Practicing the Promise of Critical Pedagogy:
Case Studies of Three Pre-Service Teachers Mediating
the Meaning of Race, Equity, and Social Justice In Middle School Classrooms

Dissertation

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to document the efforts of three white preservice teachers to engage in critical pedagogies across three different middle school contexts. Inherent in this study is the belief that teaching and learning to teach from a critical perspective is a process that is responsive to the context in which it is performed (Enciso, 2007; Fecho & Meacham, 2007; Orellana, 2007). For preservice teachers working in middle school classrooms this means acknowledging the politics of teaching literacy in their field placement site and actively working to construct alternatives that are rooted in critical pedagogy. I draw upon the framework of critical pedagogy to address the potential for working with preservice teachers to create transformative experiences for themselves and the students they work with in their middle school literacy classrooms.
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Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation in loving memory of my grandmother, Ethel Price. You began preparing me for this journey the first day of my life. Thank you for believing in me.
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Fields of Study

Major Field: Education

Studies in Literacy Education, Elementary and Middle School Education, and Teacher Education
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Chapter 1: Introduction

As a high school student in the 1990s, I was unaware of the pedagogical shifts in teacher education related to multicultural initiatives. I was aware, however, of the strained effort by some of my classroom teachers in West Virginia and later Ohio to acknowledge contributions made by marginalized groups in our society. My high school in Ohio offered Black history courses, Black history week underwent a 21-day expansion, and self-declarations of open-mindedness seemed to be in vogue.

The idea of providing an environment conducive to educational equity was being taken up by teachers who cared about their students and wanted them to feel successful. However, many of them may not have known how to create a space that honored our lives or engaged us in experiences that provided space for us to share worldviews. I often wondered how many of my teachers took the time to consider the implications of the ideas they learned in professional development workshops (i.e., seeking perspectives from underrepresented groups; watching films on diversity without discussion before or after) before attempting to claim them as a classroom practice.

I introduce the following memory and vignette to provide insight into my commitment to prepare preservice teachers to work with diverse populations. 17 years ago…
I attended a large, urban, somewhat diverse high school in Ohio during my junior and senior years. I was the only person of color in all of my advanced placement courses and most of the honors courses. This was never a source of contention or frustration until I met Mr. Smith.

“Yesterday we had an invigorating discussion about the Vietnam war…”

He lost me after “war”. I couldn’t tell you what else that man was talking about, but I prayed (from my desk strategically located in the middle of the room) that he would not walk past me. That always signaled his entrance into, “…Detra, please tell us why the people in Laos weren’t interested in greeting the GI’s. How did they feel?”

“But…Mr. Smith, I don’t know. I’ve never met anyone from Laos, I don’t even know where it is.”

“Yeah, but you’re Black, they’re close enough to you, so what do you think?”

I really wasn’t sure what I thought. I certainly had no clue how to respond, so I gave the standard honors track answer, “I’m not really sure. I’ll need some time to think about your question to make sure I’ve considered all the options.”

I cannot begin to tell you how much I detested those words, “What do you think?”

Fortunately this was the only teacher with whom I had this experience, but his ability to de-race me sent a powerful message to the class about race, identity, and power. My identity and the experiences that shaped my identity were irrelevant in this class because they could simply be removed whenever it was convenient.
When we studied the Revolutionary War and the architectural details of Washington D.C, he asked me if I could recommend my favorite book by Benjamin Bannaker. When we read about the War of 1812, he asked me to speak on behalf of a massacred indigenous population. When we discussed the Civil War, I was to recount fictionalized family horror stories from the Underground Railroad.

I soon realized that I was the official spokeswoman every time anyone who didn’t require Coppertone to get a tan ever did anything in history. I felt overwhelmed. I remember staying up late at night trying to stay ahead of the class so that I could figure out what to say if I were asked to speak for an entire tribe from a continent I had never stepped foot on.

I hated sixth period and I hated being asked to represent people whose cultures I had not even heard of. It wasn’t bad enough that I was the only person of color in all of my AP courses; this man made me the messiah for people who wore anything out of his realm of experience, from Jeri curls to turbans.

Everyday I walked down the hall and through a narrow corridor that led to a small, enclosed room, I felt smothered. I was a young articulate African American woman who could be transformed into a Brazilian coffee bean grower, a poet in the Harlem Renaissance, or a field slave with just a flip of the page. My teacher took away my story in a misguided attempt to embrace some warped idea of multicultural education.

I believe that the experience recounted above from Mr. Smith’s class awakened my political consciousness and operated subconsciously as a catalyst to my dissertation
research with preservice teachers. My experience highlights the distortion of academic literacy and its relationship to race. I believe that seeking clarity around the definitions and theory of critical literacy and racialized structures of school need to be addressed with preservice teachers. If literacy is a social practice and is also implicated in shaping identities (Guttierez, 2007; Lewis & Moje, 2007; Street, 1994), racism and racialized identity formations are inherent in the process of learning to be a student and teacher.

I now realize that many of my former schoolteachers as well as the classroom teachers I have worked with and provided professional development for do not see a place for racial advocacy or social justice in public schools. Many have not participated in meaningful discussions or engaged in self-reflection about race and equity in their practice. Thus, I was neither the first nor will I be the last student of color to experience the exchanges that were so prevalent in my high school AP US history course. Given that, and my commitment to challenge oppressive educational structures, I have contemplated the role of my research in transformative literacy education.

The beginning chapter offers a description of my study that examines critical pedagogy in teacher education. It also includes a statement of the problem studied, an overview of the theoretical frames informing the purpose and methods of the study, research questions that were addressed, an explanation of the significance of the study, and a brief overview of the remaining chapters.
Description of the Study

The goal of this research was to document and examine how three preservice teachers engaged in critical literacy practices with the middle school students they taught during student teaching in three different school settings. I designed the study to explore how they conceptualized race, equity, and social change and how their perspectives influenced the work they did with middle school students. I recruited participants who were committed to reflecting on their classroom practice as they worked to establish a pedagogy that allowed them to challenge the dominant school literacy narrative that had contributed to the disenfranchisement of many students they worked with on a daily basis. This dominant narrative constructs literacy as a set of hierarchical skills that provide access to less rigid interpretations of district mandated literacy curricula. Students who are successful at navigating this narrative are given opportunities to work in small groups to create projects, use technology to create presentations, and spend more time discussing ideas about texts. Students who fail to navigate this narrative are labeled struggling, listen to books on tape, and answer questions on worksheets.

This dissertation is premised on the notion that preservice teachers interested in literacy education need to understand the complex social and political dimensions of literacy learning in elementary and middle school. Their role as literacy educators must move beyond a neutral based approach to reading and writing as a set of autonomous skills (Street, 1994) and begin to directly address the impact that race and equity have on the lived experiences of their students (Delpit, 2006/2002/1995; Willis, 2000/1996). My
argument, neither neutral nor apolitical, demands for critical reflection of the ideologies that guide and challenge the work that my participants engaged in during the course of this study. Like Ladson-Billings (2001), Cochran-Smith (2005,2003) and Zeichner (1993) I contend that teacher education programs are morally and ethically bound to explicitly address race, equity, and social change with their preservice teachers and require them to do the same in their field placements. This mandate is not predicated on a deficit perception of students who enroll in teacher education programs, nor in the belief that professors in teacher education programs should assume their role or in their capacity to change the students they teach. I maintain that our role in teacher education is to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to develop “political and ideological clarity” (Bartolomé, 2004) as we prepare them to meet the needs of the diverse student population they will serve. As Bartolomé (2004) explains, both are needed for preservice teachers to understand how the dominant narrative influences their interactions with historically marginalized populations, in relation to race, class, gender, and linguistic differences. This study describes the efforts of three preservice teachers to disrupt this narrative and create new possibilities for engaging in student affirming pedagogies. The disruption of this narrative contributes to transformative work that promotes a critical political consciousness.

Statement of the Problem

It has been widely reported that the majority of students in teacher education programs do not share cultural, linguistic, racial or ethnic characteristics with the public
school students that they will teach (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Garmon, 2004; Seidl, 2006; Sleeter, 2001). This discontinuity along with the insufficiency of experiences that most preservice teachers have with students of color and with discussing issues related to race, calls into question their ability to effectively work with students from racial/ethnic backgrounds different from their own (Cross, 2005; Garmon, 2004). Many teacher educators have documented a culture of resistance and sense of discomfort with discussions pertaining to race within their teacher preparation programs (Smith & Singer, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Williams & Evans-Winter, 2005). This culture of resistance and the lack of self-reflection impact the ways preservice teachers examine how their conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change as well as the avoidance of these topics influence their classroom pedagogy and relationships with their students.

Given that the majority of students, who are white middle class females, enter teacher education programs unable and unwilling to make connections among ideas of racism, whiteness, privilege, equity, or diversity (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; King, 1991; Lawrence & Bunche, 1996; Sleeter, 2001; Ukpokodu, 2005), this study seeks to disrupt this pattern by explicitly engaging preservice teachers in conversation about race, equity, and social change. In doing so, this study documents how the participants’ understandings of these ideas influence their literacy pedagogy.

Although many efforts have been made within teacher education to incorporate and examine themes related to equity, diversity, and multiculturalism, Williams & Evans-
Winters (2005) contend that there is still a “missing dialogue of race in teacher education” (p. 201). This missing dialogue masks opportunities to examine the impact that race has on the lived experiences of preservice teachers and the students that they work with in the field. It promotes and sustains a colorblind ideology that cannot account for the pervasive discrepancies in academic achievement and deficit discourse used to describe the cognitive abilities of students of color. This chasm creates a rift between the experiences that preservice teachers assume all students have in schools and the reality that many of their students endure on a daily basis.

The following sections present a discussion about how preservice teachers are framed in the field of education. Specifically, they address the 1) demographics of the teacher candidate pool; 2) preservice teachers’ pedagogical knowledge; 3) preservice teachers’ field placement sites and 4) preservice teachers’ inquiries. Central to my study is understanding how the framing of preservice teachers creates and constrains opportunities to understand the specific ways they conceptualize and enact critical pedagogy with middle school students in their field placement sites.

**How Are Preservice Teachers Framed?**

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (1992) reports that 40% of the nation’s school-aged population (kindergarten-high school) is made up of minority students, whereas 90% of the teachers are white. This statistic is often cited to provide context for the cultural discontinuity that exists in the field of teacher education. The majority of preservice teachers entering the profession do not share the same cultural,
linguistic, or racial background with the majority of the students they will work with on a daily basis. Their ability to navigate multiple world views are hampered because they are largely unaware of the ways their identities as white, middle and upper-middle class students have been associated with unnamed privileges (McIntosh, 1988; Sleeter, 2001; Thompson, 2003). As a result, our field is riddled with stories of white preservice teachers resisting experiences (i.e., conducting home visits in economically fragile areas of town; writing reflections that require them to attend to race and privilege; discuss the benefits of whiteness) that require them to seriously critique their white identity and the privileges associated with that status.

The dominant narrative present in this body of research suggests that white preservice teachers do not have the desire to interrogate connections among power, privilege, and student achievement. Nor do they have the skills to negotiate daily interactions with students and families who do not share a similar background (Gordon, 2005; Sleeter, 2001; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005).

Our field is ushering in a new generation of teachers who need experiences that will prepare them to acknowledge and engage multiple worldviews. This generation of teachers will have the privilege of working with an increasingly diverse population of students encompassing a range of racial, cultural, linguistic, sexual, and economic locations/positions/realities (Blackburn, 2003; Kinloch, 2009; Dyson, 2008; Seidl, 2007). Thus, a goal of teacher education is to prepare students to teach and learn in a way that respects and honors these divergent perspectives (Kinloch, 2005). Therefore, what is
needed is a critical approach to teacher education grounded in sustained conversations on equity, diversity, and successful teaching and learning in a range of environments.

If students in teacher education programs are provided with opportunities to engage in conversations about critical pedagogies that are informed by theory and grounded in practice, they will have space to develop ideas that infuse the curriculum with questions generated from a critical perspective of teaching and learning. This critical perspective will draw on the tools, experiences, and reflective dispositions of teachers/teacher educators as they examine ways to become agents of social change. Such a perspective can generate sophisticated understandings of what it means to contribute to innovative and engaging practices that support diverse learners whose racial identities are often different from their teachers.

**How Are Preservice Teachers’ Literacy Pedagogical Knowledge Framed?**

Teacher educators have worked in tandem with classroom teachers to address principles of critical pedagogy with preservice teachers (see Bartolomé, 2006; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Jennings & Smith, 2002; Morrell, 2004,2006; Reed & Black, 2006). Collectively their work has engaged preservice teachers in discussions about knowledge and power, anti-oppressive education, equity, and access to quality literacy education. I situate my work within this body of research and offer new insights by framing specific ways preservice teachers with an interest in advocacy can enact a pedagogy of transformation that is fueled by the above-mentioned principles as well as care for the students they serve.
However, when surveying the literature on preservice teachers’ literacy pedagogical knowledge I found gaps in how preservice teachers conceptualize pedagogy, enact those conceptualizations in the field, and reflect on those interactions to inform their practice. Niesz (2006) points out that critical studies often focus on how educators and school systems contribute to unjust or inequitable schooling experiences. My study, however, documents how three preservice teachers worked to disrupt this trend. To do this it provides a glimpse into the daily practices, planning, and questioning attributed to critical pedagogy that three preservice teachers experience within different middle school contexts. It highlights how my participants interpreted theory and weaved it into their daily practices. My participants’ acts of interpretation reiterate the ways in which preservice teachers engage in curriculum development grounded in a social justice framework (Picower, 2007; Reed & Black, 2006).

For many preservice teachers, critical theory and critical pedagogy are illusive constructs that are found in the pages of university textbooks and not actual classrooms. Although several studies have presented information about how practicing teachers conceptualize and appropriate critical pedagogy in their classrooms (Duncan-Andrade, 2005), few studies have examined how preservice teachers apply tenets of critical pedagogy in the classroom with different populations. My study serves to bridge this gap by documenting how preservice teachers take up principals of critical pedagogy, with a specific focus on literacy education as they re-shape, re-purpose, re-imagine, and refashion the curriculum to meet the needs of three different student populations.
How Are Preservice Teachers’ Field Placement Sites Framed?

In the AERA report on Teacher Education, Kenneth Zeichner (2005) called for more studies that examine the context within which preservice teachers are asked to work to highlight how teacher education programs are responding to the needs of diverse student populations. I would expand this call to include how preservice teachers negotiate their role as a teacher advocate working toward an inclusive, socially just literacy curriculum with their mentor teachers, university supervisor, students, and family members within a particular context. The participants in my study faced challenges implementing their evolving critical literacy pedagogies and worked to develop new ways of considering how this work (critical literacy or multicultural education) would be taken up with students in their classrooms. They grappled with questions including the following: What language should be used to discuss this work with their mentor teachers and families of students? How can they present the notion of struggle and the urgency of acting to transform groups of students with varying exposure to such ideologies? What type of support would they receive from other stakeholders involved in their program?

The current literature in teaching and teacher education does not fully explore these questions in the context of working for social change through critical conscious pedagogy. Preservice teachers entering the profession quickly learn to navigate multiple discourse communities and find the information they receive in university-based courses in direct conflict with practices of the in-service teachers they are working with. Many may want to be advocates for an emergent problem posing curricula (Shor, 1992) that
will create space for students to question how society operates. Nevertheless, they are often countered with pacing guides and fears of not being prepared for standardized testing.

**How Are Preservice Teachers’ Inquiries Framed?**

There is little evidence to understand the types of inquiries preservice teachers undertake in middle school settings in relation to critical pedagogy. What we do know is that preservice teachers are often asked to create cumulative projects that evolve from teacher research. What we do not know is what types of questions they ask and how students benefit from the answers. Reed & Black’s (2006) study highlighted questions preservice teachers were asked to investigate, but little information was presented as to what questions the preservice teachers were generating based on their investment in improving literacy pedagogy.

I draw upon the work of Short, Harste, and Burke (1996) to inform my understanding of inquiry. They suggest that understanding learners’ inquiry requires information about how they make sense of the world around them. They explain, “Inquiry comes from exploring and being interested in the world” (p. 257). I take that to mean asking questions, constructing meaning, and becoming invested in the process of understanding how and why something works. The key for this type of inquiry is change, or movement; it is not stagnant, but shifts as learners take into account new information.

An example of this movement in relation to inquiry can be found in the previously mentioned study by Black & Reed (2006). They present the foundations of curriculum
change in the WEL program initiated by preservice teachers’ attempts to disrupt stereotypes involved with holidays and school celebrations. While the study sheds light on the initial process of preservice teachers to challenge prevalent images students were bringing to school, very little knowledge is generated about their own sense of inquiry around race, equity, and social change.

Another study conducted by Leland, Harste, and Shockley (2007) offers insight into how a teacher education program re-designed its curriculum to address preparation of preservice teachers to teach in working-class schools. The goal of this reconceptualization was to push faculty and students to question the assumptions that guided their pedagogy, particularly when teaching children of color or children from working class neighborhoods. The researchers’ in this study developed four principals to serve as the basis for critical social practices they wanted their preservice teachers to engage in as they worked with students in the classroom:

- All participants in schools are learners
- All learners deserve rich, multilayered learning experiences
- Knowledge is socially constructed and therefore subject to change
- Inquiry is an invitation to bring intuitive knowledge to a reflective plane
- Language is never neutral

Inquiry was the primary tool selected for preparing prospective teachers to interrogate their assumptions about students and families in working class neighborhoods. The faculty designed a series of assignments to help preservice teachers interrogate their
assumptions about working class students while examining their literacy pedagogy with a critical lens. Central to Leland, Harste, and Shockley’s (2007) findings was the need for preservice teachers to rely on critical inquiry to challenge and disrupt inequitable schooling practices. We learn from the case of Caroline, the preservice teacher in the study, that teacher educators need to find ways to balance student inquiry with guided critical inquiry. When the participant was left to her own devices, she did not take up a critical approach to her inquiry process.

**Purpose of This Study**

When synthesizing related research for this chapter, I was intrigued by the following quote: What would preservice teacher education look like if “pedagogy would take on the task of regenerating both a renewed sense of social and political agency and a critical subversion of dominant power” (Giroux, 2004, p. 33)? Giroux (2004) explains that the challenge facing educators is to provide conditions for students to address how knowledge is related to power. I would expand this challenge to include preservice teachers who work in a variety of field placement contexts and have to constantly negotiate the extent they can engage in such practices with multiple stakeholders and varying degrees of success. Giroux (2004) goes on to state:

Central to such a challenge is providing students with the skills, knowledge, and authority they need to inquire and act upon what it means to live in a substantive democracy, to recognize anti-democratic forms of power, and to fight deeply
rooted injustices in a society and world founded on systemic economic, racial, and gendered inequalities. (p. 35)

The study I present for consideration documented the efforts of three white preservice teachers to engage in critical pedagogies across three different middle school contexts. Inherent in this study is the belief that teaching and learning to teach from a critical perspective is a process that is responsive to the context in which it is performed (Enciso, 2007; Fecho & Meacham, 2007; Orellana, 2007). Taking into account Smith & Singer’s (2006) report that preservice teachers are resistant to talking about race and feel that discussions on the topic are intimidating, this study presented an opportunity to engage white preservice teachers in dialogue and reflection about race, equity, and social change in teacher education. It documents their journey of learning how to respond with a pedagogy that challenged the status quo and created new possibilities for interrogating our society.

My argument is influenced by Bank’s (2006) claim that “misconceptions and lack of knowledge about ethnic and racial groups that teachers learn in the wider society impedes educational reform …” (p. 769). This is problematic for preservice teachers who may not be given a space to examine their own assumptions and values that guide the work they do with students. As Bartolomé (2004) explains, when preservice teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy focusing on the practical aspects of teaching, they miss the opportunity to [re] examine their “ideological posture” and the ways it manifests in their interactions with students.
Theoretical Framework

If the “epistemological assumptions of mainstream academic knowledge” (Banks, 2006, p. 769) continue to go unexamined in a variety of academic and social spaces that preservice teachers inhabit, then preservice teachers and the students they work with in classrooms lose out on the opportunities to interrogate what it means to live and learn in a democratic society. The cycle of reification continues at the expense of those least prepared to challenge it (Delpit, 1995). In order to investigate local knowledge construction and the interrogation of race, equity, and social change within a preservice teacher education program, my work draws upon a critical theoretical framework (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994). Critical theory provides researchers, educators, and students with a framework to challenge asymmetrical power relations in society. Of course these relations of power will be asserted and reworked in different ways depending on the history of relations associated with particular sites.

Critical theory deals with numerous themes concerning power, equity, and access. It makes inscribed power relations the problem of research by questioning indirect ways power works in order to understand how institutional patterns constrain and restrain development of democratic conditions (Popkewitz, 1997). Critical theorists believe that knowledge is socially constructed, contextual, and dependent on interpretation (Giroux, 1997; Luke, 2000; McLaren, 1997; Popkewitz, 1997). They are interested in what type of knowledge best serves human emancipation (Popkewitz, 1997) and seek to destabilize asymmetrical power relations along the lines of class, gender,
race, and sexuality. Educators and researchers who draw upon critical theory understand that social and historical contexts shape present day relations and the need to locate interactions within their social and historical contexts.

For preservice teachers working in middle school classrooms this means acknowledging the politics of teaching literacy in their field placement site and actively working to construct alternatives that are rooted in critical pedagogy. I draw upon the framework of critical pedagogy to address the potential for working with preservice teachers to create transformative experiences for themselves and the students they work with in their middle school literacy classrooms. These experience reflect the desire of all parties involved to counter debilitating educational practices that result in some students of color (1) failing their courses; (2) being tracked in lower ability classes; (3) being perceived as lazy and incapable of learning; (4) being suspended and removed from class at higher rates than white students; (5) being required to speak and learn in a second language without the support of their home language.

Applying a critical orientation to middle school literacy education would also embrace a dialectical view of knowledge that works to expose the relationship between objective knowledge and “common sense” cultural norms (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). This understanding is essential for preservice teachers to develop as they work to deepen the interconnections between theory and practice by co-constructing with students a space that supports their examinations into how their actions can shape and re-shape the
social, cultural, and political landscapes around them (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003).

