offer suggestions for change, it leaves a vacuum that is filled by the very oppressive educational practices that critical pedagogy claims to be against. These authors go on to say that instead of facilitating change, critical pedagogy allows anti-democratic and anti-intellectual education to persist by not providing a model of reconstruction. Filax (1997) suggests critical pedagogy can be oppressive because some teachers allow it to dominate their classroom, which may cause some students to feel as if they have no choice but to accept critical pedagogy. She further suggests that critical pedagogy gives the impression that the only way to achieve change is through revolution, making it seem as if social change can not be achieved otherwise.

Maxcy (1999) suggests that critical pedagogy is idealistic and limited. He points out that some champions of critical pedagogy take historical figures and make them martyrs when they may in fact not have or have had any direct association with education. An example of this is McLaren’s use of Ernesto “Che” Guevara as a figurehead of critical pedagogy and educational leadership. Maxcy suggests that this is
too idealistic because the philosophies of education being attached to Guevara may not have been those of Che himself. He also suggests that some of the figures in critical pedagogy speak greatly of social reform and change but do not act upon their own words, instead they merely urge others to do so. Maxcy (1999) further refers to critical pedagogy as “revisitations to the scene of the crime” (p. 296). He implies that critical pedagogues call upon past criticisms of society and education rather than elicit new trains of thought, which limits its capabilities (Maxcy, 1999).

Brown (1999) presents two main criticisms of critical pedagogy. First, critical pedagogy can instill an elitist mentality in students because its aims are to perform a critique of society, which causes students to separate themselves from society. Being separated from society may cause some students to feel as though they are disconnected or opposed to being part of it. By viewing themselves as separate, Brown (1999) suggests, students begin to naturally view the problems of society as not their own. Rather they view the problems as those of a society of which they are not part. Brown’s second criticism is that critical pedagogy may cause teachers to neglect the students’ points of view by focusing too much on critical pedagogy. This suggests that teachers who employ critical pedagogy may be so focused on the concept of critical pedagogy, that it becomes more important than its goal of social reconstruction and reform.

Some authors suggest that race and gender issues have taken a back seat to issues of class due to the large focus on social equality (Lynn, 2004). These critics of critical pedagogy suggest that its focus on social reconstruction has been narrow in its scope because of its focus on Marxist views of class and economic standing, while neglecting
all other major issues in society such as racial equality, gender equality, and political representation (Lynn, 2004). Lynn (2004) further suggests that due to the large disparity between racial and gender equality in the United States, the focus on class equality has made critical pedagogy ineffective in dealing with other important issues, which are minimized by it.

Brown (1999) suggests that a major flaw in the use of critical pedagogy is the focus and dominance of the theory itself. He further suggests that educators and philosophers can offer too much emphasis on critical pedagogy and therefore not focus on the individuals involved in the struggle for social reconstruction. This lack of emphasis on the individual can lead to a sense of alienation among those trying to be helped because they don’t see their interests represented. Furthermore, the interests represented are those of the philosophers and educators behind the theory rather than the people who are struggling (Brown, 1999).

Another critique of critical pedagogy is that critical pedagogues easily call for change and reconstruction in places where they are not and in locations that they will never visit (Maxcy, 1999). This suggests that critical pedagogues view their recommendations of social reconstruction and revolution from a far distance while others do the work (Brown, 1999; Maxcy, 1999). The overall suggestions of these critiques is that critical pedagogy conducts its business from a safe distance and in the safe confines of academia while the actual struggles of reconstruction, revolution, and reform are conducted by others (Maxcy, 1999).
Nonetheless, despite their criticisms, critics of critical pedagogy often seek similar results of student empowerment, democratic education, and civic involvement (Knight & Pearl, 2000). Just like its advocates they support an education that invests in students and in community-based education that liberates students and promotes a democratic society (Fischman, 1999).

*Application in Education*

Freire (1970) has argued that critical pedagogy is a form of education that will liberate individuals from oppression and the world that attempts to hold them back. The literature suggests three major areas in which educators should use critical pedagogy: curriculum and instruction, developing students’ points of view, and developing a view of society.

Using critical pedagogy in curriculum and instruction is based on raising the consciousness of students so that they can take control of their own education (Schugurensky, 1998). By using critical pedagogy in the classroom, teachers are able to give students voice. However, and more importantly, students are able to acknowledge that they have a choice to accept and legitimize knowledge or to disregard it as biased (McLaren, 1999.) Not only do Ohio’s Academic Content Standards for Social Studies, stress critical thinking, students are also expected to think critically at younger ages (ODE, 2006).

Ahlquist (1990) distinguishes between basic critical thinking and legitimate critical thinking. Critical thinking requires simple analysis while legitimate critical thinking requires intense questioning of one’s environmental controls, which is one of the
first steps in using critical pedagogy. Ahlquist (1990) recommends that teachers understand the difference between basic critical thinking and legitimate critical thinking because the latter is of foundational importance to critical pedagogy. She recommends using critical pedagogical thought for the purpose of seeking legitimate, humane, and holistic reflection on the part of students. To apply this methodology teachers must view their students as individuals with different histories, cultures, and personalities – because the critical pedagogue will welcome and enhance those things that make us different.

Another perspective on the application of critical pedagogy is that it allows students to truly think critically about any number of subjects. Ahlquist (1990) suggests there are two types of critical thinking: “weak-sense” and “strong-sense” critical thinking (p. 53). In “strong-sense” critical thinking critical pedagogy employs “true critical thought” in such a manner that extensive analysis can take place. “Weak-sense” critical thinking refers to surface thought which does not involve substantive questioning of any potentially underlying issues. In addition, Ahlquist argues that “instead of teachers telling students what they need to know about history, teachers should empower their students by enabling them to discover/rediscover their own cultural identities” (p. 56).

Levine-Rasky (2001) states that “only a critical pedagogy facilitates marginalized groups’ participation in democracy through their empowerment and enablement of voice” (p. 293). Having a student-centered curriculum and pedagogy is beneficial for fostering student empowerment and involvement (Levine-Rasky, 2001). Student empowerment is one of the core ideas that defines critical pedagogy as a theory and application (McLaren, 1999). Letting students know that they have a voice and that they can use it is what Freire
attempted (Schugurensky, 1998). He believed teachers must empower students to apply critical pedagogy beyond the classroom (Freire, 1970).

**Teacher Education**

Bassey (1996) suggests that preservice teachers should learn to apply critical pedagogy to the formulation of a democratic and empowering classroom and that this can be achieved during early field experiences (p. 44). Derman-Sparks (as cited in Ukpong, 1994) defines empowerment as “having the intellectual and emotional ability to confront oppression and work together” (p. 30). McLaren (as cited in Ukpong, 1994) defines empowerment as ‘bringing [someone] into a state of belief in [his or her] ability/capability to act with effect’” (p. 31). From these definitions of empowerment, giving students a voice in the world awakens them to what they already possess (Freire, 1970).