Researchers have documented how students and teachers find ways to resist and re-negotiate constraining literacy practices in their day-to-day classroom interactions. For example students read and discuss texts in ways that explore positionality, identity, and power (Bean & Moni, 2003; Enciso, 1997; Moita- Lopes, 2006; Peyton-Young, 2001); bring in popular media which students find interesting and can analyze in order to respond to situations in their community (Morrell, 2004; Peyton-Young, 2001); address curriculum standards (Lee, 1995, 2008); and engage in projects promoting social justice (Fecho, 2001).

Educators who operate within a critical frame work believe that schooling should be tied to the struggle for equity and utilize critical pedagogy as a means to rid schools of practices that lead to exploitation and social injustice. In order to work toward these goals, critical educators, particularly literacy teachers, should ask why information is being taught, how learning is constructed around this information, and how examination of texts can uncover political, social, and economic implications. Participating in these practices can point to preservice teachers and their students’ relationships with the larger society (McLaren, 2003). Disrupting dominant literacy practices through resistant reading of text can impact classroom literacy instruction.
Research Questions

As developed in the discussion above, several questions form the central theoretical and pedagogical intervention in my study of preservice teachers’ constructions of critical pedagogy in literacy education:

• Research question 1: What pedagogies do preservice teachers draw on to mediate discussions about race, equity, and social change in their language arts classroom?

• Research question 2: How do preservice teachers critically question their conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change?

• Research question 3: How do preservice teachers draw on critical pedagogy to plan lessons that interrogate students’ conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change?

Methodology and Research Design

First, because knowledge is always changing and being socially constructed as people act and react together, a research design that is emergent rather than predetermined was used. The goal of this research was to document emic understandings of preservice teachers’ use of critical pedagogy to examine social and cultural realities of race, equity, and social change in their middle classrooms. Over the course of ten months, I worked with three preservice teachers in varying supportive roles. I was the instructor for their Middle Childhood Reflective seminar course; I conducted observations at their field placement for three-months during student teaching, and I was the Program
Manager for the graduate teacher licensure program. Thus, an ethnographic perspective was used to create case studies for this research (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1994). I relied on participant observations, interviews, field notes, University coursework selected by the participants, and transcripts from audio recordings of weekly lessons in order to gain familiarity with the group of preservice teachers in the study and attend to the local meanings that impact their classroom pedagogy.

Given the social complexity of teaching and learning, the goal of each case study was to make visible and to understand how the participants made sense of discourse and interactions with students about race, equity, and their role as agents of change (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Gathering and analyzing data collected from multiple sources provided a foundation for understanding how the preservice teachers made meaning around issues related to race in particular contexts through the use of critical pedagogy. Comparing and looking for emerging patterns across data sources over a ten-month period achieved data triangulation.

To develop a theory that was grounded in the data, I engaged in a constant comparative method of analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). This design is based on a four stage iterative process that allows the researcher to inductively develop theory by categorizing data, developing codes, comparing and reducing categories, and making connections among categories. This work examines how preservice teachers’ conceptualized race, equity, and social change and used these conceptualizations to make pedagogical decisions during their student teaching. The design of this study adheres to
my belief in a grounded approach to research that seeks to represent an epic view. Pivotal questions that guided the direction of this study and pushed me to think about the impact this work could have on classroom literacy practices included: What would an equitable classroom look like? What types of conversations would take place there? How would issues of race, power and equity be addressed in ways that would facilitate social, emotional, and cognitive growth as well as social change?

**Significance**

Drawing on the work of Freire (1970, 1998) and hooks (1994), I use the term critical to indicate pedagogies that examine dominate ideologies about language, power, and knowledge production. Teaching and learning from a critical perspective would question power structures that lead to inequitable learning opportunities for marginalized groups. Operating within this framework, preservice teachers could juxtapose conceptual systems and provide their students with opportunities to investigate each on its own merits.

My dissertation suggests that a curriculum for young people that enables them to examine their concerns about their world is an important factor in academic success. I argue that by drawing on tenets of critical pedagogy in their planning and teaching of the literacy curriculum, preservice teachers are able to not only teach students to read and write skillfully, but also address the many ways that texts work in social life. Following Luke’s (2000) definition of the relationship between texts and social fields, I sought to document the ways preservice teachers succeeded (and failed) as they understood and re-
mediated “…what texts attempt to do in the world and to people, and [moved] students toward active position-takings with texts to critique and reconstruct the social fields in which they live and work” (p. 453).

While novice teachers are challenged by the prospect of mediating discussions about race, equity, or social change, they are also concerned with offering adequate time and attentions to the meaning and narrative forms literature offers. This study documents how preservice teachers interpret the racial and equity dimensions of their placements as they also plan for and interpret literature with sixth and seventh grade students.

Over the past decade, scholarship that examines the links between race, culture, and schooling has flourished, allowing scholars interested in race and pedagogy to develop new ways of looking at the links between race, culture, and pedagogy (Lynn, 2004). According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), race needs to be used as a “…theoretical lens for assessing social inequity” (p. 50) if we are to address the systemic and institutional factors that restrict race to functioning as handicap for students of color. Providing preservice teachers with support as they worked to interrogate their conceptions of race, equity, and social change provided an opportunity to examine how these conceptions influence the academic, social, and emotional relationships with students. The participants questioned the discourse about literacy instruction in their placements to move away from a linear skills based approach towards engaging students in a wide range of literacy practices that integrate a variety of skill sets.
This study aimed to document and analyze preservice teachers’ conceptualizations of race, equity and social change and how those constructs impact their classroom literacy practices. Crafting a framework for preparing preservice teachers to work with diverse populations must move beyond advocating for sound content knowledge and delivery to a sustained commitment to work against oppressive structures that impede the academic success of marginalized students. The goal of literacy teacher education should include making explicit efforts to guide preservice teachers to be better prepared to work with diverse student populations. To meet this goal, preservice teachers should be offered opportunities to critically reflect on their understanding of social issues and how those impact pedagogical decisions.

This study highlights specific challenges preservice teachers face in the field when attempting to converge race, equity, and social change through critical pedagogy in a middle school curriculum. The preservice teachers involved in this study developed strategies and relied on tools such as children’s literature, professional books, community resources, and popular media to examine dominant ideologies about race and equity. Each participant re-worked the literacy curriculum to dismantle hierarchies that sustain inequitable spaces to teach and learn. My research seeks to better understand how preservice teachers address specific relations of power and dynamics of race within the literacy classrooms that traditionally are ignored, and introduce new ways of thinking about race, equity and social change. Thus, this study will help teacher educators understand the depths of resistance and barriers, alongside the hopes and actions, from
multiple spaces when student teachers introduce a problem-posing literacy curriculum and its related ideologies in different middle school settings.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

“Underneath all the different interpretations of the term critical lies a common thread—you look at local context and meaning, just like we always have, but then you ask, why are things this way? What power, what interests, wrap this local world so tight that it feels like the natural order of things to its inhabitants?” – Agar, M. (1996)

This dissertation study examined three preservice teachers’ applications of critical pedagogy to address race, equity, and social change in three middle school settings. I locate my dissertation research within a critical pedagogical framework, and in doing so I am attentive to the various frameworks that complement it such as critical theory, critical race theory, and sociocultural theory. I am proposing that teaching-learning processes involving race, equity, and social change are sociocultural, socio-historical, and sociopolitical acts. This triad creates a relationship between pedagogical processes and the cultural, historical, institutional, and political factors that shape them.

Given the current state of education and the impact NCLB is having on children attending under resourced schools, critical theory offers a lens through which to develop critical reflection on and critique of the future of our educational system. Kincheloe (2004) reminds us that a “Critical perspective develops a language of critique to expose the way contemporary democratic societies maintain disparate social relations and in turn how these relationships shape pedagogy” (p. 55). My research reflects an interest in the
relationship between social inequity and pedagogy; thus, Kincheloe (2004) and Agar’s (1996) words remind me that critical theory works to expose injustice and create opportunity for reflexivity around issues of race, class, and gender. A critical framework, for preservice teachers, can provide a language through which they can view discrimination as systemic and not as an isolated event; develop a set of principles to operate from that are informed by critical pedagogy and advocacy; and expand pedagogical tools available to “read the world and the word” (Freire, 1970) as they name and interpret stereotypes and missing perspectives.

Critical theorists, including Apple (1996), Bartolomé (2004), Freire (1970), Giroux (2004), and hooks (2003, 1994, 1989) assert that in relations of power circulating through public institutions like school, oppression is formed as one group benefits by reducing the access to resources and knowledge production that should be available equitably to all people. Often, the inequity created around distribution of resources is taken for granted or intensified through procedures and relationships that are not transparent to all participants. Thus, people who experience oppression may come to believe that such inequities are part of a natural practice, in education, for teaching and learning.

Educators and researchers who draw upon critical theory (Bean & Moni, 2003; Damico with Riddle, 2006; Jones, 2006; Kinloch, 2007; Luke, 1997, Popkewitz, 1995) understand that social and historical contexts shape present day relations and argue that in every place where power is differentially distributed, we need to be vigilant in locating...
and examining who benefits, through what means, and with what definitions of equity. They raise questions such as: How is power used to dominate prevailing discourses about fairness, equity, and rights? Who manages resources and power? How are resources and power managed? What rationales are expressed to support a series of actions and decisions? Who benefits from these actions?

The relationship between power and pedagogy often goes unquestioned in daily classroom interactions. Students work under the assumption that their teacher is the authority figure in the classroom, and typically follow under his or her charge. Educators interested in disrupting this mindset find critical pedagogy a helpful tool in constructing a space where teachers and students view each other in reciprocal ways. Understanding the foundational role that critical theory plays in shaping critical pedagogy provides preservice teachers with a frame of reference for planning and enacting emancipatory practices.

When educators establish environments where multiple opinions are valued and expressed, acknowledge people who are marginalized, and discuss how these ideas manifest in classrooms, they are operating within a critical framework, specifically they are providing opportunities for students to expand and engage in transformative conceptions of literacy practices (Adamson, 2003; Enciso, 2004; Dyson (2008,1997); Morrell, 2004). Thus, critical theory provides a foundation for critical pedagogy to build upon and engage in emancipatory action (Darder, Baltondano, & Torres, 2003; Popkewitz, 1997).
As an educator and researcher who operates within a critical paradigm, I rely on a transactional, value-mediated epistemology. I come to know and understand the context I work in by collecting data using dialogic and dialectical methods to examine how the lived experiences of my participants construct and are constructed by social, political, economic, or cultural values. I pay attention to how the effects of those values shift and stabilize over time (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In doing so, I identify the kinds of knowledge learners need to acquire in order to participate in society as active informed citizens (McLaren, 1988).

Preservice teachers need experiences in their teacher education program to help them understand how race, equity, and power shape the ways teaching and learning are enacted in various spaces that extend or constrain access to quality education for all students. Engaging them in candid discussions about pedagogy, race, equity and social change invites them to craft a philosophy that accounts for the lived experiences of all students in their classrooms in meaningful and productive ways. This chapter presents a discussion about the need for teacher education to examine how critical approaches to literacy teaching and learning could inform our work with preservice teachers’ around issues of equity, diversity, and social change.

I am drawing on four bodies of literature to gain a better understanding of how this work has been addressed in the past and the areas we need to expand in the future: 1) Teacher education; 2) Critical Literacy; 3) Critical Pedagogy; and 4) Critical Race Theory. I acknowledge that while there are other bodies of work to draw upon, the focus
of my study is better situated within these intersections due to the nature of the questions and the context of the study. Central to my study is understanding how preservice teachers’ framing of critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and equity create and constrain opportunities to understand the specific ways they conceptualize and enact critical pedagogy with middle school students in their field placement sites.

Teacher Education

According to Cochran-Smith & Fries (2005), there is an overwhelming consensus that our nation’s schools are at-risk and failing to perform at high standards due to poor quality instruction. At the crux of every education crisis is an inadequately prepared classroom teacher. While Cochran-Smith & Fries do not endorse this viewpoint, the subtext of these messages is that traditional teacher education programs are not preparing competent professionals to work successfully with school-aged children. The dilemma for teacher education is how to incorporate this feedback and re-imagine our work with preservice teachers while resisting the narrowly designed paradigm upon which this view was constructed. As a field, how do we move forward with progressive frameworks for teacher education?

The guidelines for examining those questions must begin with the premise that teacher education programs have a responsibility to prepare students for teaching in the 21st century (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This charge moves beyond attending to standards, value-added systems, and classroom management strategies. Our new generation of teachers will need to understand complexities such as transnational
immigration, bilingual education, and inclusive education related to teaching and learning in communities with students and families who understand the world from a different perspective than the typically white, middle class, heterosexual female teacher their son or daughter will be working with in the classroom.

There is a great concern among critical educators that our current system of schooling has a strong tendency to socialize students based on the dominant ideology. Currently the majority of teacher education faculties are white, middle class, and monolingual with limited experience working with diverse communities and advocating for equitable education. With a limited number of teacher education programs sufficiently prepared or committed to disrupt this trend, there is a growing call for preparation programs to re-conceptualize and re-tool their curriculum to meet 21st century demands (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Across the literature there is a trend of white preservice teachers failing to authentically engage in critical readings and discussions related to diversity, multiculturalism, or anti-oppressive education on the systemic acts of discrimination (Lewison et al, 2002; Marx, 2003). This body of work provides valuable information about how students in teacher education programs respond to challenges made against the dominant narrative that served as the backdrop to their educational success. It was only through this growing body of literature that teacher educators began to reexamine their programs and make conceptual shifts in curriculum, field experiences, course offerings, and licensure requirements. Sleeter’s (2001) work documented ways white preservice
teachers used the notion of colorblindness to cope with their fears associated with equity and diversity. The students in her study were uncomfortable discussing, examining, and being asked to address how privilege masks inequities that students from under-resourced schools live with on a daily basis. Sleeter’s study highlighted the importance of working through resistance and exploring privilege before preservice teachers receive their initial teacher license and enter the profession unequipped to redress systems of oppression that limit the achievement of students in under resourced schools.

Bartolomé’s (2004) work echoes this premise in its assertion that teacher education programs create avenues for preservice teachers to interrogate their “… assumptions, values, and beliefs and how this ideological posture informs their perceptions and actions when working with linguistic-minority and other politically, socially, and economically subordinated students” (p.97). Her argument implies that many preservice teachers enter teacher education programs without this experience, bringing with them unexamined and unchallenged beliefs that are not beneficial to the students they work with in public school settings. I would add that these beliefs create a barrier between new ideological stances that preservice teachers could take up to understand how their cultural lives have prepared them to challenge or maintain the status quo, as well to transform how they conceptualize the role of the classroom teacher.

This issue is further complicated when teachers of color attempt to engage their students in conversations on race, diversity, or multicultural education. Williams & Evans-Winter (2005) report the difficulties they encountered as teachers of color when
trying to engage white preservice teachers in discussions about race. The participants in their study questioned the political motivation behind the classroom conversations, and expressed the belief that discussions about race and racism should be left out of education.

The former assertion supports Gordon’s (2005) findings that important matters related to race are “…dodged, suppressed, or ignored altogether” (p. 137) by preservice teachers. By exercising their agency to resist seeing color, racism, whiteness, and privilege, preservice teachers are making a deliberate decision not to acknowledge, and therefore take up, tenets related to anti-racist practices. This resistance includes refusal to sift through their own misconceptions about race, equity, and social change and how those misconceptions play out in the classroom.

Bartolomé’s (2004) analyses provide additional insight into the context many preservice teachers bring to their teacher education program. Her study demonstrates that teacher education programs must work to understand and address the deficit orientation held by many preservice teachers, or risk undermining their students’ creditability with students and families who have racial, cultural, economic, or linguistic differences with them. Her work with preservice teachers exposed widespread beliefs that students in under-resourced schools -who are primarily poor Black and Brown children- are not capable of succeeding because of their linguistic, cultural, racial, or class backgrounds. Bartolomé’s findings suggest that preservice teachers (regardless of background) accept
the dominant ideology regarding social order and meritocracy. The students in her study believe the system is fair and accept it as natural.

One avenue to combat students’ resistance to critical racial analyses is to create required courses grounded in multicultural and anti-racist pedagogies. Many teacher education programs have made efforts to implement this idea with the goal of better preparing future teachers to work with diverse populations (Cross, 2005; Garmon, 2004; Sleeter, 2001). However, Bartolomé (2004) finds that preservice teachers resent having to take courses that challenge their ideologies. Given this, Gordon (2005) recommends offering multicultural courses, diverse field experiences, and curricula infused with tenets of multiculturalism to address the gap between white teachers and the students of color that they serve. In support of Gordon’s findings, Wiggins et al.’s (2007) study of diverse field experiences for preservice teachers found that immersion in schools with populations that do not share the same cultural, socioeconomic, or racial status, can lead to more culturally responsive teachers. In order to achieve this, multiple levels of support should be provided for preservice teachers as they are placed in settings with students who share different backgrounds.

As a former elementary teacher who strived to look for the best in each student, I am overwhelmed and deeply troubled by the grand narrative this body of work produces. While working on this review of literature I read a variety of studies filled with accounts of how preservice teachers resisted discussions related to race, diversity, and multicultural education. It affected the way I saw and related to the preservice teachers in
my university program. I began to assume that the majority of white, middle-class female
students I had yet to work with would fall into the same pattern. Being an African-
American woman did little to calm my apprehension. My concerns about how the
students in my courses would respond to issues of race, equity, and social justice
increased the tension I was experiencing when crafting course syllabi. Each time I
selected a piece of children’s literature or found an article to add to a course packet, I
wondered if my students would revolt. Would they openly resist reading and discussing
the texts and sub-texts I had selected for the course? Would they question my selections
based on my appearance and disregard the scholarly process I went through to make these
curricular decisions?

I had fallen into the trap of deciding the assignments my students were to
complete before I gave them a chance to exist as learners in my class. After teaching
several courses and engaging in pedagogies that foster critical consciousness, I learned a
lot about my students and why many of their fears often get labeled as resistance. Many
of them shared stories about growing up in communities with people who only looked
like them and the sense of shame and guilt they associated with this reality. They
constantly needed assurance that raising questions or not knowing how to ask a question
in a “politically correct way” did not make them racist or anti-multicultural. I began to
realize that this overwhelming sense of guilt and fear created a semi-permeable barrier
that many of my students were not sure how to cross.
For some students, experiencing this situation may be too much to handle; therefore they chose to respond negatively out of fear. Clearly I do not want to create a narrative that provides an excuse to re-center whiteness and the privileges associated with it (Ryan & Dixson, 2006; Thompson, 2003). Yet I question the pedagogy teacher educators expose our students to when trying to engage them in topics they have limited experience discussing in small or large groups.

The aforementioned experiences with preservice teachers and the associated literature review have exposed limitations to the body of work that represents preservice teacher dispositions toward race, equity, and social change. The growing number of studies that describe preservice teachers constructs a linear trajectory of who they are and who they will become. However, such studies oftentimes do not acknowledge the contradictions or positions that students assume or take on when it comes to addressing issues of diversity. From my own experiences, I argue that this dilemma is more complex than the literature would have us believe. There are some students who struggle with their role as advocates or allies concerning race, equity, and diversity. These students may be resistant to acknowledging their implication in a society that systematically discriminates against those who are non-white.

On the other hand, there are students who want to be allies, even if they are not sure how to go about doing that work. Both sets of students are complicit in this dance, and on some level, may understand how this inherent contradiction creates a barrier that is difficult to penetrate. I believe that my job as a teacher educator is to avoid the binary
that these statistics imply by helping students understand the range of responses and positions available, while, simultaneously, assisting them in moving along the spectrum.

Given the goal of movement in understanding and action (see chapter 1), I believe that preservice literacy teachers need space within their teacher education program to interrogate meanings of race, equity, and social change and the impact these things have on their literacy pedagogy. This interrogation serves to challenge the color-blind ideology students may hide behind, heighten their cultural and racial awareness, and prepare them to reflect critically on their practices and interactions with students, families, and mentor teachers.

Reworking the field

Seidl’s (2007) work with preservice teachers highlights possible options for partnering with community members to examine and discuss issues related to race, class, and culture. Her study created a space to work with preservice teachers that helped them become bicultural or biclass competent through working with an African American church to provide after school tutoring and literacy support. Her findings suggest that white students who have little experience with students of color need to consider what it means to teach non-white, and non-middle class students. In this way, white students can have extended opportunities to discuss and reflect on what those experiences mean for their teaching.

Arguing that race plays a role in people’s perceptions of others, Seidl (2007) argues that students need to work on “acknowledging the role and history of race and
racism in our society and the ways in which this history affects relationships between communities…” (p.8). Key to her findings is the notion that race is a part of identity – especially for students of color. Yet students coming from white middle class backgrounds are taught to deny this because they are socialized to believe that it is rude, and therefore “side-step” conversations about race. In other words, “race and racism come to occupy a deafening silence in many spaces, including classrooms” (p.8). Seidl advocates for preservice teachers to develop a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the historical and political legacy of race. Her work supports the ideas of fostering open, responsible discourse on race with preservice teachers to become aware of and challenge the politics of skin color while disrupting the hegemonic practices that sustain oppressive structures.

Dillard’s (2006) work continues this theme by describing how preservice teachers struggle to “do the right thing” without having the cultural background or lessons learned from experience to guide them. Through her practice of journaling with students, she has provided space for them to share their frustrations, fears, and hopes that often involve advocating for less oppressive environments to teach, live, and learn. Although Dillard does not locate her work within a critical frame, I believe this example illustrates that Black feminist critical pedagogy involves transformation, as much as critique. As a field, critical teacher educators need more examples like Dillard’s (2006) to hold ourselves accountable for doing the work with preservice teachers that we expect them to engage in with their students.
Literacy Education

The above perspectives, grounded in research on teacher education, are interdisciplinary in nature because this study examines the underlying concepts of critical theory and pedagogy through research and theory in literacy education. Two questions that frame the studies in this section include: What does it mean to be literate in the 21st century? What theoretical frame(s) guide pedagogical decisions for literacy instruction in middle grade classrooms? To provide a survey of critical literacy education related to this dissertation, I will focus on scholarship related to critical literacy instruction in teacher education. I define literacy as those situations for learning and expressing knowledge about oneself and the world through reference to texts (broadly defined).