Other theorists see the use of critical pedagogy as one that is grounded in direct application. Levine-Rasky (2001) believes that critical pedagogy helps to “ground a person in the principles of personal liberation, critical democracy and social equality” (p. 295). She also suggests that preservice teachers have many preexisting notions about critical pedagogy and the classroom. However, until these notions are uncovered, preservice teachers will continue to harbor misconceptions. According to Gay (1995, as cited in Levine-Rasky, 2001), critical pedagogy “trains students in the cultural skills that improve their group’s traditions such that education prepares them to join the public discourse with confidence in their heritage” (p. 156).
According to Freire (1970) the problem-posing method of education is fundamental to the application of critical pedagogy while the banking method is counter-intuitive to that same process because it causes students to become recipients rather than participants. The problem-posing method requires students to analyze, synthesize, and internalize information with the guidance of a teacher rather than simply being repositories of information. In the banking model students are passive actors in the process of education, while in the problem-posing method of education they are active participants. The problem-posing method is characteristic of critical pedagogy because it empowers students (Ward-Martin, 2000). Getting away from the banking method is hard for many preservice teachers because they are often being educated through this method. Mojab (2001) argues that to get away from it, however, preservice teachers must be educated in the methodologies of problem-posing. When applying critical pedagogy, teachers must be conscious of how it relates to society. Everyone retains some part of society and takes it with him or her wherever he or she goes (McLaren, 1999).

A central aim of critical pedagogy is changing society; seeking to build and develop a more equitable, hospitable, and humane place (Freire, 1970). Critical pedagogy is based on students existing within a society of which the classroom is an integral part (Liston & Zeichner, 1987). Ukpokodu (1994) advocates students self-understanding in the world by arguing that “this new sense of awareness arouses a sense of obligation and a capacity to create and reconstruct society into a just and hospitable place for all humans,” which relates to a pedagogy of action. (p. 32).
There are many aspects to American society that are beneficial to students but there are also many that hinder and oppress them. By changing the ways preservice teachers are trained, teacher educators can begin the process of changing some of those issues that hinder students in their choice whether to participate in the current system of institutionalized education (Campbell et al. 2005).

Once teachers learn how to get students to ask tough questions of themselves through critical pedagogy, they can apply that same framework to the broader society of which they are members (Milner, 2003). Milner argues that “until the pursuit of liberation is achieved, individuals are fragmented in their pursuit of clarity, understanding, and emancipation. This liberation is not outside of man (woman), and it is not created or accomplished through some external force. Rather, it begins with mental understanding and alterations” (Milner, 2003, p.199). Therefore the flow of change must not be from society to the individual. Instead, the flow of change must be from the individual to society. The application of critical pedagogy is achieved by employing its theory on an everyday basis so that it is seen as constant and not suspect (McLaren, 1999).

In general, the application of critical pedagogy is essential to being able to pose tough questions about our existence and to understand benefits that students may or may not receive (Milner, 2003). Critical pedagogy provides a framework for how to teach in a liberating and empowering way, and from a socially critical point of view. It has benefits that cross time and culture in every direction (Schugurensky, 1998). The benefits to curriculum, students, and society are all grounded in one simple ideology. The system
should not become more important than the individual who occupies it (Levine-Rasky, 2001).

**Summary**

Many perspectives on critical pedagogy center on its ability to allow power structures to be examined in society and to expose the hidden curriculum in a classroom setting by both teachers and students (Campbell et al. 2005). Some argue critical pedagogy is important because it allows for a true dialogue to occur between students and self, students and teachers, and students and society (Campbell et al., 2005). Milner (2003) argues that “preservice teachers enhance their racial awareness and sensitivity … through the use of critical pedagogy and by rejecting the ‘osmosis approach’ to education and liberation” (p. 200). Teachers can not simply pass on liberation; it must be discovered by the individual, especially with regard to racial awareness (Milner, 2003).

The consensual perspective on critical pedagogy is that it is a form of education that can liberate and create a “critical consciousness which would result from [students’] intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (Freire, 1970, p. 74). Critical pedagogy creates and facilitates change. There are those who believe that critical pedagogy does not provide a framework for reconstruction (Knight & Pearl, 2000). Others suggest that critical pedagogy allows students to be oppressed by its methodology because it suggests that social change can occur through only one means of liberation (Filax, 1997). Thus critics argue that the theory lacks a central framework to achieve all of the goals that it claims it wants to achieve.
The overarching theme of the literature is that change is needed and can be achieved through the use of critical pedagogy. Even Knight and Pearl (2000), who argue that critical pedagogy is lacking, agree that it facilitates the process of change. Making students more aware of themselves, their surroundings, and how they interact within society is a crucial aspect of critical pedagogy. Bassey (1996) suggests that preservice teachers need to be exposed to critical pedagogy so that they can become aware of inequalities and know how to deal with them while not downplaying their students’ existence. He further argues that until preservice teachers are trained to use critical pedagogy that they will forever have a distorted view and be unable to apply its methodologies. Calderon (2003) argues for the use of critical pedagogy to create and foster an education that is community-based so that change in the school has an effect on the outside community as well.

The literature is rich in its description of how to use critical pedagogy in the classroom. However, it severely lacks studies of its actual implementation. Calderon’s study (2003) is one of the few that examined the successful use of critical pedagogy in a local community to effect change. While Bassey (1996) argued that preservice teachers should be prepared to become cultural brokers, Levine-Rasky (2001) suggested that for change to occur, preservice teachers need to be placed in situations where critical pedagogy’s benefits are more obvious.

The next section will focus on the methodology used to conduct this study. The first part of the Methodology will explain this study’s overall research design, followed by a description of the participants and method used to select them. Next, the instruments
that were used will be described as well as the method of data collection and analysis.

Finally, the *Methodology* will describe how the data was collected and analyzed.
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the extent to which a group of preservice social studies teachers in their senior year, and immediately prior to their student teaching experience, understood, adapted, and used critical pedagogy in a lesson plan format. Data collected for this study consisted of 34 questionnaires, 10 initial oral interviews, 5 lessons plans, and 5 follow-up interviews.

Participants

This case study was conducted during Winter Quarter 2005-06 at Ohio University. Before completing the questionnaire each participant signed a waiver acknowledging voluntary participation in the study. Thirty-five questionnaires were handed out and thirty-four were returned. One person chose not to participate. All participants provided demographic and background information. Each participant also answered a series of questions related to critical pedagogy (Appendix A).

All participants in this study were enrolled in their social studies methods course. The objective of this course was to help them examine the nature, development, purpose, and value of social studies, with an emphasis on methods and techniques of instruction. This course was chosen because the preservice teachers enrolled in this class were scheduled to student teach the following quarter and had nearly completed their content and professional course requirements. They were required to have taken a course on
cultural diversity, and a course on school and society. Each course included an intensive focus on critical pedagogy.

Of the participants 62% indicated they were middle class, 25% indicated they were working class, and 13% indicated they were affluent professional. All participants were Caucasian; 75% were male and 25% were female. Their ages ranged from 21 to 61, with an average age of 25.9 years.