My work begins with the premise that literacy is socially constructed, and those social constructions erect barriers for some students while providing advantages for others. Therefore, evoking critical pedagogical practices within the school literacy curriculum challenges conceptions of literacy that make instruction exclusionary both in practice and content (Lankshear & Knoble, 1997). I am advocating for preservice teachers to draw upon and create new literacy practices that provide students with opportunities to question how marginalized groups are shaped within society and how these manifestations are contested (Morrell, 2004).

The middle school literacy curriculum is often shaped by the urgency to support struggling and striving readers. Cognitive theories that address reading acquisition lay the foundation for normalized discourse by focusing on benchmarks that allow some to
be viewed as making progress or on target (normal), and others as not progressing or lagging behind (deficient) (Lave, 1994). The epistemological assumption is that reading comprehension could be segmented, measured, and ranked. Within this framework literacy is not viewed as a social process, but an individual cognitive act that can be separated from the sociohistorical conditions that it developed in. This separation occurs when students are asked to read and analyze texts in isolation from their peers and the historical context that produced the text.

Within an academic or school setting this process involves students and teachers using language to mediate discussions and generate knowledge around texts. Working with preservice literacy teachers to deconstruct normalized literacy practices that are foundational to how school curriculum operate and only located in behaviorist or cognitive approaches to reading, requires a shift in paradigm. The term reading is associated with constructing meaning from a text based on the reader’s cultural and cognitive resources.

The term literacy is commonly used to refer to the ability to read and write. By expanding that definition to account for cultural influences one could understand how literacies are contextual and can be used as a tool to get work done. I draw upon the work of literacy educators who propose that literacies are cultural ways of thinking, reasoning, and doing (Bloome, 1985, 2004; Faulkner, 2005; Gee, 1997; Street, 2004; Unrau, 2004). Viewing literacy through this lens provides space for taking up multiple literacies that students’ rely on to accomplish tasks in their personal, home, and/or academic lives.
Therefore, literacy can be thought of as cultural ways that students work with language and text to make meaning and get work done in multiple domains (Faulkner, 2005). Situating literacy practices in their social context would allow preservice teachers to explore their function in society and how that information is made available across all populations in order to access how readers actively rely on their rational judgment about the world as they encounter the word (Freire, 1970).

I am arguing that critical literacy is an integral part of preparing preservice teachers to be literacy educators and that teacher education programs have an obligation to focus on the sociopolitical nature of literacy. An expanded view of reading education in particular and literacy education in general, would push faculty and students to explore conversations that center on power, discourse, and access. Given the current political climate around literacy and the so-called “literacy crisis” our country is facing, it would be negligent to send new teachers into the classroom without a sophisticated understanding of how they can become “savvy text consumers” (Vasquez, 2004) and move beyond narrow definitions of literacy. Foregrounding critical literacy in teacher education literacy programs creates opportunities for future literacy teachers to “interrogate texts and challenge social constructs, ideologies, underlying assumptions, and power structures that intentionally and unintentionally perpetuate social inequities and injustices” (Wallowitz, 2008, p.2) in our society. In order for preservice teachers to understand that literacy represents an ideology, they have to recognize and interrogate the social, cultural, and historical influences that impact text production (McCormick, 1996).
The Role of Critical Literacy in Teacher Education

In my experience preservice teachers often use and confuse the terms “critical thinking” and “critical literacy.” Many associate the term critical with a cognitive orientation, (i.e. higher order thinking), but use the labels indiscriminately. Cognitive theories that address reading acquisition lay the foundation for normalized discourse by focusing on benchmarks that allow some to be viewed as making progress or on target-normal, and others as not progressing or lagging behind-deficient (Lave, 1994). The epistemological assumptions are that reading and comprehension could be segmented, measured, and ranked. Within this framework literacy is not viewed as a social process, but an individual cognitive act that can be separated from the sociohistorical conditions that it was developed in.

Words such as remediation and recovery are used within a cognitive framework to define those who do not succeed because reading is cast as a measurable act that is politically, culturally, economically, and socially neutral. In this view someone would always be labeled as not knowing as much, unable to achieve, lacking ability, exhibiting a deficit. Cognitive theories allow for students to be grouped and tracked according to their perceived ability with instruction tailored to challenge those who were capable and remEDIATE those who were struggling. This results in reading being constructed as an autonomous practice (Street, 1995).

To move beyond an autonomous view toward an ideological view of literacy (Street, 1995), I argue that preservice teachers need sustained opportunities to critique the
relationship among language, power, and literacy practices. First steps would include understanding the need to acknowledge and take into account multiple ways of being literate (Heath, 1983) and the hierarchy that is imposed and sustained that falls along racial, gender, and class lines. Paulo Freire’s work (1970) cemented the foundation for a theory of liberatory literacy pedagogy that many scholars have extended into the classroom (Heffernan, 2008; Souto-Manning, 2009; Vasquez, 2004;) and teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2005,2006,2007; Irrizary, 2009; Nieto, 2005; Torres-Guzman, 2005).

In the wake of restrictive and scripted environments that many public school teachers find themselves working to navigate, it is imperative to critique mandated texts and work with preservice teachers to establish this practice in their field placement sites. There has never been a greater need to take off the blinders and engage the world we live in, particularly for students living and working in under resourced schools. Ignoring the violence and dilapidated conditions that youth, particularly poor youth of color, endure does not honor or extend Freire's (1970) notion of “reading the word to read the world”. I find Shannon’s (1995) definition of critical literacy helpful in constructing pedagogies that explore race, power, and social change:

Critical perspectives push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it becomes a means for understanding one’s own history and culture, to recognize connections between one’s life and the social structure, to believe that change in
one’s life, and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and to act on this new knowledge in order to foster equal and just participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives. (p.83)

Given that, this study focuses on literacy practices that preservice teachers and middle school students engaged in to voice their concerns about their world. I argue that by drawing on four dimensions of critical literacy, a subset of critical pedagogy, in their planning and teaching, preservice teachers are able to not only teach students to read and write skillfully, but also address the many ways that texts work in social life. Following Luke’s definition of the relationship between texts and social fields, this study documented the ways preservice teachers succeeded (and failed) as they understood and re-mediated “…what texts attempt to do in the world and to people, and [moved] students toward active position-takings with texts to critique and reconstruct the social fields in which they live and work.” (Luke, 2000, p. 453).

Drawing on Lewison, Seely Flint, and Van Sluys’ (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy as the primary frame of analysis provides insights into the processes that preservice teachers used to conceptualize critical pedagogy, plan and implement critical practices in their classrooms, reflect on their learning, and develop an pedagogy of advocacy based on their experiences.

Lewison, Seely Flint, and Van Sluys’ (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy are:

- Disrupting the commonplace
• Interrogating multiple viewpoints
• Focusing on the sociopolitical
• Taking action and promoting social justice

These four interrelated dimensions provide a layered analysis of my data collected. Together they construct an in-depth and multi-faceted framework that accounts for each participant’s journey toward understanding and creating pedagogy based on critical perspectives. The dimensions in this framework provide a mechanism for understanding how the participants’ classroom practices changed over time.

Drawing on sociocultural theories of reading that are informed by critical perspectives would locate reading as a social and communicative process (Bloome, 1985), not an autonomous practice (Street, 1995). This conceptualization foregrounds the social relationships involved in reading such as interacting with others, negotiating social position, and becoming socialized in culturally accepted ways of thinking, responding, and being with texts (Bloome, 1985). Luke and Freebody (1997) explain:

Reading is a social practice using written texts as a means for the construction and reconstruction of statements, messages, and meanings. Reading is actually “done” in the public and private spaces of everyday community, occupational and academic institutions. Reading is tied in the politics and power relations of everyday life in literature culture.” (p. 185)

A critical approach to literacy instruction ensures that teaching and learning create space for teacher education students and faculty to examine the discourse around
knowledge, to question if it is “oppressive or exploitive” which expands how knowledge can be interrogated. By moving beyond the idea of knowledge as a true or false binary (McLaren, 1997), preservice teachers can begin to re-conceptualize what knowledge does, how it is used, and how they can make use of it.

Bringing a critical perspective, influenced by socio-cognitive and sociocultural theory, to the field of reading provides a framework to critique the power dynamics related to class, race, and gender that may have been neutralized in earlier conversations. By situating the reading process in a sociohistorical and political context, critical educators create space for examining how schools take up and shape reading, who benefits from those practices and who is stymied (Morrell, 2004). As a goal, critical educators draw awareness to this issue and work in a collaborative manner to address the ramifications of labeling poor students as struggling or at risk because they do not benefit from the current system of literacy instruction in our classrooms.

Expanding the framework for reading teacher education allows critical educators like Otinsky (2007) to explore with her preservice teachers what literacy learning means for different groups of people and highlight literacy practices that are not acknowledged within traditional academic settings. In Otinsky’s study, she used inquiry as a vehicle to focus on dominant and marginalized conceptions of literacy with the goal of transforming oppressive social conditions. Creating time and space in preservice teacher programs for students to engage in critical work around literacy practices and texts allows them to become creators of meaning. Thus, students would be active participants in constructing
how texts are taken up and what actions can occur such as surveying families in their field placement sites to understand which issues related to equity are important in that community or working with local community organization in the field placement site to establish, staff, and maintain literacy service learning projects to address issues related to empowerment.

Applying a critical orientation to literacy education would embrace a dialectical view of knowledge that works to expose the relationship between objective knowledge and “common sense” cultural norms (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres (2003). This principle is necessary for teachers who value the interconnections between theory and practice and plan to provide space in the classroom for preservice teachers to question the common sense way of doing reading or engaging in literacy practices and experience how their actions can shape and re-shape the social, economic, cultural, and political landscape around them (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres (2003).

Within this expanded view of reading education, the classroom lessons preservice teachers create would begin to reflect the social and constructive nature of reading. As a result, the activities they construct for students in their field placement sites would push them to discover multiple meanings within a text by drawing upon their various backgrounds to analyze the implications of texts as social productions.

Infusing principals of critical literacy in teacher education recognizes that children live out a politicized literacy curriculum and that they are capable of participating in discussions about it (McGillis, 1996). It prompts preservice teachers to understand that
without critical interpretation of texts, students may accept the social values, behaviors, and cultural ways of viewing the world that lead to conformity or in severe circumstances political sterilization. I believe this recognition leads to an understanding that texts are not the single holder of meaning and that they can be read from various perspectives that are contextual in nature and dependent upon one’s lived experience.

**Critical Pedagogy**

The current political climate has reinvigorated an epistemological rift among educational researchers regarding criteria used to measure and define scientific research (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002; Pellegrino & Goldman, 2002). What counts as educational research, who is in position to define what counts as educational research, and the implications that ensue are far reaching and have had a dramatic impact on how classroom teachers make instructional decisions on a daily basis (Boomer, 2005; Rankie Shelton, N & Fu, D, 2004). The mere imposition of the question, what counts as research, serves as a constraint upon the types of pedagogies that teachers are willing to experiment with in the classroom, let alone preservice teachers. If research drives instruction, and only certain types of research count—what options do preservice teachers have to reach out to youth who are marginalized by the status quo?

I argue that exploring the intersection of teacher education, critical literacy, and critical pedagogy would help preservice teachers and faculty recognize and locate how they are positioned when reading texts that address issues of subjugation, domination, and exploitation. Doing so positions them to read, write, question, and think critically.
They will better understand how people produce and consume texts that represent, shape, and reshape their identity as they draw on multiple systems to make meaning of these texts and use multiple literacies to read and write their own world.

Critical pedagogy is an evolving theory and practice that is a reflection of and a response to the current political landscape (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996). The judgments that critical pedagogues make are guided by questions that examine the relationship among power, language, and identity. Educators who draw on critical pedagogy to inform their practice believe that knowledge is socially constructed, contextual, and dependent on interpretation (Giroux, 1997; Luke, 2000; McLaren, 1988; Popkewitz, 1997). They are interested in what type of knowledge best serves human emancipation (Popkewitz, 1997) and seek to destabilize asymmetrical power relations along the lines of class, gender, race, and sexuality

When teachers fuse this agenda with their pedagogical decisions, it becomes a vehicle for change. Thus, critical pedagogy is an orientation towards pedagogy that encompasses classroom practices and instructional decisions and foregrounds the premise that people are agents of change. It provides a link between critical theory and classroom practices that educators rely on to transform their classrooms into spaces where students can engage in conversations around issues of race, equity, and social change. Preservice teachers who draw on principles of critical pedagogy strive to create links between the practice of schooling and democratic principles of society to transform oppressive practices (McLaren, 2003; Shor, 1988).
Educators who operate within a critical frame believe that schooling should be tied to struggle for equity and utilize critical pedagogy as means to rid schools of practices that lead to exploitation and social injustice. For preservice teacher committed to these ideas, questioning the curriculum to uncover the political, social, and economic implications is a necessary first step. Doing so would disrupt dominant practices through resistant reading and rewriting, participation in discussions about texts that rely on personal experiences in the world to interpret the word, and explicit sustained engagement with literacy practices that foster social interaction.

Although critical theory and critical pedagogy provide a framework for attending to the sociopolitical dimensions of learning, there is a perspective missing from the paradigm. Walker (2006) reminds us that teaching and learning in any environment begins with a sincere commitment to affirm humanity. It is our quest for this affirmation that allows a community of people, regardless of race, class, and gender to work toward ending oppressive situations. At the heart of any newly formed alliance is a sense of care and humanity. When preservice teachers co-construct spaces with their middle school students to challenge misrepresentations of marginalized groups, they do so to affirm their students’ humanity by allowing them to speak with fearlessness and honesty.

I include the concept of care to acknowledge a missing component from the patriarchal view of critical pedagogy. My inclusion of care acknowledges the influence that Black feminist theory and pedagogy have on my conceptualization of advocacy and transformative education. The work of Walker (2006), hooks (1994, 2003), Morrison
(1992), Dillard (2006), and Lorde (1984) contribute another lens to view teaching and learning that encourages community and love. I believe that it is within their theorizing of community and collective engagement that critical pedagogy finds its pulse.

**Principles of Critical Pedagogy**

According to Darder, Baltodano, & Torres (2003) critical pedagogy advocates for the development of a school culture that supports assisting culturally and economically marginalized students to empower themselves by becoming part of the struggle to determine what is considered legitimate knowledge. Critical pedagogues recognize (and advocate for society to acknowledge) that school is not a neutral site for learning that provides equal access for all students. They (critical pedagogues) work to open up spaces for their students to resist the roles presented to them by speaking about their condition (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Morrell, 2004; Vasquez, 2003). This study expands our understanding of how three preservice teachers enact critical pedagogy in their classroom.

Embracing a dialectical view of knowledge that emphasizes how human activity is a product and a force that shapes the world (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003), preservice teachers who draw on critical pedagogy believe that problems attributed to asymmetrical power relations in society implicate the individual and society because they interact and inform one another. In a school setting this occurs when teachers become complacent with the scripted curriculums tied to mandated testing. When first introduced, the tests are marketed as benchmark assessments that will guide classroom instruction.
As soon as these benchmarks become fixed measurements that rank achievement, and therefore reflect on classroom pedagogy, many teachers find it difficult to resist tailoring their instruction to mimic the form and substance of these tests. Then, as students begin to perform poorly (according to these instruments), more restrictive and prescriptive curricula invade the classroom. In the end, the teachers’ over-reliance on the curriculum guides outweighs the needs of the students. But, in order to demonstrate adherence to district standards, the teachers continues to adhere to the script. All the while, the teacher knows the script is unless and is contributing to the stifled test scores his or her students are receiving. So not only does the curriculum fail to prepare students to perform on the tests, the tests fails to measure what students actually know.

These interactions are evident through contradictions that are prevalent in our society, particularly in the middle school settings the participants in this study were placed in for their student teaching. For example, some schools use ‘tracking’ to provide students with appropriate paced instruction. However, using tracking as a system to group students into courses does not support the notion of schooling as a great equalizer that provides students with opportunity or equal access to challenging courses. Critical educators rely on a paradigm that is dialectical in nature to allow them to view school as a site of marginalization and indoctrination, as well as a site for emancipation and transformation (McLaren, 2003). I take this to mean that many teachers and students do conform to school structures and requirements, but also find ways to resist oppressive structures within their compliance.
Based on my analysis of literature related to critical pedagogy, I believe it advocates: (1) reflecting on and revising instructional practices across time and space; (2) working in “real-time” without the aide of a blueprint or script; (3) re-imagining classroom practices to take into account, build upon, and extend students’ “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005); (4) establishing a learning environment where students are seen as active participants who construct knowledge, negotiate meaning, and use their agency to challenge oppressive practices that marginalize groups in our society.

For preservice teachers working in middle school classrooms this means acknowledging the political nature or unsanctioned curriculum that exists within their field placement sites and actively working to construct an alternative for students to engage in. By doing so, they are placed in vulnerable positions as multiple stakeholders who often hold conflicting ideologies about instructing middle school students are evaluating their competence. I believe that if we ask preservice teachers to deconstruct the curriculum and create options that do not marginalize particular groups of students, we need to make sure they have the support and foundation needed to accomplish this task.

Picower’s (2007) study of New York University’s Social Justice Critical Inquiry Project (here after referred to as CIP) provides insight by tracking how graduates from their program continue to incorporate equity-centered pedagogies in their classroom. Findings from her study suggest that providing a social justice framework and inquiry
group for preservice teachers to draw upon as they enter the profession. This support helps them to become competent and successful urban educators. As part of the teacher education program, preservice teachers are introduced to a social justice education framework as they work in urban field placement sites making connections between theory and practice.

The program continues into their first year of teaching, providing curriculum development support and professional development. By participating in a project that relies on their stories, questions that arise from their classroom practice, and a supportive space to process the implications for their students, recent graduates continue to investigate and develop curriculum and effective pedagogies to meet the ever-changing needs of under resourced areas. This study underscores the importance of working with preservice teachers during and immediately following their teacher education program, to develop and reflect on anti-oppressive pedagogies that seek to promote equitable living and learning conditions for all public school children.

The findings from Picower’s (2007) study are supported in Reed & Black’s (2006) research detailing their work related to equity, advocacy, and pedagogy with preservice teachers in the World Educational Links program (hereafter referred to as WEL). This program began as an initiative to “prepare future educators for anti-oppressive teaching, critical pedagogy, and social activism” (p. 34). The WEL program has a dual purpose: to develop preservice teachers investment in critical pedagogy and teacher activism through a full-year initial teacher licensure program focused on
transformative learning. The faculty engaged their preservice teachers in discussions about the current educational system to assist them in understanding the social, political, and historical context of education and their role in this system.

The preservice teachers in this program are presented with information about white privilege, injustice, and their role in developing an anti-racist white identity that may have been excluded in previous schooling experiences. As they reflect upon assigned readings and cultural experiences, many struggled with coming to terms with their role in maintaining and benefiting from an unjust society. The faculty in the WEL program assisted the preservice teachers through this process by focusing on teaching for equity and social justice, developing a stance as an activist educator, and supporting their students in learning to transform their knowledge into action. Four pedagogical principals form the basis of curriculum development and classroom instruction throughout the WEL program. Preservice teachers were asked to consider the following concepts as they prepare for content area standards:

1. Community building
2. Participatory classroom processes
3. Student–centered constructivist pedagogy
4. Critical inquiry and reflection

Thus, the focus was to engage preservice teachers in discussions about pedagogy and curriculum development that led to further reflection about how knowledge is constructed in schools to meet the needs of all students. The preservice teachers involved in the WEL
program graduated with tools and resources that required them to reflect on their role as advocate and educator, and to consistently challenge themselves to make teaching and learning an inclusive political act.

My dissertation builds on the ideas presented in this growing body of literature by foregrounding the inquiries of three preservice teachers and context of their field placement sites. Previous studies (Leland & Harste, 2005; Labbo (2007); cluster all of these students together with generalizable statements about their commitment and resistance to address inequitable learning environments for children in our nation’s public schools. My study provides context and background about particular students in order to critique how they disrupted inequitable patterns in their field placement sites. Thus, connections among critical theory, critical pedagogy, and classroom practice are analyzed.

**Critical Race Theory**

Educational scholarship is a good site for examining the construction of race and how it manifests in curricular decisions that effect middle school students. In the past decade, scholarship that has examined the connection among race, culture, and schooling has flourished allowing scholars to develop new ways of analyzing the links between race, culture, and pedagogy (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lee, 1995). Understanding the epistemological underpinnings of research related to race has the potential to allow us to examine the assumptions that typically go unquestioned. Race and racism manifest itself in subtle ways so educational researchers need to
examine the role race has in the daily experiences of students of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Due to myths about race being perceived as truth, Montagu (1997) asserts, “… many people continue to believe that race is a reality, a fact, that some “races” are superior to others.” (p. 43). That being the case, race can be viewed as a heuristic that is used to maintain unequal power structures within our society. Critical race theory focuses on the effects of race and racism and can serve as an analytic tool for examining the social construction of race within a middle school setting. I argue that because school and literacy are social constructions and race is a social construction, using a critical race perspective to analyze literacy practices in middle school allows one to understand (a) permanence of racism; (b) whiteness as property; and (c) counter-storytelling (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Critical race theory (hereafter CRT) originated from conversations that circulated among scholars of color within Critical Legal Studies concerning the group’s failure to take up issues that pertained to race. CRT locates itself within the intersection of critical theory and race, racism, and the law. It grew out of a need to establish terminology for discussing issues related to race and oppression that were not available in current scholarship (Crenshaw et al., 1995). According to Crenshaw (1995) “critical race theorists seek to fashion a set of tools for thinking about race that avoids the traps of racial thinking.” (p. xxxii). CRT provides a legitimate framework for sharing stories about how race has affected people of color in this country which “talks back” (hooks, 1989) to the dominant narrative that serves as a force of oppression for people of color.
Mutsau da (1995) explains that the goal of CRT is to work towards ending oppressive practices that marginalize people of color, while working toward ending all forms of oppression.

Although CRT emerged from the field of legal studies, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) built upon this framework to explore tenets of CRT in educational research. In their article *Toward a critical race theory of education*, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) contend that descriptions of inequitable school experiences and academic resources between middle class white students and students of color (Kozol, 1992) are the result of a racialized society that does not acknowledge or take up issues of race.

Making the connection between race and property rights supported Ladson-Billings & Tate’s (1995) argument that school inequity is the result of racism being endemic in a society that was based on exclusionary property rights. In this context property refers to rights or privileges, not just material artifacts. Whiteness implicitly and explicitly carries with it-unrestricted access to privileges to educational opportunities that are restricted to others. For example, schools with predominantly white students offer more electives and advanced placement courses than schools with predominately African-American students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Drawing upon critical race theory as a tool for analysis requires educational researchers and curriculum developers to recognize and then work to alleviate the systematic structures that allow these situations to develop.
As suggested in Dixson & Rousseau’s (2005) review of literature of CRT, educational researchers should make efforts to align the initial tenets founded in legal studies to education. For the purpose of this study I will draw upon the following three tenets outlined in DeCuir & Dixson’s (2004) work on CRT to frame my critical analysis of the context in which the participants in my student engaged in critical literacy practices with middle school students: (a) permanence of racism (Bell, 1995); (b) whiteness as property (Harris, 1995); and (c) counter-story telling.

**Permanence of racism**

Racism is endemic in American society and I believe that it is necessary to view it within its historical confines to understand the gravity of its impact on education. Middle school students work in environments that are set up to control and manage them based upon a biological construction of adolescence. A social construction of adolescence would acknowledge how students could experience the environment in different ways and how those differences result in the marginalization of particular groups of students. Viewing adolescence as a social construction calls into question how schools operate, how students are perceived, and how their experiences differ based on other social constructions that affect their daily life. Gender, age, class, ability, sexuality, and for the purpose of this paper, race, are a few social constructions that impact the lives of middle school students.

Middle schools are not neutral environments that exist outside of society. Teachers and students who work and interact within these spaces bring with them a
history that has shaped how they respond and work together as well as ideas that they choose to adhere to. McLaren (1988) argues that schooling is a form of cultural politics that introduces students to particular forms of social life that involve power and social practices that privileged forms of knowledge that reproduce inequality. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) maintain that the inequalities that students of color face within multiple institutions in our society (especially school) “… are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized.” (p. 47). I am interested in how we move these discussions out of the margins and into the center with a particular focus on the structure of middle schools.

Based upon a biological construction of adolescence, middle school is set up as a universalized experience that all students encounter in the same manner. However, race and adolescence are social constructions and refusing to acknowledge the cultural, economic, and historical influences groups of students bring with them into the classroom, ignores the experiences of being “raced” within a middle school environment. CRT provides a frame to challenge these hegemonic claims by critiquing the fundamental principals that allows race and racism to be constructed within that system. The permanence of racism and whiteness as property are two tenets of CRT that allow us to understand the connections between the social construction of race and of adolescence.

_Whiteness as Property_

If middle schools are currently set up to meet the needs of the typical adolescent, and the information used to construct this prototype ignored or failed to account for
students experiences of “being raced” in our schools, then how can middle schools claim to be sites that “develop healthy, productive, and ethical citizens.” (http://www.nmsa.org/) when the organization fails to acknowledge the problem? One possible explanation is that middle schools have been set up to preserve and reproduce structures that allow a color-blind ideology to permeate their organizations. If race is not considered to be a problem for those who maintain and structure middle schools, or is perceived to be a problem for people of color, then one could argue that there is no need to address race, which means that there is no need to address whiteness, meaning there is no need to critique the privileges associated with being white.

*Counter-Storytelling*

Although data provides insights into how race impacts educational opportunities for students of color, personal narratives, or counterstories provide further depth and grounded examples of what racism looks like in action. DeCuir & Dixson’s (2004) study of two African American students experiences at an elite K-12 academy utilizes counter-storytelling (Matsuda,1995) to illustrate how these students were “culturally alienated, culturally isolated”, and silenced (p. 26). DeCuir & Dixson’s (2004) define counter-storytelling as:

A means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. The use of counterstories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses…therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups (p. 27)
Counter-stories provided spaces to name oppressive acts that may not support dominate narratives of what life is like in a particular context. They serve as an alternative perspective that preserves evidence of what life has been and is within our society. Lawrence (1995) argues that counter-stories are a form of praxis and resistance to oppression. They are a useful construct to use within a CRT framework because they give authority and validity to the lived experiences of those whose intuition and judgment are often questioned and/or dismissed.

There are several important arguments that Dixson and Rousseau (2005) make about the tenets of CRT in education. The problems that occur when “The dominant discourse positions colour-blindness as an ideal” (p. 14) were of particular interest to me because of the harmful educational, political, economic, and social consequences faced by students from marginalized groups. I have a better understanding of why color-blind discourse erases the notion of whiteness as property and negates many cases for injustices and therefore fails to address any remedy for those who are affected.

Regardless of the intent, color-blind discourse allows whiteness to be accepted as the norm and those who do not share this label are seen as deficient or abnormal (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005). Morrison (1992) explains that “…it is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture” (p. 10). Thus, to enforce invisibility through silence is to restrict an African American student’s participation in the dominant cultural body, which makes no sense unless there is a stigma attached to being non-white.
Educational researchers need to critique the hidden racial dimensions of the mythology of meritocracy that is being used to manipulate the debate that centers on what constitutes merit. Merit is a term used to neutralize discussions on race (Crenshaw, 1995). Still, some would argue why focus on race, why not class, or gender, or religion? CRT provides one lens for viewing the effects race has on the daily lives of middle school students. This is not meant to diminish the effects of other constructs, but to foreground the realities of living in a racialized society.

Why Is Critical Pedagogy Needed In Teacher Education?

Critical pedagogy challenges inequitable practices and raises questions concerning systemic issues of discrimination and marginalization. Preservice teachers are preparing to enter into a profession riddled with institutionalized patterns of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. Many of these students have never been asked to question, nor had any reason to challenge a system that has worked for them and provided many of the invisible privileges they enjoy on a daily basis. Giroux (2004) calls for teachers to acknowledge the role cultural politics has on pedagogical development:

Cultural politics matters because it is the pedagogical site on which identities are formed, subject positions are made available, social agency enacted, and cultural forms both reflect and deploy power through their modes of ownership and mode of public pedagogy. (p. 32)
This implies that pedagogy is reliant upon a teacher’s interpretation of the world and the type of world students will interact in. It presupposes preparation for what is to come. It is never neutral, but informed by political, economic, and cultural factors.

Bartolomé (2004) supports this endeavor by advocating for teacher educators to “infuse teacher education curricula with critical pedagogical principles in order to prepare educators to aggressively name and interrogate potentially harmful ideologies and practices in the schools and classrooms where they work.” (p. 98). The students who enter our programs overwhelming cite their concern and care for students as the main reason for going into education. Providing a framework to help them, “explicitly explore how ideology functions as it relates to power” (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 98) can increase their ability to successfully meet the needs of all students.

Therefore, critical pedagogy must “…address real social needs, be imbued with a passion for democracy, and provide the condition for expanding democratic forms of political and social agency” (Giroux, 2004, p. 36). Drawing on tenets of critical pedagogy as a guide for working with preservice teachers serves to challenge dominant paradigms about teaching and learning and locate critical pedagogy is moral and political practice that moves beyond students processing received knowledge (Giroux, 2004). It acknowledges hope for a different future and emphasizes that there are still possibilities for transformation that have not been attended to or explored. Critical pedagogy is a form of political intervention that seeks to understand the relationship between social justice.
and distribution of resources; conditions that support political agency and social change; the goal is social transformation (Giroux, 2004).

Giroux (2004) explains that understanding the connection between power and knowledge requires educators, in this case preservice teachers to “critically interrogate the fundamental links between knowledge and power, pedagogical practice and social consequences, and authority and civic responsibility” (p. 40). When preservice teachers work with students to examine discourse around knowledge, to questions if it is “oppressive or exploitive” which expands how knowledge can be interrogated. By moving beyond the idea of knowledge as true or false binary (McLaren, 1997), students can begin to reconceptualize what knowledge does, how it is used, and how they can work to transform it. I believe our work with preservice teachers should be grounded in developing our collective critical consciousness and move towards ending oppressive practices. Critical pedagogy provides the insight and frame for accomplishing this goal.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I outline the research design and methodology used in this study. I describe the research questions, researcher positionality, participant selection, research settings, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Data for this study were collected through classroom observations, interviews, planning documents, and university coursework over a period of ten months in 2006-2007. The information gathered was used to compile a case study for each of three project participants.

Research Design

The project focused on three white female M.Ed students enrolled in the middle childhood education program at a large mid-western university. Each participant was assigned to work in a different middle school from January 2007 through June of 2007. Central to this inquiry was documenting how each student would appropriate tenets of critical pedagogy in their daily classroom lessons and interactions with students to address issues of race, equity and social change. My initial questions in shaping a proposal for this research were organized around the assumption that the teachers would have different ways of planning and enacting a critical pedagogy and these differences would be the focus of my research:
1). How would each preservice teacher create plans that engaged students in anti-oppressive teaching and learning opportunities?

2). How would each preservice teacher embody being an agent of change in the setting they were working in?

3). In what ways would they advocate for a critical approach to planning and instructing with their peers and mentor teachers?

4) What literacy practices would they rely on to implement their vision?

These questions were transformed, however, as I realized that the preservice teachers’ plans and teaching practices were based on how they conceptualized critical pedagogy and critical literacy, and what barriers and supports they faced in their specific classroom and school sites. Case studies would help me document their definitions or conceptualizations of critical pedagogy and compile a range of data sources that would show consistencies and contradictions in their ideas and actions.

Case study research emphasizes what can be learned from a single specific case (Stake, 1994) that foregrounds real-life situations. Researchers who engage in case study research work to understand the complexities of each bounded case. The conceptual framing for this qualitative case study design was informed by the work Dyson and Genishi (2005) and Stake (1994) in that it attempted to: 1) consider the nature and value of each case; 2) document methodology and work to understand the social dimensions and dynamics of each educational site; 3) seek patterns and identify themes from the data; 4) compile the themes to identify issues; 5) triangulate data for interpretations by
identifying the interrelationships gained from the data; 6) construct assertions about the case based on “thematic threads” (Stake, 1994, p. 244).

**Research Questions**

Each case study, then, developed as I observed, interacted with, and collected documentation of the ways each student teacher created opportunities for their middle school students to examine issues related to race, equity, and social change. My research questions address descriptive, self-reflective and contextual dimensions of student teachers’ understanding of critical pedagogy:

1: What pedagogies do preservice teachers draw on to mediate discussions about race, equity, and social change in their language arts classroom?

2: How do preservice teachers critically question their conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change?

3: How do preservice teachers draw on critical pedagogy to plan lessons that interrogate students’ conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change?

**Researcher Positionality**

As an African American female who has lived the majority of her life interacting in predominately White, and at times hostile institutions, I began to question the role education should have in our society and how the choices that I make as a teacher educator and researcher need to support and advance those expectations. After reading McLaren’s (2003) *Life in Schools*, a description and critique of the oppressive conditions young people face in schooling, I am better able to articulate my hopes for critical
pedagogy in the classroom: a) I want a politicized citizenry informed and actively working against inequality in the name of social justice; b) I want students to be uncomfortable in a society that exploits workers, demonizes people of color, privileges the rich, and commits other acts of oppression; c) I want to do more than locate my beliefs and expose unjust structural systems that sustain our society; d) I want to be part of the transformation and I want my work to speak through what it does not just what it says.

It has taken me some time to locate myself as a researcher and understand what it means at an epistemological and ontological level to operate within a particular paradigm. This is primarily a result of not finding a home in one of the “Big four paradigms”, positivism, post positivism, critical theory et al., and constructivism (Dillard, 2006). I do not wish to be trapped in one all encompassing narrative, however over the past few years, my work has centered on questions of equity and access; issues that have pushed me to question how schools operate and focus on who is left of out the dominant discourse. This work is primarily informed by a critical theoretical paradigm, but has its roots in African American feminism (Collins, 2002; Dillard, 2006; hooks, 1994; Walker, 1988).

Throughout my coursework, issues related to power, gender, class, and race have been major components of my interest and research focus. Critical theory has provided a useful framework for me to examine topics that affected marginalized populations in a manner that exposes inequities in order to acknowledge and address unfilled needs. Each
paper was another step toward challenging the dominant discourse by presenting an alternative perspective and uncovering inherent bias in “common sense” assumptions in literacy around power, gender, and race.

I did not assume a deficit model for the participants that I worked with, nor do I believe that it was my responsibility to convert them into racially consciousness teachers. However, I did feel obligated to reflect with them about their understandings of race, equity, and critical pedagogy and how the decisions they made based on those understanding can reify privileges for some at the expense of marginalization of others.

Thus, designing a study to document preservice teachers work around issues of race, equity and social change meant investigating how their conceptualizations and patterns of thinking regarding these topics shifted as a result of the work that they engaged in with middle school students within the specific constraints of each school and classroom setting. It was essential to note and keep track of how their understandings of power, privilege, race, and equity developed over time.

My work as a researcher, committed to engagement with social justice in education was complicated due to my position as the program manager for the graduate program in which they were enrolled. The position of program manager was a full-time administrative assignment and required me to teach a weekly reflective seminar that met from September 2006-June 2007, advise students, coordinate placements with school districts, communicate with mentor teachers, and conduct weekly meetings with the university supervisors. I was also the instructor for their culminating capstone course in
which they constructed their action research project documenting their work during student teaching. In addition to both of those roles, I was also a full-time doctoral student at the same university. These conditions required me to be aware of how my actions and decisions informed each of the roles I had at the university. Finding balance among these positions was something I tried to achieve on a daily basis.

While working on my dissertation proposal I struggled with the ethics involved in working with students whom I evaluate and, in concert with faculty, recommend for licensure. I created a reflective journal to keep track of my concerns and document any instances of conflict about my position as program manager and PI for a research study. It was through this reflective journaling that I decided to highlight the transparent methods and motives for the research with each participant, so I might alleviate my own concerns and provide a productive space to monitor issues as the project progressed. For example I kept track of issues participants were having with their mentor teachers or parents related to the this project. I made notes of what issues to discuss with the participants, mentor teachers, and University supervisor, while considering the multiple roles I held in the program. When Ann continued to worry about negotiating more time for her lessons, I asked her University supervisor to set up a meeting to discuss time management and planning lessons accordingly. I wanted her to have more time to teach lessons that examined race and equity, but I knew that her mentor had other items on the agenda. I decided to step back from the situation and allow her supervisor to address the issue.
I was also concerned about researcher subjectivity. Peshkin (1982) states that: “[Subjectivity] affects the results of all investigation … and operates during the entire research process “ (p.175). If this is the case, all researchers should make every effort to create a transparent and forthcoming version of their subjectivity and how it manifest itself in their research in the final write up. I believe that researches are obligated to not only be informed about which “personal qualities” were ignited or guided their research, but also disclose this information to the reader (Peshkin, 1982). I held dual roles in this research process, researcher and mentor. There were times that I felt tension between these roles, particularly when observing classroom lessons. As an experienced educator I often found myself wanting to intervene and help guide the lessons that I observed. There were many times that I had to remind myself that my role was to document and debrief, not co-teach or revise lessons in progress. My goal was to focus on the student’s processes and understanding of what it meant to teach from a critical perspective. Being in a unique position to serve as a mentor, instructor, and participant observer during this study informed my decision to create a collective approach, which I will describe in chapter four, to how the study was conducted.

**Participant Selection Overview**

Three female graduate students who were enrolled in Ohio State University’s Middle Childhood M.Ed program during the 2006-2007 academic year participated in this project. There were twenty-six students enrolled in the Middle Childhood M.Ed program, twenty-two females and four males. All students self-identified as white.
I began working with the program during August 2006. The previous program manager left in July and did not establish a form of communication with the group. For several weeks they were unaware of who they would be working with, what the requirements were for the program, and what schools they would have options of working in during student teaching. Many of the students shared that they were frustrated with the lack of communication in the program, which lead to a few tense meetings as I transitioned into the role of program manager.

My first task as program manager was to read through a stack of placement requests from the cohort. Of the twenty-six students in the cohort, twenty-one requested suburban placements that reflected their personal schooling experience. The majority of the suburban placement requests were based on deficit perspectives of students in urban settings. My first impression of the group that I would be teaching and mentoring was that they had limited experience working with diverse populations and were not interested in challenging their perceptions of children and families from different backgrounds. I am not sure what prompted the students to write these requests, but I was suspected that they had discussed the issue and decided to take a stand as a group against field placements in urban settings.

I began considering selection of students for each case during the fall of 2006. I was the instructor for students’ weekly seminar and made note of themes that emerged from students’ work related to literacy, race, equity and social change. I shared these findings with other instructors in our program as well as university supervisors, and
expanded my list of students to consider working with during spring quarter 2007, when all M.Ed students would be engaged in full-time student teaching. Each quarter, in concert with the faculty program director, I developed assignments that required the students to consider the role of community, race, and social justice in their placement site. My purpose was 1) to challenge the deficit model many students had began to articulate in their University course assignments; 2) help students construct a theoretical foundation for working with students who do not share their ethnic, racial, gender or class background; 3) provide students with opportunities that would promote new ways of thinking about teaching and learning in diverse settings. During autumn quarter students were asked to complete the following assignments:

Reading Response

This assignment is designed to help you synthesize and demonstrate your understanding of the readings and the extent to which the concepts and ideas discussed inform and influence your teaching. Pay close attention to how issues of equity and diversity are represented and how your thinking is challenged by the information you are reading. You are required to do two of the three reading response synthesis. Possible options may include:

- Answering a question or questions, which attempt to connect concepts that may have been addressed in an article.
- Identifying and analyzing a concept or concepts that we may have encountered in an article.
• Selecting and analyzing the concepts addressed in one or more articles. Your papers must be thoughtful and demonstrate that you have read the articles carefully. You must be able to clearly articulate any disagreement and/or agreement you may have with the author(s). In addition, you should connect the articles with your own practical and personal experiences.

Observation Paper: Classroom community

• How does the teacher build a classroom community? Communication?
  Transitions, routines and rituals?
• How is authority, control, or power distributed in the classroom?
• What kinds of decisions do the children make?
• What kinds of decisions/control does the teacher retain?
• What type of guidance/management system/strategies does the teacher use?
• How does the teacher address issues of equity, diversity, and social justice?
• What can you infer about this teacher’s philosophy of education from the manner in which power is distributed?

Reflection Log: The Role of Observation and Inquiry

Consider the wonderful opportunity you have the first weeks of your placement to become an acute and sensitive observer. Never again in your
teaching careers will you have the time and luxury to watch carefully what experienced teachers do within the context of their classrooms.

Many people go in to teaching feeling that they really know what it’s all about. After all, they’ve been in schools themselves for 14 years or more. This “apprenticeship of observation” or prior experience that all students bring to teacher education programs can prevent students from acquiring a true understanding of the complexity involved in teaching and learning. So, the very first thing that you need to do is learn to observe. As you become a more sensitive observer you will start to inquire into what you are witnessing. You will ask questions - questions of children, of the teacher, of administrators, of parents and other school community members. Questions that stem from observations are the first step toward critical reflection.

As you are immersed in a classroom, you will see a variety of interesting interactions among the students and teachers. These observations should lead you to question what is going on around you, how the students are responding to the environment, and why certain choices are being made concerning the social, academic, and emotional development of the students in the classroom. Given this, it’s important that you begin to document your observations right away.

Reflective log entries should be complex, rich and analytical and not “diary-like.” You may consider using a *double-entry format* where you split the page. On one side you record observations. On the other side you record what
you would like to change, implications for practice and your questions. Your mentor teacher and/or university supervisor will also use this column to offer questions and comments. Remember, the purpose is not to judge what you see, but to learn to observe in and on action.

During winter quarter students were asked to complete the following assignment in addition to the reflection log and reading response synthesis:

*Examining Multiple Perspectives in the Community*

You will create a multi-genre project that provides insight into the community in which your school is located. Multi-genre is termed used to describe a collection of artifacts across a variety of genres informed by the research you do on your school community. The goal of this process is for you to have multiple ways to share the knowledge you gained about your school community with your peers. Below you will find 4 questions that you must answer as a part of this project. You will also need to create and answer 2-3 additional questions of your own for a total of 6-7 questions.

- Document the school community you are working in
- What is important to your school’s community?
- What is an issue your school’s community is trying to address?
- What types of relationships are fostered among families, school, and community?
- How can you support your school’s community?
During spring quarter, students were asked to complete the following assignments in addition to the reflection log and reading response synthesis:

**Middle Childhood Philosophy Statement**

Revise the philosophy statement you wrote during Summer 2006 taking into account the coursework and field experiences you have had since then. Your revised statement should address the following areas:

- Social justice, equity and diversity
- Family and Community
- Student Development: Social, emotional, and cognitive needs of middle level learners
- Classroom Environments
- Knowledge of pedagogy

**Family Communication**

Getting to know your students and their families is an important part of being an effective teacher. During your student teaching I would like for you to choose 1 (or more) of the following ways to communicate with your students and their families in order to find out or share how they are doing in school, what their needs are, and questions they may have for you.

- Newsletter
- Phone call
- Home visit
Answer the following questions about your experience, but feel free to add more information. You may want to focus on a few students instead of the entire class for these responses.

• What did you learn about your students and their families?

• What did you learn about yourself?

The body of these assignments prompted students to consider multiple perspectives related to equity, social justice, and racism.

Winter 2007

After compiling notes from the assignments autumn quarter and narrowing down the list of potential participants from the cohort of twenty-six, I arranged an individual conference with each student. During autumn quarter my goal was to create a list of potential participants based on their interest in equity, race, and social change. As I graded each assignment I made note of interesting thoughts and ideas that address equity, race, or social change, and included the initials for the student/s who wrote the idea in their paper. This information was helpful to create a short list of potential participants. Prior to the conferences preservice teachers in the cohort were asked to create a list of potential topics for their teacher research project. During each conference I discussed several university class related projects and inquired about potential topics for their teacher research project that was due at the end of their student teaching. I made note of
the students who expressed an interest in exploring race, equity, social justice, and literacy. Six students expressed such an interest.