Data Collection

A questionnaire was administered to undergraduate students who were enrolled in the above social studies methods course. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher to elicit responses that would reveal their perspectives with regards to critical pedagogy. The reliability of each questionnaire depended on participant’s honesty in answering the questions. The questionnaire was designed to obtain honest answers regarding the opinions, definitions, and other references to critical pedagogy by asking ‘yes’ and ‘no’ questions. This ensured that the participants supplied responses either for or against critical pedagogy.

Based on the responses to the questionnaire questions, two groups of five preservice teachers each were chosen for in-depth analysis. The first group of five students was chosen because they demonstrated a somewhat sophisticated definition of critical pedagogy. The second group of five participants was chosen because their answers to the questionnaire indicated an inability to define critical pedagogy. After being selected, all ten participants participated in an oral interview. The purpose of this
interview was to gain an understanding of their level of understanding and support of critical pedagogy. (See Appendix B) All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. After each interview was transcribed, I destroyed the tapes.

In their questionnaires the participants were asked to provide demographic and background information as well as to define critical pedagogy. All 34 respondents were undergraduate preservice teacher education students majoring in social studies education with the exception of one who was a graduate student. This participant was removed from the pool because the focus of this study was on undergraduate preservice teachers.

The age range of participants was between 21 and 61 with an average age of 25.9 years. There were six participants over 39 years of age. This caused the average age to rise in the initial participant pool. Excluding these six participants, the average age was 23.9 years. Sixty-two percent of these participants indicated their socioeconomic status as middle class, 25% working class, and 13% affluent professional. Seventy-five percent was male and 25% female, creating a 3:1 ratio of male to females.

All participants who completed the questionnaire described themselves as European-Americans of Caucasian descent, suggesting paramount homogeneity. Along with the gender disparity, there was a clear lack of ethnic and racial diversity in the initial pool. Participants were all from dominant social groups in society which is relevant, as Paulo Freire has suggested that dominated groups tend to be more accepting of critical pedagogy due its direct impact on their lives (Freire, 1970). All of the initial participants, except three, offered a definition of critical pedagogy.
After this initial interview, the five participants who expressed an understanding of critical pedagogy were asked to create a lesson plan pertaining to WWII that applied critical pedagogy. (See Appendix C) After completing their lesson plan, each participant had a follow-up interview in which they were asked to explain their lesson plan based upon a series of questions. (See Appendix B) These questions addressed the participants’ definition of critical pedagogy, their perspective on critical pedagogy, previous experiences involving critical pedagogy, and potential application.

Each of the ten participants I selected agreed to participate in follow-up research. All indicated they were seniors. Six participants described themselves as middle class, three as working class and one as affluent professional. All participants were Caucasian and identified themselves as European-American. Their age ranged from 21 to 39 years, with an average age of 24.7 years.

The five participants who indicated they understood critical pedagogy were asked to develop a lesson plan incorporating critical pedagogy. After having developed their lesson plans, these five participants each participated in a follow-up interview to assess the lesson.

The follow-up interviews were designed to determine whether the five participants who developed a lesson plan were able to define and apply critical pedagogy. The five participants who indicated that they lacked an understanding of critical pedagogy were only asked to explain their responses. Finally, the interviews were intended to determine whether there were any significant similarities and differences between the two groups.
Each of the ten participants was given a pseudonym to protect his or her identity (See Figure 1).

*Figure 1 List of Participants*

**Individuals Indicating Understanding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>WC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>WC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>MC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>MC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>AP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean Age: 27.6  
Range: 21 – 39

**Individuals Indicating Lack of Understanding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>MC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>WC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>MC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>MC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>MC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean Age: 22.8  
Range: 21 – 22

**Key:**  
M=Male; F=Female  
WC=Working Class; MC=Middle Class; AP=Affluent Professional
During their interviews, the participants were asked to give clear and concise responses. The interview questions were designed to measure the participants’ understanding of critical pedagogy. I sought to gain an understanding of their definition of critical pedagogy, personal perspective, and exposure to critical pedagogy. The responses were valid only in so far as the participants chose to offer the requested clear and concise responses.

The data for this case study was collected in four phases. Phase one required administering a questionnaire. (See Appendix A) Phase two required selecting ten participants, five male and five female, for an initial interview. (See Appendix B) These participants were chosen based upon their ability to either provide or not provide a definition on the initial questionnaire and to have gender balance. Phase three required five participants to write a lesson plan that implemented critical pedagogy based on their individual definition of the methodology (See Appendix C). The fourth and last phase of the study required these last five participants to participate in a follow-up interview to explain their lesson plans (See Appendix D).

Completion of the questionnaire took approximately one half hour. The pre-lesson plan interviews, lesson plan designs, and post-lesson plan interviews were conducted over a period of thirteen days. Each pre-lesson plan interview took approximately 35 to 65 minutes. Five participants were asked to design lesson plans and participate in a follow-up interview that took a considerable amount longer. Data obtained from these five participants was acquired from the questionnaire, the initial interview, the lesson plan and the follow-up interview. The participants’ answers to questions in the initial
interview were obtained prior to the request to develop a lesson plan. The lesson plans
designed by the five participants were reviewed during the follow-up interview. At the
time of this interview, the participants were asked to explain how they had incorporated
critical pedagogy in their actual lesson plans. Further evaluation of the lesson plans and
interview transcripts was conducted during the time following the interviews.

Data Analysis

The overarching goal of this study was to assess whether preservice teachers fully
understood critical pedagogy and hence would apply it in their lesson plans. The data was
analyzed in reference to the six research questions that were presented in the
Introduction. The questions were as follows:

1. Were the participants able to define critical pedagogy?
2. What, if any, misconceptions did participants have who stated they understood
critical pedagogy?
3. To what extent did participants who stated they understood critical pedagogy, have a
depth understanding of its essence?
4. Did the participants who stated they had a deep understanding of critical pedagogy
actually apply it in their lesson plans?
5. Were there any identifying characteristics in the personal background of the
participants who showed a predisposition towards using critical pedagogy?
6. Were there any identifying characteristics among the participants who expressed a
lack of understanding of critical pedagogy?
Based on the analysis of the questionnaires, I chose ten participants for further in-depth study. I chose these ten participants based on their responses on the questionnaires. In the selection process I attempted to have equitable gender representation among the ten participants to determine if there were any potential correlations to gender in this case study. These ten participants were also chosen to create an even distribution of two groups of five participants. The first group expressed an understanding of critical pedagogy by detailing complete definitions with explanations of their responses. The second group was selected based upon their lack of understanding of critical pedagogy. For the second group I attempted to choose participants who offered no definition of critical pedagogy. This was an attempt to determine if there were any factors that might have contributed to their lack of understanding. To analyze the data, I chose the following steps. During the ten initial interviews, I reviewed the questionnaires and analyzed them with the participants. The participants reviewed the demographic information they provided on the questionnaire and were asked if they believed it played a significant role in their perspective on critical pedagogy. They explained the rationale for their responses on the questionnaire in further detail. Those participants who indicated a lack of understanding of critical pedagogy were asked to define it based on what they understood it to be at the time of the interview or any general understandings they might have. If participants were absolutely unable to provide any definition, this was noted. The interview then continued and the interviewee was questioned to gain an understanding as to why he or she could not offer a definition. This was done to determine if there were any general trends among these participants’ responses. They were asked to list the pros
and cons of critical pedagogy based upon their own understanding and whether they believed critical pedagogy should have a place in a social studies classroom curriculum. Next, the participants elaborated on whether they believed critical pedagogy to be beneficial to their students. The last part of the questionnaire asked whether or not the participants felt that their training and exposure to critical pedagogy had been sufficient. Those participants who stated they understood critical pedagogy in the initial interview were asked to go through the same process as the one described above to evaluate their responses to the questions. All of this information was documented through the use of audiocassette tapes and then transcribed. The last part of the initial interview included questions regarding their definition of critical pedagogy and its benefits. The information obtained was evaluated based upon the responses, either supportive or non-supportive of critical pedagogy, and demonstrating understanding of critical pedagogy. It was also reviewed for any demographic patterns.