Toward the end of February 2007, I distributed a survey (Appendix A) to all of the students enrolled in the M.Ed program to find out what their interests were in relation to race, equity and social change. I read the responses and used that information to further narrow down my list of potential participants from six to five. Next, I met with these five students about my dissertation research project and decided to invite three of them to participate in the study. These participants were selected based on their responses to the survey and the body of work they had produced during the fifteen weeks we had worked together. I considered how their conceptions of race, equity, social change, and literacy pedagogy had developed over time and the commitment they expressed to explore these topics during their student teaching.

Three overarching themes stood out across the students’ work that informed my decision. First, the students expressed an interest in learning how to incorporate discussion about equity and race into their lesson planning. Second, each student posed important questions about systemic inequities and what role they could take as an educator to counter those in their classroom. The third and last reason was willingness to participate in the study based on their interests and the needs of the students in their field placements.

The interview and survey were useful tools in capturing explicit information about their interest in race and pedagogy, such as conversations they were part of in the
past that addressed race; concerns they had about discussing race and equity in the classroom; and ideas they were interested in trying out during their student teaching. However, these data but were not the determining factors in selecting participants. Each interview provided insight into the participants’ goals, concerns, and questions around learning to teach from a critical perspective. These interviews also served as a time to establish parameters or guidelines for the research.

At the end of February 2007, I selected Jill, Ann, and Sam to be part of my study. Collectively the group was committed to their students and to tenets of critical pedagogy. My selection criteria were based on each student’s demonstrated understanding of race, equity, and social change; connection to critical literacy and teacher inquiry project; commitment to advocacy; interest in developing plans that addressed race, equity, and social change; and a willingness to reflect on their practice. Class assignments, individual interviews, results from the survey, and discussions were used to gauge understanding of key concepts. Given my status as the full-time administrator for the M.Ed program and a graduate student at the University, I only choose three participants for this study.

At the time of the selection I knew that Jill grew up in an urban environment and wanted to understand how to plan and teach lessons from a culturally relevant perspective. She was part of a program at the university (not connected to Middle Childhood licensure program) that worked with preservice teachers who expressed an interest in urban education. As member of this program Jill spent part of her first summer
in the M.Ed program working with urban teachers and students in a math and science summer camp. Jill entered the program living out her commitment to equity-based education, with a specific interest in African American middle school students.

I was also aware of Ann’s shifting her perspective about the role of teacher as advocate. She had not had any in-depth experiences working with students or communities around issues related to social justice. This was the first time in her academic career that terms such as whiteness, privilege, and equity had been central to her coursework and growing understanding of her teacher identity.

Sam presented herself as an advocate for social justice from the beginning of the program. At the time of her selection, her commitments, questions, and reflection were more sophisticated as her drew on her recent experiences in the classroom to make sense of the theory she was learning about at the university. Due to Sam’s transparent stance on equity, race, and social change, she was positioned differently among her peers in the cohort. I believe this study presented an opportunity for her to share ideas and plan lessons that affirmed her commitment to social justice without social repercussions.

If I had to create a continuum that reflected commitment to the principals of critical pedagogy at the time of my participants’ selection, I would represent it in the following manner:

Figure 3.1 Critical Pedagogy Continuum
Background Experiences of Participants

In this study, the participants shared their emerging conceptualizations of critical pedagogy, cultural autobiographical statements, philosophy of teaching, and personal background information. As a researcher working with this group of preservice teachers I chose to highlight their background information to provide insight into how their pedagogical choices were shaped by existing and shifting ideologies as well as life experiences. The participants shared many commonalities such as race, gender, age, and economic access to graduate education, but their previous work history and field placement sites offered contrasting experiences for them to reflect on and use to shape a grounded approach to critical pedagogy in the middle school setting. The students in our program were provided with numerous opportunities to examine the relationship among race, equity, and social justice throughout the licensure program. Many students choose not to engage in this work, or to only align equity with differentiation. Jill, Ann, and Sam
stood out from the cohort due to their interest and willingness to take up constructs of critical pedagogy during their student teaching. The following brief biographical sketches highlight those similarities and differences.

**Jill**

Jill is a white female student from a working class family. She grew up in a large urban city in the Northern region of a large mid-western state. Her early school years were spent in what she calls a “poor urban school district” (Interview, 4.07). During this period of her life, most of her friends were African American and she immersed herself in African American culture. She wore cornrows in her hair, Adidas jogging suits, and oversized “fly gold chains” (Interview, 4.07).

Her family moved to the suburbs when she was getting ready to enter high school and she found herself in a culture shock. She did not fit in with her peer group in the new school and had a hard time adjusting her clothes, mannerisms, and tastes in music to fit into the norm in her new environment. Jill considered herself to be an outsider and struggled adjusting to her new school.

Jill graduated from high school, attended college, and decided to work with children before applying to the Middle Childhood M.Ed. program at a large mid-western university. She wanted to become a teacher to make a difference in the lives of all children, particularly students in low performing urban schools. Jill found it difficult to navigate the racial politics in the M.Ed cohort because she had difficulty forming
relationships with other White women. She shared on many occasions that she did still find it difficult to fit in this environment.

*Sam*

Sam grew up in Alabama with a passion for outdoor living. Both of her parents are educators and she recognized from an early age that “…helping others to understand and to discover things for themselves has always been a natural activity for me.” (Autobiographical Statement, 4.06). Sam attended a suburban elementary school, urban middle school, and a state-run residential school with a focus on math and science. Sam has experienced predominately white learning environments and predominately black learning environments. She explains that she has always felt more at ease in diverse settings, even with metal detectors and less competent teachers.

After high school graduation Sam attended a small four-year liberal arts college, where she was the President of the local Amnesty International chapter. She went to become a research assistant for NGO in Washington, D.C, volunteer at an adult literacy council, and later spent three years substitute teaching in a variety of school districts. When describing her ideal teaching environment, Sam wrote: “I am most inspired and invigorated when working with a group of culturally diverse people.” (Autobiographical Statement, 4.06). Sam’s experiences in the world showcase her commitment to advocacy work, and support her desire to work with a mentor teacher who believes in social change.
Ann

Ann, a former dance teacher, enjoys working with children of all ages. She grew up in middle class community and enjoyed school as a child. Ann volunteers in literacy classrooms working with students who are experiencing difficulty with academic literacy tasks. She enjoys working in urban and suburban settings, but prefers to work with a mentor teacher who believes in structure and discipline.

Within the cohort Jill and Sam were outliers. Sam, openly identified as bi-sexual, and Jill openly shared her discomfort in predominately White middle-class settings. Their identities that are typically marginalized within our society functioned as cultural capital for both students among the faculty and staff of the M.Ed program. The data show that these two participants relied on their identities to inform the work they did with students and on behalf of students in their field placements.

Each subsequent interview allowed time to negotiate the requirements of this project with each participant based on her individual needs and the context she was working in. For example, Jill was concerned about how her participation in the study would impact my opinion on her ability to teach. I had to explain how I was negotiating my role as program manager/evaluator and function as a researcher focused on documentation and support. I explained that each role I was involved in informed the other, but my goal for this research was not to document her errors or failures, but to capture and theorize about her success.
My interest in documenting the process of learning to teach from a critical perspective sparked interest, not apprehension from the two participants. Ann and Sam each had different concerns, most involving the curriculum and how parents would respond to inquiries about race and equity. There were no easy answers and most of the questions eventually led back to the students in each classroom. What were their needs? What were their interests? Who was benefiting from the status quo? How can we challenge the system to include all students?

**Context**

The literature on preservice teachers paints a dismal picture of their interest in anti-racist multicultural education and motivation to engage in anti-oppressive classroom practices (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Sleeter, 2001; Ukpokodu, 2005; Williams & Evan-Winter, 200?). This deficit view of preservice teachers does not account for their willingness to engage in discussions about race, equity, and social change in a variety of contexts. I chose to study a group of students who wanted to be successful in those areas, thus my study offers our community a chance to focus on their potential and possibility.

The students in the Middle Childhood M.Ed. program were not adequately prepared in their undergraduate education to engage in conversations related to equity, diversity, or critical pedagogy. Once admitted to the graduate teacher licensure program, they were required to take four courses that addressed issues related to race, privilege, and power. The faculty of those courses also served as resources for the students and provided assistance with planning and locating resources for several students in the
program. Although students were exposed to anti-oppressive pedagogy in two of their methods courses, they were not provided with a sustained opportunity to examine how these ideas are materialized in the classroom. This structure provided an opportunity for some students to mask their lack of commitment to social justice by using the language they were learning in the classroom without any sincere commitment to incorporate these ideas in their teaching. The majority of students in the program typically watched teachers and students at their placement sites responding to a pre-set curriculum with little consideration of diversity in the classroom or the potential for the students’ inquiry about equity and social change.

This study was conducted across four different spaces during 2006-2007 in a large mid-western city. Four students were returning to school to seek their teaching license after working several years in a different field. The remaining three sites are middle schools located in three separate school districts. Originally, I requested that each participant be placed in an urban setting, but due to time constraints and available mentor teachers, that request was not able to be honored by the university placement office. Each participant fulfilled her second field experience and subsequent student teaching in the following middle schools:

Jill- Shady Lane – Large Urban District
Ann- Russet Middle School – Suburban District
Sam- Kennedy Sixth Grade – Suburban District
Shady Lane Middle School is part of a large urban school district that serves approximately 55,000 students. As part of a district with the largest student population in the state of Ohio, Shady Lane is not immune from issues that plague most urban districts. As a former elementary teacher in this school district I am aware of the revolving door that ushered in new administrative regimes every 3-4 years; excessive movement among effective administrators; and constant changes in the approved curriculum guides.

During my tenure in this district I received a new curriculum guide each year, witnessed the purchase of $15,000 worth of materials and texts for my buildings book room only to see it replaced with anthologies two years later; and administered countless bubble tests to students whose scores were used to “measure” progress toward the district’s benchmarks created for the state proficiency tests. I understood the context Jill had to navigate and used my insider knowledge to assist her in working around potential roadblocks.

At the time of this study, 506 students were enrolled at Shady Lane, and 99% of them were classified as economically disadvantage (ODE, 2007). Although the school received an Effective rating on the state report and met the AYP goals outlined by the school district, Jill documented a disproportionate number of minority students failing more than one course and in jeopardy of repeating seventh grade. The demographic information does not clearly reflect the level of socioeconomic diversity that is present in the school. The majority of students failing one or more courses did not live in the middle
class neighborhood surrounding the school. They were bussed in from less affluent areas and were zoned to attend less desirable schools in the district. Many people who live and work in Lewiston, recognize Shady Lane as a choice school and apply for in-district transfers to provide their children with the opportunity to attend this school. I do not have demographic information that details how many students lived in the neighborhood or were bussed in from other areas of town. I relied on Jill’s perception of who the students were and how they understood their relationship to the school and its surrounding community.

Jill noted that her mentor teacher had mentioned on two occasions differences between the neighborhood kids and the others. He specifically made note of their behavior and scholastic aptitude. Jill also shared with me that she overheard students discussing this issue, and found that the students of color (primarily African American males) did not feel as if they belonged in the environment. This information becomes invaluable when comparing the segregation that occurred in her courses and the literacy practices and pedagogy provided for students in the lower tracked classes, predominately made up of students of color who were bussed in from other areas of town.

Ann’s Site

Ann’s middle school field placement site was in a suburban school district. Russet Middle School was part of a district that served over 13,000 students located in the northeastern suburb of Columbus, Ohio (ODE, 2007). During this study, Russet’s
enrollment was around 956 students. It also shares an Effective rating on the state report card, but reports 14% of its student population as economically disadvantaged.

Russet is located on the eastern boundary of the school district and is nestled among large executive homes. The majority of students who attend Russet are white/non-Hispanic, with the majority of students of color being bused in from other parts of town. The process of “re-districting” to increase diversity in the student population has mixed reviews among the staff and families in the district. I spoke with one African American male teacher at the school and he alluded to issues that were popping up with children from outside of the school’s residential community. He also noted that most of the students were African American and that the staff was not ready to have in-depth conversations about how to meet the needs of a diverse population. Russet has a positive reputation in the community and is considered a choice school among the other four middle schools in the district.

*Sam’s Site*

The final middle school in the study, is a sixth grade building located in a northwestern suburb of town. Kennedy Sixth Grade School is part of a large suburban district that serves approximately 15,000 students. Unlike the other two schools, Kennedy is rated Excellent with Distinction on the state report card. Of the 561 students enrolled in Kennedy, around 18% of them are identified as economically disadvantaged. The majority of students are white, with a small population of limited English proficient students.
During this study two issues related to working in this setting became central to Sam’s inquiry. The building is constructed as separate pods with connecting hallways. The students in Sam’s class were not aware that students who immigrated to the United States attended their school. They didn’t take classes with them, eat with them at lunch, or play with them at recess. Given the larger political maneuvering around immigration, school ratings, and overcrowded schools that was taking place during this study, recognizing the status of immigrant students in this building was germane to this case study.

I initiated this research project to understand how preservice teachers conceptualized race, equity, and social change and how their perspectives on these ideas influenced the work they did with students. My goal was to document how three preservice teachers’ planned, implemented, and reflected on lessons that addressed race, equity, and social change with middle school students. I examined my participants’ rational for emergent critical pedagogical choices, responses to success and barriers during the course of their student teaching, and the influence that participation in the Middle Childhood M.Ed program had on their learning to teach from a critical perspective.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Activity</th>
<th>Time frame</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September- December 2006</td>
<td>Compile and analyze general themes from all student coursework related to race, equity, and social change</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2007</td>
<td>Obtain Instructional Review Board approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-February 2007</td>
<td>Distribute survey to Middle Childhood cohort</td>
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<td>End of February 2007</td>
<td>Data collection &amp; Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Select three preservice teachers for study</td>
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<td>Distribute consent forms</td>
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<td>First Round of semi-structured interviews with participants</td>
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<td>March 2007-June 2007</td>
<td>Data Collection &amp; Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Field Placement Observations</td>
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<td>June 2007</td>
<td>Data collection &amp; Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Second Round of semi-structured interviews with students</td>
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<td>July 2007</td>
<td>Data collection &amp; Analysis</td>
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<td>Third Round of semi-structured interviews with students and 1 mentor teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collect Teacher Research Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2007- June 2008</td>
<td>Data collection &amp; Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Work on data analysis and implications for dissertation research</td>
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Table 3.1 Timeline

**Data Collection: Sources**

The primary sources of data for this study were field notes from classroom observations; transcripts of audio from classroom observations; university coursework that addressed race, equity, and/or social change; participant planning artifacts; three semi-structured interviews; student artifacts; and photographs of classroom lessons.
Throughout the study I examined the participants’ understanding of race, equity, and social change by attending to their questions, goals, and classroom practices in the specific settings where they completed their student teaching. In the following pages I will describe the collection and use of each data source for this research.

Observations

Beginning the month of March 2007, I observed each participant teach a lesson at her student teaching site between 7-13 times. Each observation lasted about one hour with 10-15 minutes of discussion and reflection before or after the lesson. The initial plan was to observe each student 6-8 times during the study. However, the amount of observations varied due to the participant’s student teaching schedule, unforeseen cancellations of class (assemblies or field trips), or an invitation to join the class for a follow-up lesson. I observed Sam seven times; Jill eight times; and Ann thirteen times. I audio recorded each observation and took detailed field notes.

Conducting observations in classroom as well as audio recording literacy events allowed me to document the ways each preservice teacher’s plans converged with or diverged from the original intent of plans for that setting. Observations also highlighted the student teachers’ ways of grappling with and managing the complexities and reality of working in “real-time” within a classroom setting.

I also observed each participant for eight weeks in her reflective seminar course for which I was the instructor. I paid specific attention to class interactions where discussions pertaining to race, equity, and social change were the topic of discussion. Of
the eight observations, I chose to focus on three that centered on social justice; teaching for equity; and engaging students in meaningful lessons (the majority of this discussion was about managing urban students). I recorded field notes after each session.

*University Coursework*

I collected specific assignments related to each preservice teacher’s perceptions, values, and ideas about race, equity, and social change that encompassed their experiences in the community in which they went to school; desired to teach; and were placed in for their student teaching. I asked each participate to share assignments they turned in from their required courses and methods courses that took place from June 2006-August 2007.

By collecting data that focuses on the participants’ perceptions and responses to issues related to race, equity, and social change in their personal, academic, and field placement community I was be able to gain a better understanding of how they interpret the impact each concept has on the social conditions in which they live, engage in scholarly discussions, and teach. This information was useful in establishing what, if any, issues or tensions they felt needed to be addressed during their student teaching to make it an equitable space for everyone to participate in. These tensions also enabled me to understand how they examined inequities in relation to the problem of creating a curriculum that could be expanded to give students space to do critical work.

Each participant provided a copy of the following assignments:

- Middle Childhood Teaching Philosophy
• Field experience synopsis
• Reflective journals from student teaching experience
• Response to Lisa Delpit article: Lessons from Teachers
• Community Multi-genre paper
• Reflection synthesis
• Teacher Research Project

Each participant also provided additional coursework that she felt was necessary to analyze with respect to her commitment to exploring anti-oppressive, anti-racist, critical pedagogies.

Planning Documentation

During February of 2007 I collected an outline of each participant’s unit plan for student teaching. Before each participant began her student teaching, I asked for an updated version of the outline, along with copies of their lessons plans, unit goals, and additional planning resources related to their planning for student teaching. These artifacts were used as data in this study to gain a deeper understanding of conceptual issues each participant hoped to address during her student teaching and the level of commitment each had to addressing race, equity, and social change with their students.

Interviews

Asking emic level questions to the participants in the study was the main goal for my interviews, such as how do you define race? Why do you want to create lessons that address equity with middle school students? What is difficult about the work you are
doing in your field placement? After compiling information about the variety of forms that interviewing can take, I decided to use a semi-structured format for the interviews in this study taken from Fontana and Frey (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The purpose of using this approach was to gather as much data about the thoughts and feeling concerning implementing lessons that address race, equity, and social change from the participants in this study. I understood that the goal was to uncover the emic views concerning the instructional method, all information obtained and analyzed provide a snapshot or partial view of the participants perspectives and ideas.

I facilitated three semi-structured interviews with each participant during this study. The first two were audio recorded and transcribed. The last interview was less structured and focused on themes and concepts that emerged from the data collected during my classroom observations. I did not audio record the last interview because I did not bring the recorder with me during our last conversation, and most of the questions I asked were addressed in their final projects.

Each thematically driven interview provided insight into philosophical beliefs concerning planning, implementing, and student participation in critical teaching events. The following themes were emerged from ongoing observations and review of data:

- Definition of race and social justice
- Meeting the needs of a middle childhood student
- Critical perspectives on literature
- Identity construction
• Classroom literacy practices
• Merging local and academic knowledge
• Equitable learning environments

The first interview took place in February 2007 during their field experience and observation component of the program. The purpose of this interview was to explain my research project, find out what each participants understanding, goals, and commitments were towards examining race, equity, and social change, and to generate ideas for collaborating on the documentation of this research. I tried to make it very clear to each participant that I was not interested in their performance of critical pedagogy, but their engaged and sustained effort to create a space for their students to voice their perspectives about race and equity, challenge dominant ideologies, and work toward social change. I felt this goal could only be accomplished by partnering with my participants to documents their evolving pedagogy.

The second interview took place in March prior to their full-time student teaching. The purpose of this interview was to document any shifts in conceptions about race, equity, or social change. I wanted to clarify what I thought their understandings about race, equity, and social change was based on the survey, previous interview, and past coursework. I also wanted to gain more information about how their understandings/conceptions were expanded during their year in the M.Ed program, and how those conceptions influenced their planning for student teaching. I began each interview with a list of questions or concepts to ask about, but followed the lead of their responses when
necessary. As a result new questions were generated that were specific to each participant.

*Field Notes*

During each phase of data collection I took detailed field notes in my researcher’s notebook. My field notes were set up in two columns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Theoretical Implications</th>
</tr>
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After each observation I wrote questions that I wanted to follow up with each participant and my thoughts about how the students were engaging in the lesson. For example after observing Ann for the first time on April 12, 2007, I wrote, “What structures are in place that allow students to work together so seamlessly? How is Ann building on the work her mentor has established?” (Field notes, 4.12.07). Another note I wrote after observing Sam’s class during independent reading on May 11, 2007 contained the following questions: “I wonder how books circulate among students? What are they reading? Have the decided to read any of the books about immigration that Sam brought into the classroom? What are the social implications for choosing particular books to read?

*Research logbook*

Research log was created to provide a space to organize data collected, reflect on observations and conversations, and keep track of interpretation of data.

*Transcriptions from audio files*

Across the study, literacy events related to discussions about race, equity, and social change that emerged from children’s and young adult literature, reading texts,
discussions about texts, discussions about negotiating meaning within a group, and read aloud sessions were audio recorded. This data captured a variety of contextualized literacy practices that occurred in the classrooms.

I audio recorded each observed lesson and two of the three semi-structured interviews with my participants. I listened to each file and created an index. After indexing each file, I went back and created transcripts for each interview and selected lessons or sections from lessons I observed. I choose these lessons based on the relationship of the topic to my research questions; discussions students engaged in during the lesson; and connections to previous lessons that addressed my research questions. These transcriptions became part of my dataset for this study.

*Student artifacts*

During the classroom observation phase of this study I collected various artifacts from each participant’s classroom. The students in each participant’s classroom generated collections of artifacts as they engaged in lessons designed by the participants to address race, equity, and social change. I created a log of the artifacts and categorized them under each participant’s name. I made note of the date and topic from the lesson in which each artifact was generated.

*Photography*

I took digital pictures of lessons in action or large artifacts generated from a lesson that could not be photocopied or removed from the classroom during my observations. Again, literacy events related to discussions about race, equity, and social
change that emerged from children’s and young adult literature, reading texts, discussions about texts, discussions about negotiating meaning within a group, small group and partner activities, and read aloud sessions were photographed. This data captured a variety of contextualized literacy practices that occurred in each classroom. For example

**Data Analysis**

Adhering to a framework of qualitative case study research, the data for this research were inductively analyzed (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994). I sought to understand how preservice teachers addressed issues of race, equity, and social change with their middle school students. Specifically, I was interested in how each participant enacted tenets of critical pedagogy within the literacy curriculum. Returning to my research questions, I wanted to understand 1) How students were drawing on their conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change to plan lessons; 2) How students were responding to those lessons and changes the participants were making to their lessons; and 3) What pedagogical strategies were they incorporating to mediate discussions about race, equity and social change with their middle school students?