The five lesson plans were evaluated using this study’s definition of critical pedagogy as presented in the *Introduction*. The participants were asked to participate in a follow-up interview to further evaluate their lesson plans. The participants once again reviewed their demographic information. This information was also used to determine whether there were similarities with responses they offered during the initial interview. These participants then offered their definition and interpretation of the critical pedagogy. Next, the participants were asked to describe their exposure to critical pedagogy in their undergraduate experience because this might have impacted their definition and/or opinion of critical pedagogy. The final part of the interview sought to determine whether
they were actually positively disposed towards using critical pedagogy in their future classrooms and whether they had had enough exposure to the philosophy during their undergraduate experience.

Finally, all data was evaluated at four different levels. At the first level, the information on the participant’s questionnaires was examined to determine if the responses revealed any general trends or preconceived ideas about critical pedagogy. Next, the information was reviewed based upon the participants’ own analysis of their responses. This was done to determine if any inconsistencies existed between the date of the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews. Participants’ lesson plans were re-analyzed to determine if any new information could be discovered and also, to see if the lesson plans had any intended or unintended applications of critical pedagogy. Finally, the transcribed interviews were examined to determine if any inferences could be made from the participants’ responses. The purpose of the post interview reviews was to determine if any new information could be obtained. The information gained provided valuable insight into the participants’ knowledge or lack of knowledge of critical pedagogy. It was important that the participants provided their information with respect to the exposure that each had had to critical pedagogy in their undergraduate experience.
FINDINGS

Introduction

This section presents the findings. The data were analyzed in two ways. First, all ten participants were evaluated based on the six research questions outlined in the introduction. This review was conducted to determine the participants’ understanding of critical pedagogy and their ability to develop a corresponding lesson plan. Next, the findings were compared to the current literature on critical pedagogy. Finally, interviews were conducted with the five participants who developed a lesson plan, in order to further evaluate and gain a more in-depth understanding of participants’ views regarding their attempted application of critical pedagogy.

Questionnaire

Some typical responses in the questionnaire defined critical pedagogy as “teaching globally”, “your teaching theory”, and “professional education” while others did not offer any definition at all. Out of the 34 returned questionnaires, eight participants did not provide a definition. Three of these eight participants did not provide any written response at all.

In reviewing the questionnaires, 26 participants provided definitions of critical pedagogy but only five provided definitions that indicated some focus on critical thinking. The other 21 questionnaires offered definitions that were similar to the three typical responses listed above. Their definitions referred to critical pedagogy as “the way you want to teach”, “how we learn”, “the idea of how a person believes a student learns..."
most effectively”, and “a way to communicate one’s own ideas, guidelines, and procedures.” The commonality in these responses of suggested some level of understanding of critical pedagogy. None of the participants criticized critical pedagogy. Instead they focused on teacher-centered techniques which suggested their conception of critical pedagogy focused on the role of the teacher rather than that of the student. In addition, their responses suggested a focus on classroom methodologies as a means of maintaining order in the classroom and clarity of presentation of ideas.

While critical thinking is not critical pedagogy, it is one of the essential components of critical pedagogy and therefore I believed these participants offered what appeared to be the best possibility of being able to articulate some level of understanding of critical pedagogy and that critical thinking does not equate to critical pedagogy.

Interviews

Each of the ten participants I selected agreed to participate in follow-up research. The findings from the ten interviews with these participants are organized based on the six research questions outlined in the Introduction.

Question 1: Were the participants able to define critical pedagogy?

Based on the responses provided in their questionnaires, Kathy, Michelle, Janet, Ken, and Robert were chosen because they appeared to understand critical pedagogy. These participants offered a definition and further explanation. In a typical response, Janet defined critical pedagogy as “planning lessons in a way that is effective and helps students think critically,” whereas Ken suggested that it refers to “the ability to teach
students to think critically about the material being presented rather than just present … rote dates, times, places, etcetera.”

These participants were also asked to define term. Kathy referred to critical pedagogy as “a thought process, how you plan to attack your personal teaching ability, I think it is a guideline for a teacher, myself, to follow to keep me on track. I think it is something useful for me as a teacher and maybe useful for my students.” Janet defined critical pedagogy as “planning your lesson in a way that engages the students and brings in a variety of ideas to help the students think critically.” While Kathy defined critical pedagogy as a roadmap for teachers, Janet defined it as a tool to engage students in critical thinking. Neither had a clear understanding of critical pedagogy as defined in the introduction. Michelle defined critical pedagogy as “a way that while you’re teaching you incorporate different perspectives and have students think about those perspectives; then think outside their normal realm of thinking.” While Ken wrote that critical pedagogy is “the ability to teach students to critically think about the material being presented rather than just present … rote dates, times, places, etcetera.” Robert suggested it is, “A teacher’s main theory on teaching revolving around critical thinking.” All five of these definitions suggest a misunderstanding of critical pedagogy. Kathy defined it as a guide, Michelle explained that it is offering different perspectives, while Ken, Robert, and Janet all defined it as the ability to get students to think critically.

In the interviews, definitions of critical pedagogy ranged from describing it as teaching in a manner that helps students to use critical thinking skills to providing viewpoints not often heard. Janet nearly verbatim stated the same definition she had
given on the questionnaire by defining critical pedagogy as “planning your lesson in a way that engages the students and brings in a variety of different ideas and helps the students to think critically.” Kathy defined critical pedagogy as a way to engage teachers to think critically about their teaching practices, suggesting it offers “guidelines to keep me on track.” Later in the interview she stated that, “It could be useful for students, I think that it is an overwhelming concept that is a continual learning opportunity.”

Michelle argued that critical pedagogy was a tool to get students to think in the mindset of others. She stated, “I would define it as a way that while you’re teaching you incorporate different perspectives and have students think about those perspectives, then think outside their normal realm of thinking.” Ken said “It may not be the text book definition but I would define it as giving information to [students] analyze for themselves, determine for themselves its relevance and ascertain, how and why something may have happened or how it could have been different and learn from what happened and take that with them.” Robert offered the same definition as the one on his questionnaire “I thought that it was the teacher’s main theory on teaching that revolves around critical thinking, not so much on lecturing or direct instruction. Making the students think more critically about issues.”

Michelle’s definition was focused on exposing students to alternative perspectives and thought processes but did not offer anything that focused on critical pedagogy. Ken and Robert’s definitions were similar to Janet’s because all three’s primary focus was to get students to think critically. The commonality in all these definitions was that each participant gave what he or she thought was a thorough definition, However, all
mistakenly defined critical pedagogy as being a teacher’s guide and a way to engage in critical thinking but nothing more than presenting alternative perspectives.

In presenting these definitions, both on the questionnaire and in their interviews, these five participants did not make any mention of power structures, nor did they mention oppression and/or reconstruction. Instead, they focused on the teacher as the center of knowledge and sole avenue to get students to think critically. These participants’ responses suggested that in place of what they believed was critical pedagogy, was instead something that reinforced the status quo. Thus, their responses indicated that these participants unwittingly maintained the status quo.

Based on the responses they provided in their questionnaires Carl, Amanda, Mike, Todd and Sarah were chosen because they did not appear to understand critical pedagogy. None of these five participants was able to define critical pedagogy. At no point did any of them mention the existence of power structures, oppression, and/or reconstruction. For example, Sarah wrote that she was “not sure what it is,” while Todd said that he “[did]n’t know but … should.” Carl volunteered that he couldn’t “recall off of the top of [his] head but [had] heard of it.” Their responses suggested a lack of familiarity with the term.

In their interviews these five participants were asked to clarify what they knew or did not know about critical pedagogy. Interestingly four out of five stated they could not define the term and did not know exactly what it was, but nonetheless said they would support it in a social studies classroom. For example, Carl, stated that he couldn’t “recall” the meaning of critical pedagogy but simply advocated using it in the classroom by stating that he was “in support of it [and that] it is necessary to expose [it], especially in
America.” Todd said, “I really have no idea, although I feel like I should,” and when asked if he supported critical pedagogy in a classroom, he said he did. Mike, the fifth participant, did not give a definition. He wrote, “Well, like I answered on my test I am not positive what critical pedagogy is. I am confused about critical pedagogy and therefore I am neutral.” He was simply not able define critical pedagogy because he had never been exposed to it. Mike’s comments suggested that he was being as honest and that he simply could not define critical pedagogy.

Carl defined critical pedagogy as “exposing students to various views, not just the dominant viewpoint or the majority viewpoint” and “a way to generate sympathy among students to the views of others.” These five participants also defined critical pedagogy as participating in a democratic society and helping students become more involved in their communities. Amanda stated, “I think I am in support of it because you have to teach your students to be active in society.” She went on to argue that critical pedagogy is a way to expose students to alternative information and uncommonly heard viewpoints, regarding history. Mike expressed a lack of understanding and said that he did not know what critical pedagogy was and would not define it. Todd said, “I would say to the point where you need to think of other people’s perspectives and look at people’s perspectives in history that are not viewed as much and disagree.” Furthermore Todd argued that teachers and students should not be viewed as equals, which contradicts critical pedagogy’s aims of equality and freedom. Sarah thought that “critical pedagogy can present many sides of an issue and [that] it helps students to learn more real world issues and the different sides to it.” Sarah defined the term as “making students in general more
aware of the world around them as it reflects different kinds of attitudes of different people from different places and … makes them more global citizens.” Sarah suggested that her definition focused on student exposure to ideas, much like the definitions offered by Carl, Todd, and Michelle.

These last five participants understood critical pedagogy to be a means for incorporating different viewpoints and social activism. Their idea of social activism amounted to civic activity, i.e. being involved in a system, being supportive of the status quo and adverse to social reconstruction. None of the definitions provided suggested a questioning of the existence of power structures, oppression, and/or reconstruction. Instead, they focused on action within a system and forms of critical thought within its confines.

None of the definitions provided by either of the two interview groups referred to the existence of power structures, oppression, and/or reconstruction. Therefore none of the ten interviewees was able to define critical pedagogy as it defined in the Introduction. Therefore, these participants will likely fail to make their students aware of hidden power structures, inherent oppression, and/or encourage social reconstruction. Instead the responses suggest the participants are likely to maintain the status quo of hidden power structures and oppression, making the ultimate goal of social reconstruction unachievable.
Question 2: What, if any, misconceptions did the participants who stated they understood critical pedagogy have?

The definitions offered by Janet, Ken, Kathy and Robert all focused on critical thinking while Michelle’s definition focused on exposing students to different and alternative ideas. Regardless of the definition given the responses showed similar misconceptions by suggesting that critical pedagogy is a tool to elicit critical thinking in order to create better citizens.

In implementing their ideas of critical pedagogy that centered on critical thinking and exposing students to new ideas, these participants in fact supported the very opposite of what critical pedagogy aims to achieve, i.e. social reconstruction. Suggesting that critical pedagogy creates better citizens and spurs them to social activism was on the right track but when the participants clarified their idea of social activism as civic activity, i.e. action within the current system, their misconceptions became clear. Critical pedagogy aims to expose the hidden power structures and oppression of the current system, and attempts to reconstruct it. However, social reconstruction is difficult because the current system inherently does not want to be deconstructed and reconstructed (Freire, 1970).

Question 3: To what extent did participants who stated they understood critical pedagogy, have a deep understanding of its essence?

The term “deep” refers to participants who indicated an understanding, actually comprehending the term as defined in the introduction. In her response Kathy wrote, “It is possible to teach students in an efficient, creative, personal way that allows them to
become critical thinkers. It is essential to provide them with the necessary tools needed to be successful adults.” Michelle stated, “It is teaching in such a way that evolves a thought process that is developed to engage the students in critical thinking.” Janet stated it referred to “planning lessons in a way that is effective and helps students think critically.” Ken’s definition focused on critical thinking. In all, Kathy, Michelle, Janet, Robert, and Ken defined critical pedagogy as a means to elicit critical thought, Robert defined critical pedagogy as “a teacher’s main theory on teaching, usually revolving around critical thinking.”

Thus all five participants suggested that critical pedagogy was a tool to get students to think critically. Their responses revealed these participants did not have a “deep” understanding of critical pedagogy. Rather than seeking to expose hidden power structures, they defined critical pedagogy as giving students the “tools to be successful adults” and implied those tools as the ability to think critically instead of in a critical pedagogical frame of mind.

*Question 4: Did the participants who stated they had a deep understanding of critical pedagogy actually apply it in their lesson plans?*

In their lesson plans, all five participants applied their personal understandings of critical pedagogy. In four of the five lesson plans, the exercises were banking method type exercises. The teacher gave guided notes, lectured, and/or gave a PowerPoint presentation while students were passive recipients of information. This is contrary to what critical pedagogy actually tries to do. Even though one lesson plan engaged students in self-learning it was still a banking method because it required them to only
discuss topics given to them by the teacher. The methods used in the various lesson plans were discussions based on terms, debates, and events relating to WW II. In these discussions, the teacher was the center of knowledge, while the students remained “empty vessels” waiting to be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1970).