These questions required an analysis of data through multiple iterations with different purposes. In addition to examining the data for patterns of participants’ concerns, actions, and conceptions of critical work in classrooms, I needed to understand the data in light of the extant research and theory related to teacher education, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and critical race theory.
The data were analyzed using the principles of grounded theory, involving repeated reading of multiple data sources to identify significant themes. Upon identifying key themes, data were further analyzed through the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach involved four phases: comparing observed outcomes to emerging data themes, testing and redefining themes as needed, reducing the original number of themes, and constructing a theoretical position to explain data. I read the collected data. I used open coding to identify themes and patterns. I created analytic memos along with my field notes to keep track of ideas and concepts I wanted to address in subsequent observations or conversations with each participant.

Then, I compared codes across each philosophy statement, reflective journal, selected university coursework, transcripts from interviews, artifacts from each classroom, and transcripts classroom literacy events. I worked to reduce the categories by focusing on key literacy events in each classroom involving race, equity, or social justice. I sorted, coded, compared and contrasted data, and reduced the data set.

In each phase of data collection and analysis my goal was allow the data to present a grounded theory of critical pedagogy and literacy instruction that emerged from data sources and observations of each participant. During the first phase I collected data from each participant that foregrounded their conceptualization of race, equity, and social change. During the second phase I combined this information with a survey (administered to twenty-six people) and interview to narrow down a list of potential participants. During the third phase I obtained coursework, interviewed each participant,
and conducted a minimum of six weekly observations of each participant to gain deeper insight into how their coursework and prior comments and experience with race, equity, and social change influenced their planning and teaching. I looked for themes that ran across each participant’s coursework, classroom observations, and interviews. During the final phase of data collection I relied on the participants’ reflections and written descriptions of their student teaching experience along with additional coursework, and a final interview to provide more elaborated insight for analysis.

After data were collected, indexed, and coded, I created data packets (Rogers & Mosley, 2006) for each participant. I organized the data into three sets, one for each participant. The data packets were assembled based on classroom events involving race, equity, or social change. Most data packets included excerpts from interviews, coursework, reflective journals, field notes, photography, and student artifacts that captured a lesson that engaged students in discussions or activities that addressed race, equity, or social change. Data were analyzed holistically so that no one piece overshadowed the others. Thus data were triangulated allowing connections across sources to generate themes for analysis.

In the final phase I relied on the data packets as the basis of my assertions for each case. I reviewed the data several times and spoke with two faculty members who were knowledgeable about each participant to periodically confirm the validity of my assertions and seek additional information about questions or avenues to explore. The constant reviewing, coding, and theorizing functioned in a recursive manner, allowing me
to identify emerging themes and use that information to guide the direction of the study. As Dyson & Genishi (2005) make clear, the goal for interpretative case study research is not the pursuit of “singular truths,” but “thematic threads” (p. 111). These threads work to reveal multiple perspectives that each participant has about the context where she is teaching. The interweaving or juxtaposing of these stories or cases allows us to gain deeper insight into the realities of teaching and learning from each participant’s point of view. It is this insight that captures the essence of their commitment to transformative education and their attempt to engage in and conceptualize critical pedagogical practices.

By applying a critical lens to the analysis I focused on how each participant established a learning environment where students where seen as active participants who constructed knowledge, negotiated meaning, and used their agency to challenge oppressive practices that marginalize groups in our society.

**Establishment of trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1994) suggest that when engaging in qualitative research various issues can interfere with the internal validity of the research study. The goal of the researcher is to insure that the phenomenon being study is accurately portrayed in the data collected and analyzed. However, Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) suggest that the term trustworthiness better captures the intent of critical qualitative research in that it does not share the same set of assumptions imposed by the positivist notion of validity. I do not claim that my study represents one true reality, nor was it my goal to do so. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) recommend that critical qualitative researchers rely on
the following constructs to establish the trustworthiness of their study: credibility, anticipatory accommodation, and Lather’s (1991) notion of catalytic validity. Addition to the above criteria, I also relied on expert and peer consultation, member checks, and data triangulation.

**Credibility**

This study provided me with the opportunity to engage in various communities for a short period of time. I used multiple methods for gathering data, which I relied on to base substantial descriptions of the participants, their backgrounds, and ideas presented in this study. The results of this study can be evaluated for its credibility due to my efforts at constructing a case for each participant that created space for them to confirm and/or contest the reality I presented with their own conceptions. We interpreted the data from different perspectives, which allowed a richer and more detailed account of their experience to serve as a source of data for this study. Thus creating one measurable tool to judge their transformation or effectiveness as critical pedagogues was not realistic or desired.

Incorporating the member check into my data collection and analysis process was crucial for establishing and maintaining creditability throughout the study. After each observation, I shared the ideas captured in my field notes and requesting that each participant respond with questions or additional information that I may have overlooked. During our weekly discussions, I also asked questions to gain insight into their practices and for clarification. I had access to and responded to each participant’s weekly reflective
journal with the insights I had based on my documentation of their work. After classroom
data collection ended, I shared a copy of my field notes with each participant and
discussed my findings with them. The feedback gathered from these exchanges provided
another lens toward interpreting the data.

I shared my insights and findings with my advisor and committee members along
with peers in my writing group to seek feedback and guidance. These discussions were
did not follow a particular schedule or format, but did result in additional questions and
possible theoretical implications being explored.

Anticipatory Accommodation

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) describe anticipatory accommodation as an
alternative to “one-dimensional cause and effect” generalizations that are not helpful for
critical qualitative research. Instead they advocate for a process of understanding how to
make generalizations that take context into account. The goal of this construct is to put
into place a flexible structure that allows for the process of comparing contexts to general
comparable contexts. Through the process of generating comparisons, looking for
similarities and differences among a variety of like-minded contexts, the research will
gain information about how their study fits into that area.

I worked to incorporate the ideas stated above into my research process by
recognizing the difficulty in making comparisons and cross study generalizations in case
study research. This study was produced during a particular period of time under a
particular and unique set of circumstances. Each case does not exist outside of the context
that it was documented in. However, conducting case study research foregrounded the particulars for each of my participants that I believe are relevant to a wider audience. Given that, I believe this study will be useful to other teacher education programs and teacher educators in a variety of contexts. As our student populations grow more diverse, our teaching force will need to have opportunities to sustain discussions about race, equity, and social change that do not assume a deficit stance.

*Catalytic Validity*

Judging the trustworthiness of critical qualitative research should include a heuristic that accounts for the transformation each participant undergoes. How do the participants in this study shift perspective and movement toward pedagogy of advocacy? This type of pedagogy requires preservice teachers to conceptualize their role in the classroom as an agent among many working toward creating transformative anti-oppressive spaces for learning. When evaluating critical qualitative research it is essential to include information about the shift in perspective or stance toward democratic spaces of learning that each participant underwent/took on/embodied.

*Ethics*

Gaining consent from participants, protecting privacy and ensuring confidentiality of participants in a study, portraying data in an accurate manner, and locating my subjectivity are issues that I am concerned about in doing qualitative research. If a research design is like a carefully choreographed dance then these issues involving the ethics and politics of doing the research must be addressed before the study beings,
reflected on as the study is taking place, and critiqued after the study is completed (Janesick, 2000).

Another issue regarding ethics and politics of doing qualitative research is how to guarantee accuracy of the findings. Researchers have to make sure that the stories that evolved out of their projects reflect an emic view rather than they’re own or an unsubstantiated version of the two. I am apprehensive about researchers publishing narratives (that are trustworthy and accurate) that reflect negatively on certain populations, and how that information could be used to enforce unfavorable economic, academic, social, political, or emotional consequences for that group. That being the case I took great care to establish a protocol of care with my participants, that required each of us to share our apprehensions, goals, and evolving concerns on a weekly basis. I was transparent with my participants about my intentions and hope for this research, along with my reservations and fears.

As stated earlier all participants in the study received and signed consent forms, were integral in the data collection and analysis phase of the research, and agreed to have the processes and interactions with students documented in a variety of ways including photography, artifact collection, and digital audio recording. They were informed that their participation in the research study would impact our relationship and how I viewed their teaching and learning. I didn’t want to entertain the notion that I would not be influenced to hold favorable or unfavorable opinion about their performance as a result of our work together. I assured them that the process I laid out accounted for these issues by
building time and opportunities for dialogue and discussion each step of the way. I assured each participant that the information I obtained from the study would not be used to evaluate her progress in the Middle Childhood M. Ed program.

I was also explicit about the research project with the administration, mentor teachers, students, and families at each middle school site. The students were given consent forms that asked for permission to collect artifacts, take photographs of classroom activities, and audio record conversations. I revised the consent form for one site based on the mentor teacher’s request for removing the option of having an alternative assignment provided for those students who families did not want them to engage in discussions about race, equity, and social change. Each step of the data collection process and description of the study was taken up in a collaborative manner that honored the needs of all parties involved.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The three participants in this study shared their emerging pedagogical choices and how their thinking and actions were influenced by critical orientations to teaching and learning. In this chapter, I begin with a description of each case that includes an analysis of each participant’s pedagogical practices related to their framing and experiences of race, equity, and social change. Although analytic categories in the cases are overlapping and interrelated, I am describing data for each case in relationship to its most salient category. I conclude the chapter by providing a theory of practice that each participant engaged in throughout the study by drawing on the following four domains and subsets gleaned from the data:
The domains represented in each square attend to specific concepts and practices emerging from the data. As a whole, the framework helps me understand how each
participant navigated the sociopolitical realm of critical pedagogy in their particular environments. The analysis that follows for each case will illustrate the grounded nature of theory development for this study and the layered approach necessary to understand the complexities of each case. Four domains emerged from my grounded analysis of the data:

Curriculum
Power and Place
Advocacy and Action
Conceptualizing Race

Each domain is useful for understanding how the participants represented the pressing issues that faced them in their student teaching sites. Within each domain I have included categories that each participant worked toward with varying degrees of success.

I compliment these domains by weaving Lewison, Seely Flint, and Van Sluys’ (2002) constructs of four dimensions of critical literacy theory in the analysis of each case. As stated in chapter two, I draw on this framework because of the flexibility it offers in examining novice forays into constructing and implementing lessons grounded in critical ideology. Each case is representative of a preservice teacher’s investment in teaching children how to participate in a curriculum that builds on their knowledge of the world. This idea is central in Lewison et al’s (2002) framework of critical literacy and supports the data from each case. I also draw on critical race theory to understand the role of race in relation to power and context.
My review of the data indicated that each student considered the content of her lessons a top priority when planning and teaching from a critical perspective. However, when each participant began her student teaching, the context presented challenges that were not readily visible during the planning stages of their units of study. Each placement had unique sets of social and political expectations for teachers and students teachers that were implicitly embedded into the fabric of those learning communities. As each participant took a stance and made her political and social commitments visible, the barriers became more visible as well.

The first domain, ‘Curriculum’, emerged as the participants worked to incorporate principles of critical pedagogy into their planning and teaching. The students were trying to forge different spaces for students and teachers to interact in and around issues of equity, race, and social change. This meant creating a problem-posing curriculum (Freire, 1970) that built on the students’ cultural background and interests. The data that were used to comprise this domain (observation field notes, students’ reflective field journal, capstone inquiry project, interviews) account for how each participant considered their students’ knowledge production and agency in their planning, teaching, and reflections.

The second domain, ‘Power and Place’, considers how each participant understood and worked to redress systemic inequities in their field placement site. The participants were pushed to think about who benefits from the current structure of their field placement sites in their university courses and by their university supervisors on a
weekly basis before they began their student teaching. By the end of the study, all three participants developed a sophisticated understanding of how power and place operated within their student teaching placement. They were able to describe systemic inequities that stemmed from tracking, curriculum design, and supplemental pullout programs. Critical race theory was a powerful lens to apply to this data because each participant found discrepancies among access to high quality learning environments that White, middle class students were receiving in contrast with those offered to students of color or students from low-income families. Drawing from data sources that included field notes, transcripts from interviews, classroom artifacts, university coursework, and reflective logs, this domain attends to how each participant was able to negotiate the overtly political policies that served as barriers to the critical pedagogies they were trying to enact. We gain a glimpse into the ways students’ actualized critical pedagogy in spaces where it was assumed they would separate public teaching from private political thought.

The third domain, Advocacy and Action, made each participant’s commitment to social change visible. The data in this domain attends to the roles each participant engaged in the classroom. It also addresses how each participant began to project their future stance as an educator. Given the barriers and successes they encountered during their student teaching, as they transitioned into their first years of teaching, would each become an advocate or an ally for equitable education? Data sources informing the analysis in this domain included field notes, transcripts from interviews, classroom artifacts, university coursework, and reflective logs.
The fourth domain, Conceptualizing Race, attends to how race is experienced and enacted by the participants and their students in each setting. The data presented in this section examines the social construction of race and the manifestations of racism in multiple settings. It includes an analysis of access to educational opportunities for dominant populations that mask inequities in each site. As with other data sources, this domain was especially informed by winter quarter survey, transcripts of interviews, and university coursework.

The participants in this study had to address planning and teaching within a critical framework in different ways that would account for the sociohistorical and sociopolitical dimensions of their placements. Therefore each domain is not accounted for in the same manner across all three cases. The design of case studies allows the researcher to create distinctions among the cases to understand the realities of each participant. Framing each case around the domains allowed me to attend to parallel, but distinct events and concerns for each participant.
The Case of Rotting Logs: Jill’s story

“This teachers should advocate for those groups of people who are continually excluded from the curriculum by creating an inclusive school environment”

(Excerpt from Reading Response, 5.7.07)

I was only in the room for five minutes and sweat was dripping down my back. I looked around the room and noticed that most of the students were slumped over at their desks with their heads down. At that moment I stopped thinking about my research project and questioned the conditions in which the students I had been observing for the past few weeks were asked to learn in. This caused me think about the analogy Alice Walker made to orchids. (Excerpt from Price-Dennis Reflective Journal, May, 2007)

In her book We are the ones we have been waiting for, Alice Walker (2006) shares a talk she presented at a 2003 Yoga Summit and Retreat in which she highlights the ability of life to sustain itself regardless of the impoverished conditions that surround it. She presents a story about orchids and the tenacity they display by thriving, even blossoming in rotting logs or ordinary trees without being cared for by anyone. As I reflect on Jill’s experience and the students who walked into the semi-light, hot and humid classroom each day, I wonder if school functioned as their rotten log.

The students in Jill’s eighth period class were being tracked in a system that was not designed to document their success. Eighth period was filled with the “undesirable students” (Field notes, 5.07). They were the students that the other teachers sent out of their classrooms for disruptions, students who had been expelled from other schools,
students who did not speak English as their first language, students that were failing seventh grade, and students who were primarily brown or black and did not live in the neighborhood where the school was located. When Jill first entered the school and began observing her mentor teacher’s work with this eighth period class, she sensed that the students were not engaged in the lessons or connected to the curriculum. During our first interview she shared that:

After starting here I was like wow, half of these students are failing or almost failing and they seem totally disconnected from what they are doing in class. They don’t want to do anything. So I thought, what’s the reason? Why aren’t they motivated? How can I get students motivated? I need to bring in culturally relevant pedagogy. Bringing their lives into it (school curriculum) might make them more engaged. (Interview transcript, 4.19.2007)

Jill discovered the ways students were tracked and the instruction that lower tracked students received to be in direct conflict with the schools mission statement which read “…to increase student academic achievement and nurture respect for self and others in a diverse student-centered community.” While many of the advanced or gifted and talented courses lived up to the lofty ideals presented in the statement, observing ideas in practice for the students that populated Jill’s eighth period class was more elusive.
Field Placement

Jill was assigned to Shady Lane Middle School for her second field placement experience and student teaching. She worked with two White mentor teachers in this building from January through June of 2007, spending the last eight weeks as a full time student teacher. Shady Lane is part of a large urban school district with 146 schools that serve over 50,000 students, but is located in predominately white middle to upper middle class neighborhood. At the time of the study, 520 students were enrolled at Shady Lane. The school has a positive image in the community and is considered by many teachers and families throughout the district as a choice or desirable school.

Jill worked with a mixture of students from the surrounding neighborhood and other areas of the city during her field placement at Shady Lane. She made note of the fact that all of the advanced classes were comprised of children from the surrounding neighborhood or mostly white children from other areas of the city. The classes that were considered “low” or below grade level were comprised of mostly African American students, or students who did not live in the surrounding neighborhood. Jill’s eighth period classroom was comprised of twenty-two students with a large percentage of African American students’ not experiencing success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino/Latina</th>
<th>African</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Curriculum

Before she began her student teaching, Jill was beginning to define the roles culture and power should have in the classroom. First, she wanted to expand the curriculum in meaningful ways and avoid the “tourist attraction approach.” For her, this meant expanding the Eurocentric curriculum she was working with by including the voices of minorities and women. Second, by engaging in this work, it was her goal to encourage students to “…challenge the status quo and come to understand who is privileged, and who is not in our society” (Reading response, 5.07). This challenge would only be possible if she provided opportunities for the students in her classroom to examine inequity on multiple levels, home community, school, and society.

Jill set out to create a learning environment where students were invited to participate as knowledgeable teachers and learners. In practice, this meant moving away from a silent, individualized autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1995), to a space where students were asked to work with a partner or group to answer questions and then share what they have learned with the rest of the class. It meant allowing students to move around the room during lessons, pose questions to peers and have discussions about the responses. In essence, it required Jill to construct a space where school and the curriculum could be politicized.
Knowledge production

Jill noted in various discussions and in her teacher research project that she noticed how students were shut down when they attempt to discuss “controversial topics such as race or the war in Iraq. She wrote, “…teachers need to move outside of their comfort zone and re-adjust teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse populations” (Capstone Project, p. 9). Through her planning and teaching she strived to understand the systemic nature of inequity related to curricular choices and how it manifested in the lives of her students. She stated, “I believe teachers need to walk the talk” in terms of curriculum development (Conversation, 3.07).

She mentioned during a few conversations that she sensed teachers talked a lot about meeting the needs of their students, but did not always live out the rhetoric they espoused. On several occasions she watched students begin to engage in discussions that fused their world with the realm of school academics, only to be dismissed or shut down. Topics such as race, the war in Iraq, and life outside of school were silenced. She believed that her classroom should provide a space for students to examine all facets of their lives, particularly race, without repercussion. Jill understood her teaching as a politicized social practice.

The students in Jill’s 8th period class had little experience discussing or examining multiple points of view on any topic within the classroom setting. The banking model of education (Freire, 1970) dominated their classroom experience and there was little space carved out to share their ideas about topics or debate the alternative perspectives missing
from the textbook or worksheets displayed via the overhead machine. Jill viewed teaching as an ideological practice and worked toward disrupting practices and beliefs that contribute to inequitable situations. She created lessons that pushed students to consider missing perspectives and why those perspectives were absent from the curriculum. She included popular culture in the curriculum, let students work with partners and small groups to discuss assignments and created projects that examined divergent opinions.

Although Jill’s students did not consistently convey a sense of engagement in her class, which was a source of frustration for Jill, it was not a deterrent. She knew that she had to find a way to engage her students in the content, but also demonstrate her care and concern about their future. In her final capstone project she wrote, “I wanted to examine how to reach my students to ensure that they have an equal chance at success. I set out to learn what is effective for African American students in my social studies class.” (Capstone Project, p. 3). She integrated her knowledge of urban settings and traditional low expectations that some teacher have for students with her stance as an advocate for children living and learning in these conditions. Jill attended an under resourced school which fueled her commitment to understand and actively work to dismantle oppressive and culturally neutral pedagogies.

By restructuring the literacy practices students engaged in, Jill made space in the curriculum for others to enter the conversation. She modeled and taught the students how to express, listen to, and respond to divergent points of view. She made an effort in her
lesson plans to create situations where students would be required to juxtapose their positions and examine those as a community of learners. Every lesson I observed included time for inquiry into other viewpoints.

*Knowledge Production and Student Agency*

Jill was already aware that her students had opinions about how they were experiencing school, particularly those who were marginalized due to difficulty behavior, accessing English, or cognitive ability. She understood the need to help them share their ideas with each other without reciprocating the methods of silencing that as collective they experienced every day. Developing a critical consciousness meant pushing back on the roles and positions ascribed to them by school. Dealing with student behavior was a major issue for Jill. She regularly wrote about how student behavior was interfering with the lessons she planned and she couldn’t figure out how to involve them in conversations with one another about the curriculum without them yelling at one another, calling one another names, or talking over each other during discussions. Interrogating multiple viewpoints was the most difficult dimension of critical literacy for Jill to plan for and enact because of the classroom culture. The data suggest three principles that Jill followed as I observed her and as she practiced her ideology:

1. Each person has something to teach and something to learn from everyone in the class;
2. The teacher is only one source of knowledge in the classroom, not the only;
3. Debating ideas or asking questions is not about yelling over someone, but pushing back (asking questions to clarify meaning) to understand their reality.
Working with the students to develop a sense of recognition of inequities in their schooling experience was not the objective of her lessons; she was already aware of their critical viewpoints regarding how they were treated at the school in comparison to students from the neighborhood (Interview, 5.07). Her goal was to bring that forward and allow it to blossom and take root in the learning community she was carving out. Jill believed that “…teachers should accommodate students by drawing on cultural experiences and personal learning style.” That meant re-centering student voices that were silenced and exploring issues that mattered to the students like race, popular culture, and violence.

Jill spent a lot of time after school looking for outside resources to expand the Eurocentric curriculum the district required her to teach. This effort to disrupt the traditional model of teaching social studies was her attempt at bridging the theory she learned about in university courses with the needs and knowledge of her students. An example of such work was an arts-based project that stemmed from a unit she was teaching about the Renaissance.