Kathy said, “The importance of this lesson will help the students understand the effects of WW II on the world as whole.” In her lesson, the students were divided into four groups. Then each group was assigned one of the following events: “Mussolini’s takeover of power in Italy, Hitler’s rise to the chancellorship of Germany, Japan’s invasion of Manchuria, and the United States’ recognition of the Soviet Union.” Each group had to create a television newscast and present it to the class, along with a written brief for the teacher based upon the information that she gave to them. Afterwards, the students were to discuss their presentations led by the teacher. At every stage in her lesson plan Kathy was directly involved in the creation of the newscast and the written brief. She led her students in the learning process with the goal that her students would get a better understanding of the players and events involved in WW II based the information that she gave them. Thus, her focus was on her students receiving knowledge rather than discovering it.

Michelle gave her students a PowerPoint presentation on countries involved in WW II by giving them quotes from different leaders. She then led the class in answering the following questions: “Who said the quote; what country are they from; what emotions were they feeling; what feelings did you have?” When asked how this incorporated critical pedagogy, she stated, “I have incorporated critical pedagogy into this lesson by
using opposing opinions on such a controversial topic. By having students dissect each view and understand why someone would react or feel a certain way helps them to see the world through a different light.” Her lesson plan reinforced her previously stated misconception of critical pedagogy, and much like Kathy, she directed her students’ path to the ‘necessary’ information by examining ‘the facts’.

Janet discussed the Treaty of Versailles and handed out newspaper articles from different countries. Although the participants were asked to create a lesson plan based upon WW II, Janet’s focused on WW I. This showed that she did not follow directions that requested she develop a lesson plan on WW II. This suggests a potential deficit in her content knowledge, which may have led to her not being able to distinguish WW I and WW II. However, because this error did not impact her understanding of critical pedagogy I chose to analyze her lesson plan nonetheless. Her lesson plan included guided notes and leading a discussion. However, she was the source of all knowledge. The discussion’s objective was to make her students aware of the different views that she chose for them to understand, rather than allow them to develop a personal interpretation. Thus her lesson plan revealed her misconceptions. For example, in describing the importance “her lesson plan’s information”, she stated, “Students will use the information on their Ohio Graduation Test.” Therefore her lesson’s objective was to give her students knowledge in order pass the state test. Her lesson plan neither required critical thinking, as she suggested, nor applied critical pedagogy.

Ken’s lesson plan sought to get his students to better understand the roles of African-Americans in WW II. His objectives were: “Students will be able to summarize
and explain the contributions of African-Americans in WW II, be able to identify and elaborate on reasons and contributions of African-Americans, critically analyze the contributions and how they changed things for African-Americans in the military and society, students will be able to speculate how things may have been different had African-Americans not participated in WW II.” These objectives were supposed to be achieved through guided notes, a PowerPoint, and debate led by Ken in which the students were given limited input through the debate. His lesson plan did not use critical pedagogy as defined in this study. Instead he merely incorporated some aspects of critical thinking.

Robert’s plan was to lead a discussion on “why Josef Stalin was as bad (if not worse) than Hitler when it came to genocide.” He hoped to achieve this by leading the class in a discussion on each leader’s atrocities. Robert’s lesson plan was focused on vocabulary terms as a base that he would use to begin a question and answer session for a discussion that he would lead seeking to address “genocide, Russia, Hitler, and Stalin”. For his final assessment Robert required his students to write a 2-3 page response in which they were to critically think about the information he had given them. However, he did not offer them any specific questions about which to think critically. When asked why he thought this was a use of critical pedagogy, he suggested that “genocide” was a topic not talked about and he used critical thinking to analyze the term. Again there was no appropriate understanding or use of critical pedagogy.

In summary, in all five lesson plans teaching and learning was teacher-centered. Even in so-called discussions the teacher remained the source of all knowledge and issues
under debate while the students remained passive recipients of knowledge. None of the participants implemented critical pedagogy. Instead, they developed lesson plans which did not use critical pedagogical thought or processes. Their application of critical pedagogy centered on creating better students through critical thinking. Instead of eliciting critical thought that led action for social change, the participants’ lessons suggested tools or ways to do well on standardized tests and/or engage students in points of view beyond their own. These lessons did not focus on power structures, oppression, and reconstruction but instead focused on ways to better fit into current power structures. The participants’ lesson plans represented a focus on assimilation and maintaining the status quo rather than social reconstruction.

**Question 5: Are there any identifying characteristics in the personal background of the participants who showed a predisposition towards critical pedagogy?**

Kathy, Michelle, Janet, Ken, and Robert all indicated that they had an understanding of critical pedagogy. They had one major different characteristic in comparison to the group that indicated a lack of understanding of critical pedagogy. When asked if their background had an effect on their view of critical pedagogy, only Robert indicated that it was not relevant. The four participants offered detailed information. For example, Ken pointed out an early emphasis on education in his life because “[his] father was a truck driver who did not graduate and had to go back to get his G.E.D, [his] mother was an honors student, and education was stressed in [his] household.” Kathy noted her rough upbringing was relevant because it made her have empathy for students. She stated, “I can relate to students who are going through that
now. That is primarily the biggest part of what is and will be my critical pedagogy.”

Michelle commented about her grandparents’ influence on her while Janet commented that her parents influenced her view of critical pedagogy. Michelle’s grandparents harassed one another regarding what she says was “their lack of intelligence on being more American” and further stated,

“My mom raised me as a single parent, well, me and my sisters. Even in class today when we had an article and I read the one about child support. I think coming from the working class and having to struggle sometimes… I can relate to someone in poverty or I can relate to someone better off.”

Michelle suggested that critical pedagogy allowed her to empathize with students from various backgrounds. Janet noted in her interview that she learned critical pedagogy from her parents who emphasized that history is not just the history of white males but much richer in diversity than is commonly taught in schools. She stated, “Basically history was in line with the man’s perspective and you’re beginning to hear a little about females and other cultures.”

The responses offered by these participants, who each developed a lesson plan, indicating an understanding of critical pedagogy emphasize the importance of empathy and critical questioning. But empathy and critical questioning, in and of themselves, do not suggest a positive disposition towards the use of critical pedagogy. While empathy and critical questioning may be regarded as fundamental components of critical pedagogy, they do not constitute a holistic understanding. A similar theme was that participants were still focused on tools for the betterment of the individual and his or her
participation in society rather than the betterment of the individual to achieve a reconstructed society that is more equitable and democratic.

*Question 6: Were there any identifying characteristics among the participants who expressed a lack of an understanding of critical pedagogy?*

A major characteristic of those participants who indicated they lacked an understanding of critical pedagogy was that they were European-American Caucasians. However this characteristic did not make them any different from any other participants in this study. Consequently, the final finding with regard to this question is that there were no distinct identifying characteristics among these participants in comparison with the entire group of participants.

*Summary*

Three major themes emerged from the findings. These participants lacked a clear understanding of critical pedagogy, did not know how to apply it appropriately to their instruction, and had several characteristics that prevented them from fully grasping its meaning.