During a lesson that I observed (5.15.07) Jill began by reviewing material from the previous day and then linked this review to a discussion about how people in society comment on their social condition or view of the world. She showed several slides of artwork from the Renaissance period and asked the students to share how artwork can provide commentary on society. In my observation notes I wrote:
This is the first step in asking students to read the world. First, they must recognize that others have found ways to show them versions of the world that are imbedded in everyday cultural artifacts. Once they have a chance to explore and analyze these perspectives, their ability to recognize the tensions and contradictions that exist among various versions of lived experiences in our world will become more frequent and sophisticated. (5.15.07)

Jill began by showing a slide of the Annunciation, a catholic religious image. The slide of Renaissance art depicted the Virgin Mary and an Angel near her. Mary appears to be pregnant. She asked her students to share what they thought of the painting. She asked them the following questions: What does it mean? What’s happening in the painting? As students began to respond, Jill probed with other questions, such as, “Why do you think the lady in the painting is a widow? What aspects of daily life are shown in this picture?” The students continued the discussion about how the artist has depicted daily life and provided insight into what was meaningful to certain groups of people during the renaissance. Below is an excerpt from that discussion:

Jill: Alright … I am going to show you a picture of a painting and you need to tell me the meaning of it.

Students are heard in the background talking

So tell me what’s happening in this renaissance painting. Jim?

Jim: There’s a lady reading a book and another lady has wings

Jill: Right, so there’s a lady reading a book and the other lady has wings

Jill: A girl being visited by an angel. Billy?

Billy: He has a message for her.

Jill: Okay, maybe he’s giving her a message.

Male student: Maybe it’s an angel of death

Jill: Oooh, maybe it’s an angel of death

Male student: I don’t think so. What? A widow?
Jill: Maybe she’s a widow. Why would you think she is a widow?
Male student: She is wearing black
Jill: Okay so she’s dressed in all black. Raise your hand please
Male student: I don’t know his name, but it looks like that angel that visited Mary telling her that…
Jill: It is, Gabrielle. What do you think?
Male student: Oh, …
Jill: Is this the guy?
Male student: No the other one
Male student: I can’t see
Male student: Yes you can
Jill: What is he doing? What …
Male student: … looks like she is having a baby
Jill: Yeah, it looks like she’s having a baby and maybe she's pregnant- yeah the … belly and she is pregnant.
Alright, so this painting is called the Annunciation. It shows when the archangel Gabriel came down and told Mary that she was going to have a baby.

*Student laughter can be heard*

Jill: I need you to sit down.. alright?
Alright, now this shows how important religion was in daily life, what is another aspect of daily life that is shown?

Female student: Reading
Jill: Reading. Reading what?
Female student: Uhh…The Bible?
Jill: The Bible. Ben?
Ben: I have a question.
Jill: Okay, go ahead
Ben: My question is … *(cannot hear question)*
Jill: …. You’re right.

*Another student’s voice is heard in the background. He ask Jill a question*

Student: They got candles *(Repeats)*…
Jill: I don’t know… Alright, so…
Sean: I have two things
Jill: Alright, Sean has two things. What’s important? I need you to turn around.
Sean: Why? Hum, Okay why if it’s an angel why does he have those kind of wings?
Jill: …good question. They’re kind of dark
Sean: Yeah. Another thing is how it’s dressed
Female student: It’s the angel of death.
Male Student: It’s not the angel of death!
Female student: But it looks like it from the picture.
At this point, Jill’s lesson took an unexpected turn. She clicked to a slide of Akon’s Convicted CD cover that depicts him dressed up in a suit in an empty courtroom. She asked the same series of questions? What does the cover mean? What’s happening in the scene? As the students responded this time, Jill pointed out that Akon is sitting in front of the jury box; she asked the students to comment on his appearance and what that has to do with the statement he is trying to make about his life. Then, Jill moved on to share slides of Ludacris’s CD cover, ‘Word of Mouth,’ Metallica’s CD cover of ‘…And Justice for All,’ and Paul Wall’s CD cover of ‘Get Money Stay True.’ The basis for her questions remained the same. What are the artists trying to convey about their lives? Their society? Are there critiques of the world or messages that we may have overlooked? Below is an excerpt from the transcript:

Jill: Okay so now we are going to look at some modern art. When we look at the modern art I want you to tell me what you think is important in the picture and the meaning.
Jill: Okay, what were we just saying?
Jill: Okay, … and Andy what are we looking for?
Andy: We’re looking for the… abstract? Meaning? I don’t know.
Jill: Okay.
Male students: Make comments (aw man....)
Jill: Okay, so tell me the meaning. Ben?
Ben: Well see it looks like he’s in court and he’s …?
Jill: Okay, right. Pete what do you think?
Pete: It has explicit language in it. Akon nasty.
Male student: Pete be quiet
Jill: Alright
Jill: Alright, what were you saying?
Male Student: He is sitting in front of the jury
JILL: Right he is sitting in front of the jury. What do you notice about the way he is dressed. Alright, raise your hand. Julian?

Julian: (Long explanation that I could not make out)

Jill: Ben. Okay

Ben: First of all, okay … (could not make out what he said)

Students laugh

Jill: Alright. We said he has money and he is in a courtroom. What does that mean? What is he trying to say?

Male student: He’s convicted

Jill: Alright Is he trying to say I have money I’m not worried? Anything else?

Male Student: Oh, I see something. I think … he’s a bad man

Jill: You think he’s a bad man?

Male Student: That’s true.

Jill: Alright, so maybe he’s saying it doesn’t matter if I go to jail because I already have money and power or is he saying now that I have money and power but I’m already going to jail

Jill: The second one

Alright, now the next one

Students shout out Luda! That’s the man.

Jill: Alright, raise your hand and tell me what you think is important in this one.

Ben

Ben: Okay, okay. What I see … is he got like… and he’s….

Jill: He got money

Male Student: His dog looks like he had rabies…

Students begin talking over one another

Jill: Alright, what is he saying? What does word of mouth mean?

Male Student: He’s saying I’m gangsta

Students: Shut up

Jill: Sean, What do you think?
Raise your hand

Chris?

Jill: Why do you think their mouths are really big?

Students respond, but can’t make out what they are saying

Jill: Does anyone know his latest song on the radio – what it’s about?

Raise your hand

Raise your hand

Students: Clapping….

Male Student: She’s mad

Jill: I think his wife is angry with him.

Male Student: What’s up with y’all and the wife?
Jill: Who is he mad at? What kind of problems does he have in that song? Does anyone know?

Male student: I didn’t hear all of that
Jill: He’s angry. Yes, he is angry. I think his wife is angry with him. He says he did the wrong thing because he needs money to feed his kids. What does he say he is going to do?

Male student: Rob something?
Jill: He says he is going to rob a bank. Why does he need to do that? Because he needs money to feed who?

Male student: His wife

Jill: His kids. He needs money to feed his kids. He says he can’t afford to feed his kids so that’s why he has to rob a bank.

Male student: *Asks Jill a question- Why is he doing this?*

Jill: No it’s not him now. It was him before or he is talking about someone else he knew. But he is using his word of mouth to talk about what?

Students: Problems
Jill: Right, problems

17:00
Students: That’s Paul Wall (more comments about Paul Wall)
Jill: Alright, if you have something to say raise your hand please

Students can be heard talking to each other in the background

Jill: If you have something to say raise your hand

Male student: Okay. I have something to say. He has a nice car and probably has lots of money because he has all of these tattoos. But I think he might have been in trouble one day because he has freedom written on his arm right here

Jill: Okay

Ben: And then he might like … because he has a Houston Astros baseball symbol on his… and this I don’t know- I think it says Duke something

Jill: Alright Ben- thanks for breaking that down for us

Ben: No problem

Jill: Alright, so what’s important to Paul Wall? What do we see there?

Students: Money
Jill: Money, what else?

Students can be heard sharing responses

Jill: Tattoos. Bling. What else?

Male student: Stunner shades… stunner shades

Male student: Put your stunner shades on

Jill: Stunner shades. What else?
Student: money
Jill: Money. What else? And he’s in a nice car right?
Male student: How you know that?
JILL: Because I can see it in …
You might be able to see it better from here
Alright, why does he have… I’m sorry…

Students can be heard arguing (sit down... shut up)

She then informed the students that the assignment she created for them involved creating

their own CD cover. She asked them to place images of importance on the cut out paper

she provided for them. The goal was to show the world what they cared about- their

perspective of life.

Jill: Alright are we ready? Ready? Ready?
    Alright, why do you think it says freedom on his arm?
Male student: He got out of jail?
Jill: He was in jail?

Students talking
Male student: He has freedom to do what he wants
Jill: Maybe ... maybe

Students talking
Jill

Get that money stay true- what does that mean?

Male student: Get that money stay true
Jill: Stay true to what?
Male student: The south
Jill: The south
Male student: No it means like get that money and don’t snitch
Jill: Don’t snitch?
    Someone else said stay true to your neighborhood
Male student: No stay true to your drugs
Male student: No man???
Jill: I don’t think that’s it
    Alright, what you are going to do is shhh.
    You are going to make your own album covers about what is important to you.
    So what kinds of things are important to you?
What struck me as significant about Jill’s lesson was the direct connection she was able to draw between popular culture and the Renaissance. This approach allowed students to draw on their expertise in music, hip-hop, and issues that plague celebrities. By reading the cover art as a text that works to position its audience and subjects in particular ways, Jill was modeling how to speak back or disrupt meta-narratives that operate on an unconscious level in our society; from religious icons to urban youth cultural references. The message was made clear in their discussion: Images and texts are not fixed.

Her lesson also created an opportunity for Jill to draw upon her knowledge of hip-hop culture. In this classroom, her access to and experience with youth and popular culture was invaluable. She knew how to make connections between curriculum and popular culture by building on her students’ understanding of images and texts from art forms that she also enjoyed. Jill grew up listening to hip-hop music and was able to capture the political and social critique this genre of music relied upon to examine inequities in society, in her life, and with her students.

By positioning her students as resources and directly drawing on their cultural experiences and personal learning styles, Jill helped them to gain access to a language of critique and resistance. As Lewison et. al (2002) point out, disrupting the common place requires teachers to include popular culture and media in the curriculum to examine how people are positioned or choose to position themselves in society. This work with her
students is a testament to Jill’s stance that “Teachers should advocate for those groups of students who are continually excluded from the curriculum” (Response, 5.07). For Jill, this work involved presenting students with relevant and meaningful information that encouraged cross-curricular connections. In a final paper for class Jill wrote, “I want to draw on popular culture to motivate and engage students. I believe this will allow them to draw on their expertise…” thus shifting the power dynamics around knowledge production in the classroom.

By attending to knowledge production and agency, Jill crafted a responsive pedagogy that attends to how knowledge is produced in the classroom and who has the right to participate in that process. She is making visible some of the taken for granted assumptions about what school is supposed to look like and how teaching and learning should occur with particular groups of students (Kumashiro, 2004). Jill attended schools where teachers had given up on Black poor kids and devalued their cultural knowledge. She witnessed the devastating impact this had on her former classmates, and realized that she was in a position to disrupt this pattern. Jill worked with the students to enact a participatory version of education that accounted for their authority and responsibility in the classroom.

*Power and Place*

Before Jill assumed responsibility for teaching and planning, she observed how her mentor teacher interacted with the students, how he planned and attended to the students’ interest and the district’s curriculum. She found that in the majority of
classroom interactions, the students were expected to work quietly and independently. A typical lesson involved lecture from guided notes using the overhead, and then completing a worksheet based on the lecture or a chapter in the social studies textbook. She noted on several occasions that students seemed uninterested during these lessons and lacked motivation to complete the assigned work. This was evident by incomplete assignments, lack of participation during discussions, and missing homework assignments.

Although her mentor teacher was aware of this dilemma, his philosophy about why the students were responding to school in the way they did, allowed him to reach different conclusions from Jill. He believed that the students in his classroom were responsible for their learning, and that any issues or problems that they were dealing with should be checked at the door. He did not believe that the classroom was the space to air problems or cultural hang-ups. This philosophy guided his life and his teaching: he felt his students would benefit from such a view as well. Jill recognized that his philosophy did not account for how her students perceived the world. There was no space to engage students in discussions about topics from their daily experiences that connected to the curriculum under her mentor’s system. So, she had to explore options that would allow her to use multiple strategies to meet her students’ needs instead of demanding that they conform to an outside version.

Jill’s concerns about the curriculum and the philosophy of teaching that guided her mentor teacher’s pedagogy were not public due to her position as a student teacher in
this placement. She knew that openly critiquing her mentor teacher could effect her evaluations and possible job recommendations. She was aware of how students in the school were being segregated through tracking and the inequitable learning opportunities tied to this system. In her interview, she alluded to the African American students being aware of these discrepancies as well, but only finding an outlet to discuss these issues in the hallways between classes. Jill shared that she overheard a few of these conversations and that the students were growing weary and angry about the situation. The students understood the privileges and academic advantages to being White and from the surrounding middle-upper class neighborhood.

In the excerpt below, Jill provides more insight into the systemic nature of this problem:

4.19.07

Jill: One of the days I was here my mentor made a comment. He said “there is a difference between the neighborhood kids and the kids they bus here. This is Grant Park, a nice neighborhood. And the kids that get bused here are…”(Jill makes a face to indicate that the students are not well respected)
Detra: Oh… I see.
Jill: Yeah. And the kids in his advanced class, are the kids from the neighborhood.
DPD: Wow. Do you see that throughout?
Jill: Yeah. The classes with more minority students or more African America students are the lower groups. Actually it seems like in theory it groups kids that are on the teachers’ list of behavior problems. There are a few of them that are in this class and they are trying to figure out what to do with them. They decided that if they cause problems they are just getting wrote up and going right to PEAK. So they are spending most of their time out of class. And they are talking about since most of them are failing every single quarter, they are talking about having them repeat the 7th grade and I think they know about it (the students). So it’s like, what’s the point? And since most of them are failing class, they are having them do grade recovery which means they sit in the back of the class on the computer and do math and reading work to pass those classes.
The data suggest a negative link between race, academic opportunity, and behavior. Jill did not see any of the teachers at the building raising concerns about this trend or working to disrupt this trend. I gather from the data that in spite of the school having an African American male principal and several African American teachers, the staff still maintained a color-blind discourse that would not allow space to engage in conversations about the racialized experiences of their student body.

**Barriers**

During a debriefing session with Jill after her lesson she shared that her mentor teacher wanted us to switch class periods for my study. Jill was apprehensive about the request, and shared with him that she wanted to continue the study with the eighth period class. She explained to me that many teachers have taken on this attitude, and that eighth period represents the students that most teachers have given up on. She acknowledged that she needed to work on classroom management, but with so many students in this class failing more than one subject, she wanted a chance to figure out how to teach them and help them become more successful in school.

As the school year drew close to an end, many of her creative efforts to engage the students were not working as well. The students were coming to class more restless and willing to attend to directions. Jill captured this frustration in her reflective journal. She wrote:

> During eighth period, a few students absolutely cannot stay seated and/or have a difficult time paying attention. …I am going to try to take the students outside,
maybe that will help the students remain calm without feeling cooped up in the classroom. …I also think I should move some seats around and not allow students to sit anywhere because we have been having some issues with messing with one another and their belongings. When I assign bookwork because of student behavior the students are much quieter and were on task. So I am not sure if all students benefit from this much structure. … I am working on finding ways to engage students, especially right now because it is the end of the school year…”

(5.29.07)

Jill continued to search for ideas to keep students interested in the curriculum, but struggled to find a balance that worked for her and the students.

During the last week of school Jill continued to reflect and seek out strategies to address the behavior issue in her eighth period class. She wrote:

This week I had to completely re-do my lesson plans because I just planned too much for this week. I wanted to do a final project with the students, however that was not going to happen. One thing that was educational and active that went over well was my Explorer Survival game. The students, as a group, picked items they thought would keep them alive the longest. Then I randomly gave the groups scenarios to deal with. This allowed the students to talk with group members and to compete against each other, which always seems to be engaging.

(Reflective journal, 6.4.07)
Jill experienced success and disappointment during her student teaching. Every lesson she created didn’t go forward as planned, and her students did not always share her interest or enthusiasm for the topics they were studying. Jill had to use a lot more of her time outside of school to supplement the curriculum guide provided by the district, as well as convince her mentor teacher that the students deserved a more rigorous engaging curriculum. Throughout her experience she continued to focus on meeting the needs of her students and making sure her words and actions demonstrated their potential and value in the school.

Advocacy and Action

Jill made it clear from our very first meeting that she believed teaching was an ideological practice. She wrote in a response to an article by Delpit (2006), “I want to work toward disrupting practices and beliefs that contribute to inequitable situations” (Reading response, 11.06). That was an indication to me that Jill was willing to take risks and probe areas of the curriculum where inequity could be addressed. It also served as a signal that Jill was beginning to outline an approach to teaching and learning that was critical in nature and committed to investigating how power dynamics shaped the lives of her students.

By engaging in politicized literacy practices, Jill worked with her students to resist the binds placed upon them by dismissing the deficit model imposed on the students and not subscribing to the pedagogy that accompanied it. Jill had high expectations for her students. She didn’t want them to get by or pass seventh grade, as
she commonly heard others hope for. She wanted them to excel. As a student teacher, pushing against this dominant belief system in the school was a risky move. Her decisions could be perceived by her mentor teacher as a direct affront to his practices and beliefs; and he could potentially ask her to leave the class or school site.

Jill wanted to make a difference in the daily experiences her students had in school. She wanted to connect with them, demonstrate that she cared for them and their future, and most importantly let them know that the knowledge they walked into her classroom with was valued and needed to be successful in her class. When she first began her student teaching she realized that her goals would require a multi-faceted approach. She had to address the classroom environment, pedagogical choices, curriculum, and classroom management.

Jill wanted her students to recognize that she cared about their lives and wanted to acknowledge their successes. Most of the students in this class had the opposite experience with their teachers throughout the day. During one observation, a small group of students working on an assignment shared the following thoughts with me: “That’s what we like about Ms. Jill (used her last name instead), she helps us. She reads the directions to us and explains what to do. She doesn’t just give up the paper and say do it. You know, she acts like she cares.” (Field notes, 5.6.07). Jill was seeking to foster a different kind a space to learn in – one that showed value, compassion, and care for her students’ lives, their ideas, and their futures.
Conversations I heard during classroom observations and assertions she made in university coursework affirmed her commitment to investigate institutional power structures with her students and the ramifications these systems had on their daily lives. She wanted students to be able to identify inequity, recognize and locate it within local power structures, and then advocate for change.

When I began observations in Jill’s classroom and reading and responding to her reflections about pedagogy I anticipated finding a deep sense of critical ideology in her thought process as well as classroom lessons. When I did not read references or ideas that could be attributed to critical theory, I became confused about what I was seeing in her classroom.

Jill was working within a critical pedagogy framework, but did not locate her work with that scholarship. What I came to realize was that Jill cared about her students and was doing what she considered to be good teaching. Many of the tenets of critical pedagogy, such as: (1) reflecting on and revising instructional practices across time and space; (2) working in “real-time” without the aid of a blueprint of script; (3) re-imagining classroom practices to take into account, build upon, and extend students’ “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005); (4) establishing a learning environment where students are seen as active participants who construct knowledge, negotiate meaning, and use their agency to challenge oppressive practices that marginalize groups in our society, could be applied, in Jill’s view to ‘good teaching.’
When working to represent her case for this study, I had to make sure that I understood what body of work informed Jill’s practice from her perspective. The data suggest that it was critical pedagogy, but Jill did not always identify it that way. She frequently referred to critical work as ‘radical,’ and she did not locate the work she did with students in that same frame of reference. Given Jill’s schooling experience and history in racialized spaces, the work she did to affirm her students’ knowledge and set high academic expectations, may have been instinctual instead of calculated.

*Vision of self as future teacher*

It was not until I read through Jill’s final master’s project that I gained better understanding of where she was coming from. Jill did not label her work critical in the ‘radical transformation to disrupt the entire world’ sense; but critical in the sense that she wanted to provide her students with a private space in school to deconstruct taken for granted information. The pedagogy for accomplishing this was not, in Jill’s view, always critical in natural. Her goal was to tailor the curriculum to her student’s lives and to motivate and engage them in lessons.

For example, creating an interactive review game during the last week of school that was based on the show Survivor disrupted the typical worksheet-based routine. Instead of having students sit in their seats all day and watch movies and fill out worksheets based on the movie, Jill created a lesson that would review topics while engaging them in more embodied experiences. Jill did not view this as a critical pedagogical strategy, she thought of it as finding a way to engage her students. The
purpose for creating the lesson was not to disrupt the commonplace, or make social justice visible, but in essence the lesson did those things, even if it was not her intent.

Jill also shared on many occasions that teachers should advocate “for those groups of people who are continually excluded from the curriculum and create an inclusive school environment” (Reading Response, 5.07.07). Although many of the classroom teachers at her field placement site had voiced feelings of frustration and hopelessness regarding many of the students Jill worked with, she still clung to the belief that teachers should do their “part to speak for social justice, equity, and diversity, to inspire others around them” (Reading Response, 5.07.07). The dilemma was not knowing exactly how to accomplish this. How could she teach students to have a “critical eye” so they are aware of dominant narratives and how that works to marginalize certain groups?

Her pedagogy became a site for praxis. Each day she would reflect upon the conditions her students were required to work in and create opportunities for them to be successful based on their interests and learning styles. Her insistence on working with the lowest achieving group of students in the seventh grade to re-engage them with school and show them that someone cared about their future and success was an act of social justice.

Race

In a critical response paper that addressed how teachers can help their colleagues take multicultural and anti-racist education seriously, Jill wrote:
It is valuable to see how issues of diversity, equity, and social justice are played out, not only in the school but the community and school environment. It draws attention to the fact that most teachers would ignore or punish students for bringing up issues of race and/or sex instead of getting to the root of the problem and taking a teaching moment to help discuss these issues that are oftentimes central to their lives. (5.7.07)

Jill was not intimidated by discussing race with students. She knew they were already actively engaging in these conversations and felt frustrated that little was being done to bring them into the open and facilitate productive dialogue around the problems they were trying to work out on their own.