The first theme that emerged was that none of the ten follow-up participants in this study had an accurate understanding of critical pedagogy. They were confused about its meaning. Their responses suggested that critical pedagogy was a tool for eliciting critical thinking. Their focus was on critical pedagogy as a tool for the betterment of individuals with the current status quo. Rather than acknowledge hidden structures of oppression and attempt to reconstruct them, these participants focused on ways to
become a better part of the current system by assimilating rather than seeking to
reconstruct society. While critical thinking is an important component of critical
pedagogy, it is only one part and does not constitute a full understanding and/or
application of critical pedagogy. These participants simply did not understand critical
pedagogy and were unable to distinctly articulate its meaning. Consequently, they
focused on ‘critical’ rather than ‘critical pedagogy’.

A second theme that emerged from the findings was that the participants were not
able to apply critical pedagogy in their lesson plans because they lacked an in-depth
understanding of critical pedagogy. Ahlquist (1990) has noted that preservice teachers
lack sufficient training in the use of critical pedagogy. None of the participants
incorporated critical pedagogy as defined in the literature. The lesson plans that were
developed by those who were asked to do so focused on assimilation into existing power
structures rather than an examination and reconstruction of hidden power structures.

The third theme that emerged from the data was the participants’ background with
regard to age, socioeconomic status, gender, race, and ethnicity. What stood out was
participants’ homogeneity. According to Levin-Rasky (2001), preservice teachers are
more likely to accept and understand critical pedagogy when they have been exposed to
the various cultural representations that exist in education. The homogeneous ethnic
background of these participants may well have constituted an important factor in their
lack of understanding of critical pedagogy. Thus the potential viewpoints of dominated
groups versus dominating groups might well have played a significant role as these
participants all were members of dominant groups within American society.
This case study analysis showed that none of ten participants, regardless of whether or not they indicated an understanding of critical pedagogy, was able to offer a definition on their questionnaires or during their interviews that included an explicit questioning of power structures. Rather their instructional goals supported the status quo.

*Conclusions and Recommendations* will present the conclusions and implications of this study. In addition, it will suggest recommendations for future research on critical pedagogy.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In consideration of the limitations and delimitations of this study, as presented in the Introduction, this section presents the conclusions and implications regarding the participants’ understanding of critical pedagogy and how they sought to implement it in their lesson plans. In addition, this section presents recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which preservice social studies teachers in their junior year of undergraduate studies at Ohio University understood, adapted, and applied critical pedagogy in a lesson plan format. The hypothesis for this case study was that preservice teachers did not fully understand critical pedagogy and would not incorporate and/or implement it into their lesson plans.

The findings supported the hypothesis as none of the participants was able to correctly define and/or implement critical pedagogy. The conclusions center on three themes that emerged from the data. First, the participants lacked an understanding of critical pedagogy due to a lack of immersion. Even when they initially indicated an understanding of critical pedagogy, they did not understand its true meaning. Second, the participants were unable to apply critical pedagogy in a lesson plan. Third, the participants inadvertently subverted the aims of critical pedagogy for social activism for change.
A review of the responses offered by the ten interviewees revealed that all had misconceptions of critical pedagogy. These same misconceptions were apparent in both groups. Three general misconceptions were viewing critical pedagogy as a means to elicit the prevailing thinking as to what critical thought is, as a guide to lead teachers, and as a way to expose students to alternative viewpoints; indeed the preservice teachers in the study suggested that critical pedagogy was equivalent to critical thinking. Their misunderstandings were due to their focus on the ‘critical’ in critical pedagogy. They did not fully understand critical pedagogy and consequently reinforced the status quo rather than suggested means of change. Therefore, by not having a ‘deep’ understanding of critical pedagogy the participants actually subverted the aims of critical pedagogy.

Further reinforcing their misunderstanding of critical pedagogy, all five participants who indicated that they lacked an understanding of critical pedagogy still said they were, nonetheless, in favor of its use even though they could not define the concept. A critical pedagogue would not advocate something to be used in a classroom, if he/she did not understand what was being applied. This type of unknowing advocacy contrasts with the aims of critical pedagogy.

The participants who appeared to understand the concept of critical pedagogy were asked to create a lesson plan that applied and implemented critical pedagogy. The instructional methods used by these participants, such as guided notes, lectures, and PowerPoint presentations, were all teacher-centered and further reflected their misunderstandings. Had these participants had a ‘deep’ understanding of critical pedagogy they would not have used teacher-centered instructional methods. By
continuing to view the teacher as the center of all knowledge in the classroom; these participants did not promote an environment in which the student constructed his or her own knowledge. As McLaren (2003) has stated, “school knowledge is historically and socially rooted and interest bound,” and “is never neutral but … rooted in the notion of power relations” (p. 196). These findings appear to validate McLaren’s argument of interest bound education as all participants placed themselves at the center of knowledge instead of their students. The participants in fact used a banking model in which the teacher is the source of all knowledge and students wait to receive it, which allows the teacher to maintain control of the curriculum in the classroom and subsequently the power structure (Freire, 1970).

Ahlquist (1990) has suggested that preservice teachers often lack sufficient training in the use of critical pedagogy. The participants’ lesson plans and inadvertent advocacy of critical pedagogy, affirmed the fact they did not understand how to implement critical pedagogy. The lesson plans reflected the participants’ misconceptions. The Ohio Academic Content Standards for social studies, which emphasize the importance of critical thinking about a variety of issues, especially through the Social Studies Skills and Methods standard, go only so far as to elicit critical thinking based on the state’s own guidelines and may well have impacted the participants’ views (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2006). The Ohio curriculum standards for social studies emphasize critical thinking and students are expected to be able to apply these standards. For example, Benchmark B for the Social Studies Skills and Methods standard
for grades 11 and 12, requires that students, “Critique data and information to determine the adequacy of support for conclusions” (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2006).

All participants should have been exposed to critical pedagogy in their undergraduate program as they were required to take two courses focused on critical pedagogy: *Cultural Diversity and Education*, and *School Society and Professional Education*. These are two of nine educational courses required for the completion of the teacher preparation program for Integrated Social Studies education at Ohio University. These classes appear to have led the participants to internalize the meaning of critical pedagogy. This is especially apparent in their presumed application of critical pedagogy in lesson plans which centered on creating better students through critical thinking rather eliciting critical thought leading to social action for change.

All participants were European-American (Caucasian), which meant they were members of the dominant culture of the United States. A fundamental concept of critical pedagogy is questioning the status quo and the ideas of the dominant culture (Freire, 1970). None of the participants suggested that culture was a factor in their view of critical pedagogy. Bassey (1996) has suggested that helping preservice teachers become more capable of dealing with culture in the classroom can be achieved through critical pedagogy that is “transformative, relevant, and emancipatory” (p. 43). McLaren (2003) suggests that teachers should elicit reactions that enable students to understand why they may have pre-conceived notions about themselves and others. Even though Freire (1970) argued that culture is a fundamental component of critical pedagogy, the participants in this study did not believe their racial and ethnic background was relevant. Resultantly,
they were not critical of themselves or their place in the dominant culture, which is necessary if one is to increase one’s understanding and application of critical pedagogy. The participants’ inability to define and/or apply critical pedagogy made further analysis difficult. Because all had the same general misconceptions, it is, therefore, difficult to draw general conclusions from much of the information.

Implications

The implications of this study focus on the participants’ undergraduate experiences. The first and, from this perspective, primary implication is that the participants are not likely to elicit critical thought that questions the status quo or the hidden curriculum in schools of the power structures, and consequently not advocate the social reconstruction of education. As a result, their inability to clearly define, understand and apply a critical pedagogy in the classroom perpetuates the status quo. At the time of this study, nearly all participants should have been exposed to critical pedagogy in their undergraduate experiences. Therefore, their undergraduate experiences should be examined to determine why they do not understand critical pedagogy. Second, the participants understanding of critical thinking as it pertains to critical pedagogy needs to be further explained, so they may learn how to differentiate between the idea of critical thinking and the idea of critical pedagogy. The instructional methodologies implemented by the participants in this study, were all teacher-centered. Preservice teachers can not be expected to teach using a methodology that has not been correctly learned or experienced.
These types of methodologies are all in contrast with the aims of critical pedagogy and, therefore, go against their student-centered pedagogical practices.

The participants advocated for an intensive focus on critical thinking leading to social activism, i.e., civic action. The Ohio Academic Content Standard for Citizenship, Rights, and Responsibilities for grades 11 and 12 requires that, “Students use knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in order to examine and evaluate civic ideals and [participate] in community life and the American democratic system” (Ohio Department of Education, [ODE], 2006). This Ohio Academic Content Standards’ focus on examination and civic participation offers a potential explanation as to why participants did not address the conception of true social activism for change and instead suggested civic activity. The content standards are an ever present entity in social studies in Ohio and students in Colleges of Education in Ohio need to be educated about their philosophical underpinnings. The state standards’ suggestion of the importance of critical thinking and the importance of civic activism may well have caused participants in this study to equate critical pedagogy with critical thinking and subsequently, critical pedagogy with civic activism.

The third implication is that the current curriculum does not require students to be engaged in cultural exchanges outside of their own culture. This lack of engagement can lead to complacency on the part of preservice teachers and not having to be critical of themselves or others. Self-evaluation/analysis is a fundamental stepping stone to implementing critical pedagogy and must be done to achieve a complete understanding of
one’s role within a culture. These participants’ lesson plans did not reflect cultural exchange and engagement which is the production of a hidden curriculum.

**Recommendations**

A method should be developed to assess the students’ understanding and application of critical pedagogy because the participants in this case study all unknowingly had misunderstandings of critical pedagogy. Therefore, an assessment should be developed to determine how clear of an understanding undergraduate preservice teachers have of critical pedagogy and if they understand how to apply it. If undergraduate preservice social studies teachers have a misunderstanding that is not addressed, they can not be expected to correctly implement critical pedagogy. Only when preservice teachers’ personal pedagogy is student-centered and the focus of learning is on the learner as active participant does the dynamic change. In such a dynamic, much like in critical pedagogy, the individual is at the center of learning. By having an understanding of and applying a student-centered curriculum, preservice teachers better implement critical pedagogy.

In response to the participants’ equating social activism with civic action, preservice social studies teachers should be made aware of the systemic role of the state standards as a tool against social change. This means teacher educators must ensure they develop a deep understanding of the standards as tool in maintaining current power structures in society. By helping preservice teachers develop a clear understanding of critical pedagogy they may come to understand what it is they can do to create a student
centered curriculum that is culturally sensitive and enlightening. As they acquire a ‘deep’ understanding of critical pedagogy, preservice social studies teachers will come to understand critical pedagogy as a tool for social reconstruction. Once they themselves understand the hidden power structures and need for social reconstruction, it will be easier for them to help their future students do the same.

Finally, as part of their teacher preparation program, preservice social studies teachers should be required to participate in cultural exchanges. This can be achieved through curriculum that requires them to facilitate classrooms whose culture does not reflect their own. This will lead to them to question their own role within the larger, and in this study, dominant culture. Consequently, they will gain a better understanding of themselves in the classroom.

Finally, further studies of preservice social studies teachers’ understanding and application of critical pedagogy are needed. These should include larger sample size than the current study and different settings. Such studies may also obtain useful information by examining preservice teachers’ understanding of critical pedagogy as they student teach and/or after they become classroom teachers.
REFERENCES


Questionnaire:

Your Name:

Licensure Level: Ex: Middle School, High School, ECT.

Age:

Grade Rank: Junior, Senior, Graduate.

Race: Caucasian, African American, Asian American, Hispanic, Native American

Gender:

Ethnicity:

SES: executive elite, affluent professional, middle class, working class.

1. Define critical pedagogy.

2. Regardless of your position with respect to critical pedagogy, please describe (in your own opinion) the pros and cons of critical pedagogy?

3a. In your personal opinion does critical pedagogy belong in a social studies classroom? (Please formulate your answers with explanations)

3b. If yes, then in what capacity does it belong?

3c. If no, then why does it not belong?
4. Will critical pedagogy be used in your classroom?  
(Please formulate your answers with brief explanation)

5a. If yes (to Question 4), in what form will critical pedagogy appear in your lesson plans?

5b. In what form will critical pedagogy appear in your teaching methodology?

6. Is critical pedagogy beneficial for social studies students, if YES why and how and if NO why not?  
(Please formulate your answers with explanations)

7. In your opinion, is critical pedagogy beneficial for society beyond the classroom? If yes how and why if no why not (Explain)?

8. Do you believe current critical pedagogical training is sufficient for preservice social studies teachers in the teacher education program at Ohio University’s college of Education? If yes, why and what areas and if no why not (Explain)?

9. Do you see a demand for critical pedagogical theory being taught in your own teacher education classes or are the current standards sufficient (please explain why or why not)?
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions:

*Interview 1 (Pre lesson plan development)*

1. Are you in support of or against critical pedagogy in social studies classrooms?

2. What are the benefits and/or detriments of critical pedagogy and it’s use in a social studies classroom?

3. What would you cite as the benefits (pros) of critical pedagogy?

4. What would you cite as the detriments (cons) of critical pedagogy?
Lesson Plan Exercise:

You are being asked to participate in the next stage of research for the current study examining critical pedagogy.

Directions
Please create a 50-minute lesson plan that incorporates critical pedagogy in a fashion that you believe is sufficient to benefit your future students. Please create your own lesson without any other person’s assistance. The only requirement is that you use the topic already chosen for this lesson (See Below). For each topic please attach an explanation describing how you have incorporated critical pedagogy in your lesson and how it will benefit your students.

Topic of Lesson Plan:

Middle School: Revolutionary War
High School: World War II
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions:

Interview 2 (Post lesson plan development)

1. What is your background (asking the subject to review background information on questionnaire)?

2. How do you define critical pedagogy?

3. What is your opinion of critical pedagogy?

4. In your opinion, what effect does your background have on your views on critical pedagogy?

5. Did you have an interaction with critical pedagogy in your own experiences during middle school and high school?

6. How and to what extent would you implement critical pedagogy in a classroom if you were the instructor?

7. What exposure have you had to critical pedagogy so far in your program of study?

8. Has your program of study changed your opinion of critical pedagogy? If not, why not? If so, how?