In another assignment from the reflective seminar course, Jill provided more insight into her understanding of race and inequity. She wrote:

… students should challenge the status quo and come to understand who is privileged and who is misrepresented. By being more aware of racism and discrimination students will be more prepared to fight for change. This empowerment will not only engage and motivate students to learn, but will help to reshape the community to one that includes all people on equal footing”. (5.07)

Jill reported on the survey I administered to the entire cohort that she participated in a group discussion about race and stereotypes with students at her middle school placement during lunch. The purpose of the conversation was to share how language shapes how people perceive others; how it can be used as a weapon to hurt other people. Jill felt the
conversation was productive, and that students shared how they felt when others had judged them based on stereotypes or called them racist names. She shared that she would use a similar tactic with students to discuss race, equity, or diversity, but would make sure that the conversations and exploration would be ‘real.’

Participating in this research project, joining discussions about race, reading articles from university courses that addressed whiteness, race, privilege, and oppression, and taking time to reflect on how these ideas manifested in the her student teaching placement, Jill was able to critically reflect on race, equity, and social change. Her reflections indicate a strong commitment to enacting pedagogies that support students’ examination of inequity, race, and social justice.

This sentiment is reflected in the following quote: “… I am more aware of what I teach, and how to bring issues of race, social justice, equity, and diversity into the classroom. …I hope I could inspire students to be advocates for change and learn that they do have a powerful voice.” (Reflection, 5.07). This awareness of her teaching practice is necessary in her growth as a critical educator. At the end of each day she has to be willing to examine her practice and ask tough questions about how she engaged all students and made the lives and experiences of all students matter in her classroom.

During our second interview Jill explained that race is more complex than researchers or most people share in public spaces. The excerpt below provides more insight into how her background experiences in two distinctly different urban and suburban school districts shaped the way she conceptualizes race:
4.07
Detra: So, I asked you how you conceptualized CRP, what about those other terms. What about race? How would you conceptualize that?
Jill: I think I have a different idea about those. So race is more than just than how you look and act. Because when I was in neighborhoods, I didn’t act like I was supposed to. I didn’t act like the typical white girl was suppose to. I had cornrows.
Detra: Was that because that was what your peers were doing?
Jill: Yeah
Detra: So what happened when you moved?
Jill: Yeah. Okay, like I moved to this white preppy suburban school where all the girls wore ribbons in their hair and yeah, I was like... I was like on an Adidas kick because I had all Adidas outfits. I even had an Adidas chain.
Detra: Laughter
Jill: So it was like a culture shock to me and I was very angry for a while. But eventually I moved on.
Detra: You figured out how to navigate that space?
Jill: Yeah, and I am still trying. I am still different from many of my friends. I like to dance more and I listen to different types of music than they do. But, like I umm… I guess it’s who you identify with. Does that make sense?

Jill’s notion of race was tied to her lived experience, not phenotype. The cultural experiences of her youth shaped the way she interacted in the world and recognized herself in society. Moving to an environment where she shared the same skin color with the majority of people, did not bring an immediate racial or cultural affiliation with that group.

Given Jill’s experience growing up in a socially and economically diverse setting, she was able to hone in on the educational disparities visible along racial lines. The urban school she attended as a child with a predominately African American population, had fewer resources, more students packed into classrooms, and teachers who had low expectations for the students. Jill understood how structural inequities in school were tied to race, and chose to enter the profession to counter those experiences. Her willingness to
ask questions, read literature related to race, equity, and social change, as well as constantly searching for ways to engage students in the curriculum by bringing in their culture demonstrate Jill’s growth and commitment to becoming an educator who reflects upon injustices in our society and uses those reflections to craft a responsive humanizing pedagogy that offers critique and hope.

Summary

Jill’s work with students engaged all four domains of the framework: Curriculum, Power and Place, and Advocacy and Action, and Conceptualizing Race. As she became more comfortable in her new position as student teacher, her planning, teaching, and reflections became more purposeful and focused. When analyzing the data for Jill’s case, I created the table below to distinguish the ways Jill was able to take up her teaching and conceptualizations of students in each domain. The shading is done in gradations. With the darkest shaded area representing the domain that she was able to engage more visibly through her teaching and planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Knowledge Production</th>
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Table 4.1 Jill’s Domain Analysis
Jill spent the majority of her planning, teaching, and reflections within the curriculum domain. The goal of her lessons was to shift the focus away from the teacher and the culturally neutral curriculum and onto the students’ interests and life experiences. She explicitly made the students’ production of knowledge and agency the focus of her work as she tried to navigate the other domains.
Quarantine- Sam’s Story “Bridge of Illusion”

Illusion

1 absolute: the action of deceiving b (1): the state or fact of being intellectually deceived or misled: misapprehension (2): an instance of such deception

2 a (1): a misleading image presented to the vision (2): something that deceives or misleads intellectually b (1): perception of something objectively existing in such a way as to cause misinterpretation of its actual nature (2): hallucination 1 (3): a pattern capable of reversible perspective


There are times I find myself engaged in work that is based on the illusion of cooperation, understanding, and change. I have experienced these types of interactions when trying to work with my son’s second grade teacher, making field placements for student teachers, and negotiating assignments related to social justice with preservice teachers. When it becomes apparent that our work is in jeopardy of failing, one party typically continues to move forward without acknowledging the problem. This typically leaves the group or other person confused, hopeful, and wondering if a solution is on the horizon. To me, these experiences represent a falsehood.
Illusions are captivating and convincing because they allow the voyeur to suspend disbelief and stay grounded in a hope of convenience. The problem is, this hope is premised on a false notion, an illusion. Without acknowledging and working to deconstruct the illusion, one often loses sight of the problem and begins to believe that they are working toward a solution- when in reality they are only serving to exacerbate the problem. Daniel Berrigan (2001) describes this unperfected dance, as a bridge of illusion. He explains:

This can be the most dangerous kind of all- the one that is hardest to replace. People are constantly passing over this bridge, back and forth in their dreams and ideologies and obsessions and fears; and they are being reinforced in all those things, importing and exporting to one another. The bridge of illusion grows stronger in such trade. But the bridge of illusion must be brought down before a real bridge can be constructed over which human beings can pass to and from reality. (p. 24-25)

Sam’s case serves an example of this bridge. In the district where Sam completed her student teaching, diversity was tolerated, celebrated, and embraced. The school’s mission statement reads: Kennedy Sixth Grade School will provide a diverse and supportive learning environment for all sixth grade students that will enhance their transition from intermediate to middle grades. The reality of how diversity was lived by students was another story.
Field Experience

Sam completed her first field experience at Third Street Elementary School located in the same large urban school district where Jill did her student teaching. Sam worked with a fourth grade classroom that was predominately made up of ELL students. Her second field placement and student teaching were to follow at the only middle level immigrant “welcome center” school in the same large urban district we often partnered with for student placements. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, her placement was cancelled due to staff reorganization that resulted from low performance on state mandated achievement tests.

After calling around to other middle schools in various districts, I thought I found an ideal placement for her in a large suburban district that was experiencing an unprecedented influx of Mexican, Latino, and African immigrants. Sam was slightly apprehensive about this placement, because the demographics and political climate did not provide indication that she was entering a space ready and willing to embrace critical dialog about the needs and experiences of immigrant students. She noted in her capstone project that our country’s meta-narrative on immigration takes on a mythic quality by not addressing the exclusive nature and patterns of systemic racism that accompany immigration. This meta-narrative has seeped into the American psyche and created an illusion that our policies and attitudes about immigration are welcoming and inviting for all who stand in line, pay their fee, pledge their allegiance, and enter our country “legally.”
The problem with this illusion is the same as with other illusions; it does not provide space or opportunity to address the reality of being a middle school student who is not from this country, or a preservice teacher working with middle school immigrant students in a predominately white, upper-middle school that views their presence as a hindrance to the community’s progress. By hindrance I mean the school district that Sam was placed in for her middle school experience (Jan.-June, 2007), was actively working to limit the impact that immigrant students learning English had on the district’s state report card. This meant, for them, enacting an English only policy at each school, providing separate classroom for English language learners (segregated from other students), and lobbying the state legislature to exempt immigrant students who did not speak English as their first language from their school test scores. At the time of this study, Jonesville was the only school district to present or endorse this argument before the State Department of Education and the State Legislature.

Understanding the system

Sam completed her second field placement and student teaching at Kennedy Sixth Grade School in the Jonesville school district. As mentioned in chapter three, Kennedy’s population consisted of mostly white middle-upper middle class students. Although I assured Sam that her placement would provide opportunities for her to work with English Language Learners, the reality stood in stark contrast with this promise. When she arrived at Kennedy and met the students in her classroom, she was disappointed to learn
that she would not have any ELL students in her classroom. Sam expressed this sentiment in the following response:

...This immediately called to mind the very visible racial and ethnic differences between my fall and spring student teaching placements. In the first placement, roughly a third of my students were African or African American, a third were Latino, and a third were white, with various other ethnicities (Middle Eastern, South and East Asian) were mixed in as well. In my current placement, things are much more racially and ethnically homogenous, with over eighty percent of the student body being white.” (May 2007).

The focal class for Sam’s work was comprised of twenty-seven sixth grade students. These students were placed on Team A with a total of ninety students. Three teachers, who along with content area subjects taught one period of language arts, guided the team. This structure allowed for students to be grouped and tracked by ability. Sam’s language arts class was considered to be the highest or best performing class. Sam’s mentor was a middle-aged White woman that was well respected within the school community. Of the twenty-seven students in her language arts classroom, only three students were non-white.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Population in language arts class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>N= 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>N=2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>N=1 (student emigrated from Eritrea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>N=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>N=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>N=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Demographics for Sam’s Classroom

The racial and ethnic make-up of the class reflected the larger community of Jonesville. It suggests that students at Kennedy had very few opportunities to interact with students who had different experiences in society or held different world views.

The school created a policy that placed all students who qualified for ESL in one of the five teams and confined them to one room for pullout instruction. This systematic exclusion of students went beyond physical separation, due to a district policy that condoned and promoted the need to reprimand students if they were caught speaking any language other than English. Sam described this physical, social, emotional, and cognitive isolation as quarantine.
The impact of how the students were isolated from the rest of the building provided an opportunity for Sam to stop and reflect about how this was impacting the culture of learning for all students at Kennedy. She wrote, “What were the effects of such categorization on the learning experiences and community formation of students at Kennedy, both those who were English Language Learners and those who had been born and raised in the city?” (Capstone Project, p.5). She was deeply disturbed by this system of exclusion and we set up a time to meet and discuss how she was conceptualizing her role at this school.

During our meeting Sam explained that she was not sure if this space was going to work. She felt like her goal of working with marginalized immigrant youth would not be actualized at Kennedy because with the exception of four students, white, monolingual, and middle class children made up her classes. We both struggled with how to proceed. As the program manager for her licensure program, I felt compelled to honor her request and find a placement that would fit with her goals and prepare her to teach in an immigrant dominant community. However, I also felt that her ability to view the systemic nature of oppression and infuse her lesson plans with opportunities for students to deconstruct their notions of how the world works would benefit the students and teachers at Kennedy Sixth Grade School. After a few days of deliberation, I decided to keep Sam at this field placement site.

After taking into consideration the needs and interests of her students, and her commitment to critical pedagogy, Sam decided to create a unit of study to examine 21st
century immigration, with a specific focus on dispelling stereotypes. Her teacher research inquiry question was:

*How can I create a language arts curriculum that responds to the changing demographics of my students’ community in a way that disrupts any one-dimensional images of immigrants and English Language Learners students may currently hold, and calls any existing negative stereotypes into question?*

Her sub-questions were:

a) How will I insure that this lesson is driven by the students’ own inquiry in addition to my own beliefs, perceptions or objectives?

b) How can I avoid objectifying or “Othering” the immigrant or English Language Learner?

c) How can I insure that this unit of study is still a rigorous language arts unit, and not something more closely resembling an advisory period?

Sam’s questions provide insight into her interest and motivation for designing the immigration unit based on principals of critical pedagogy. She wanted to move beyond the binary of enlightened or uniformed, to a more nuanced approach to teaching and learning that challenged students to consider multiple opinions. She could have focused her energy and attention on the students’ lack of information about stereotypes related to immigration, but felt it would best serve them and their school community to engage in conversations that exposed the relationship among power, class, gender, and race. Sam
wanted her teaching to evoke a critical consciousness within her students and provide them with opportunities to examine and problematize their ideas about immigration.

To accomplish her goals she expanded the current pedagogical practices to include drama, partner conversations, literature circle discussions, arts-based responses to literature, interviews, and Socratic style discussions about topics related to immigration. In analyzing the data for Sam’s case, Lewison et al.’s, (2002) framework for critical literacy provides a lens for interpreting her plans and pedagogy within a critical ideological paradigm.

Curriculum

Knowledge Production

For Sam disrupting the commonplace occurred on several levels outlined by Lewison et al (2002): (1) shifting literacy practices; (2) introducing counter-narrative about immigration and English Language Learners; and (3) explicitly addressing issues of discrimination, race, and power within the literacy curriculum.

Shifting Literacy Practices

The classroom in which Sam completed her student teaching was a vibrant space filled with affirming posters, and student work. Her mentor teacher structured the language arts class based on the school district’s approach to teaching reading and writing in the middle grades. Students were allowed to select their own reading material for independent reading, wrote in response journals, completed packets with comprehension questions, presented projects based on books they were reading, and they
engaged in spontaneous discussions about what they were reading and recommended texts to each other. Prior to Sam’s instruction, the classroom operated within an autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1994). Literacy was a visible, social practice, regulated by the assumption that tasks were equally accessible and useful for everyone; literacy was not a political act.

Sam shifted the literacy practices in the classroom toward an ideological model (Street, 1994) by explicitly taking up issues related power, immigration, and stereotypes. She worked with her students to help them “understand the complexity and multiplicity of stories around what is often portrayed to be black or white, us vs. them issue.” (Capstone Project project, p.9-10). This work began with infusing the curriculum with “critical methods of literacy and social –issue exploration” (p. 10) that included multiple texts that the students would not have accessed during free choice independent reading. These texts included political cartoons, historical documents, children’s and young adult literature, interviews, music, murals, and dramatized tableaus. The anchor text for this study was Paul Fleischman’s *Seedfolks*. For Sam, this text served as a “shared communicative context” (Bloome, 1985) to inform and support their inquiry around race and immigration.

Sam’s use of classroom space and furniture was fluid and purposeful. She arranged the desks into clusters, ovals, or any configuration that would allow the students to work in pairs, small groups, whole group, or open space for dramatic interpretation.
Students in this classroom were provided with a variety of opportunities to share learning and construct meaning around issues of power, equity, and race.

Sam engaged her students in the sociopolitical realm of literacy through close readings of multiple texts such as anti-immigration political cartoons, picture books related to immigration, and whole class readings of *A Step from Heaven* (An Na, 2003), *Seedfolks* (Fleischman, 1999), and *First Crossing* (Gallo, 2007). Each literacy practice created a space for students to read, respond, and discuss the texts in relationship to the current political climate in their school and community. Sam planned multi-tiered lessons that provided students with several opportunities to share how they were making sense of the stories about immigration in relation to issues of power and access.

Sam created literacy events that would “engage in the politics of daily life” (Lankshear and McLaren, 1993 as cited in Lewison et. al 2002) such as working in small groups to create murals that detailed possibilities of living in a diverse community; charting questions that examined the implicit political views of immigration, and making sure there was time to reflect on how these issues impact the students at school and in their community. Sam found a gap in the knowledge base her students had about immigration, and how disconnected their academic needs were from the standards created to address this topic. In many ways the curriculum sustained the stereotypical notions about immigration that the students worked with by relegating issues of immigration to the past. Sam explained,
The day-to-day experiences on which this project focused were the daily encounters between my students and current issues of immigration, a controversial topic both locally and nationally. Despite the fact that all respondents indicated in an initial assessment they knew someone who was an immigrant or who had parents who were immigrants, immigration was relegated to the past tense. This resulted in a hidden curriculum that de-legitimized – in fact, forcefully silenced through quarantine- the voices of people affected by present-day immigration policies. (Capstone Project, p. 31)

Sam’s ability to negotiate critical literacy practices with her sixth grade students through multicultural literature and historical documents would have been incomplete without a concerted effort to understand how opinions and ideas about immigration and language circulate and become part of the hegemonic fabric of our country. Sam designed three literacy practices to examine these issues: creating word webs in small groups, individually completing a knowledge sources chart (Banks, 1993), and peer interviews.

Word Web

Drawing on a literacy practice she learned in a drama course, Sam invited the students to create word webs in small groups. Each group was given a large sheet of colored butcher paper, markers, and the directions to write or draw, words, images, or phrases associated with the following words: border, community, English as a second language, stereotype, and immigrant. Each group was given three minutes to write or draw their responses, and then the webs were rotated to the next group. After each group
was given an opportunity to respond to each chart, Sam gathered the class together in a circle and discussed their ideas. Each group chose one word to represent it as a tableau (Appendix B).

By creating the space for students to exchange, debate, and explain how they conceptualized each word, “multiple and contradictory perspectives” were made visible. Inviting students to embody their understanding further extended the discussion and interrogation. Students’ knowledge and misconceptions were made visible and formed the foundation for moving to the next activity which required the students to draw on experiences with immigration and stereotypes to name the sources of those ideas.

Knowledge Sources Chart

Working from an adapted version (Enciso 2006) of Bank’s (1993) Production of Knowledge chart, Sam asked each student to complete and then discuss five domains of knowledge that informed their perceptions of immigrants. The five domains were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I know someone who…</th>
<th>I saw this thing on TV…</th>
<th>Well everybody knows…</th>
<th>My textbook says…</th>
<th>Alternatives to mainstream</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 4.3
Students worked on this activity in class and then shared their responses during a whole group debriefing. There were a range of student responses to the prompts on the chart, but there were a few commonalities across charts.

1. All students reported knowing someone who is an immigrant;
2. More than half of the students could define the term immigrant
3. For nearly half of the students in the class, illegal references were connected to the word immigrant;
4. More than half of the students reported that Mexicans come to America to work at a popular fast food restaurant, Chipotle or to build houses, whereas only 10% of the class noted that immigrants come to America for a better life;
5. All but three students suggested alternatives to mainstream knowledge about immigrants such as “ask someone who went through it”, “create your own cartoon”, or “create your own representation”.

Each group of responses revealed a pattern to associate negative images or ideas with immigrants based on popular notions promoted at home or in the media, along with their expressed willingness to investigate alternative knowledge sources. Even if this was the only time the students were presented with this type of format for thinking about knowledge construction, they learned that multiple viewpoints about a subject were possible to discuss and debate, even if they could not be reconciled. The last set of responses in which the students suggested asking someone who has gone through immigration for information, represents a shift from being satisfied with limited
knowledge toward “paying attention and seeking out voices of those who have been marginalized or silenced” (Lewison et al., 2002, pg. 383).

Sam explained the culmination of these practices by writing:

“By enabling students to make connections between the words or images they were reading, to the world, and to their own lived experiences, I was able to ensure that my students were not only exploring a critical curriculum based around immigration and stereotypes, but were also receiving a rigorous “language arts” education” (Capstone Project, p. 20).

Sam realized that having a politicized agenda that allowed students to examine power and race was not in opposition to good teaching. She could attend to the state standards and interrogate stereotypes with her students; the curriculum did not have to be a mutually exclusive space reserved for ideological neutral lessons.

Agency

Another literacy practice Sam engaged the students in to examine multiple perspectives in order to present a counter-narrative was peer interviewing. This practice was conceived after using the data from the knowledge sources chart to plan next steps in the unit investigating immigration and power. Sam wanted to make sure the curriculum she crafted was based on the students’ inquiry, so she constantly used data to guide her next steps. The last piece of data that informed her initial planning was a set of journal prompts about immigration. She asks the students to respond in writing to the following statements:
1. List three things you think you know about immigrants

2. List three things you want to learn more about immigrants

Student responses trended toward the emotional and physical aspects of immigration, with questions such “what does it feel like to be in another country? Is it hard to move? Why do people risk their life?” (Capstone Project, p.24). The district curriculum enacted a heroes and holidays approach to immigration focusing on food, traditions, and religion. The textbook and planned unit provided little space to disrupt or counter the dominant images or ideas about 21st century immigration that were going to be presented to the students. Sam wanted to make issues of marginalization visible to the students and create new spaces for them to examine competing narratives.

Sam formed a relationship with the English as a Second Language teacher at the beginning of her placement. She heard about and empathized with the struggles the students in that classroom dealt with on a daily basis. It occurred to her that the best resources for her students to know where the immigrant children in their own school. Sam shared this information with her mentor teacher and the ESL teacher. Both agreed that it would be a great opportunity for both groups of students. As stated earlier, many of the students in Sam’s classroom were shocked to find out those immigrant students who did not speak English as their first language attended their school. The students had difficulty understanding the multiple facets of immigration and often were caught up in the us versus them narrative. Sam described this as a conceptual binary.
When Sam learned that the students in her class had no idea that students learning English as a second language attended their school, she revised her original idea to account for this gap in knowledge. Below is an excerpt from an interview with her about this topic:

*Debriefing meeting, 3-27-07*

*Prior to this section we were discussing how the groups responded to creating the word webs based on terms they were interested in examining.*

Sam: This is what we did today. The production of knowledge chart. I told them this was tough stuff, but I thought they could handle it. There was a lot of stop and go at first, and I had to spend a lot of time saying that there are students learning English as a second language at your school and they were like “really?” They are totally quarantined and they are not kept on their team at all. Some of them were like “really?” And some were like “ewe…immigrants…” Basically, they’re in our school.

Detra: Wow! That’s interesting and really telling.

Sam: So I talked with the ESL tutor and she just lit up! She was like here are some books and here are some activities. …

Before the interviews took place the students in Sam’s language arts class brainstormed questions they wanted to learn about from the students in the self-contained ESL classroom. The ESL teacher worked with the students in her classroom to brainstorm questions they had and to discuss answering or not answering particular questions from the peer interviewee. Sam went to great lengths to make sure this
experience was not co-opting or objectifying the students in the ESL classroom. She wanted them to have a space to tell their story and be seen as a knowledgeable contributor to the school community.

Her goals for teaching this unit were layered. It was important to disrupt and affirm as she planned a unit on immigration that was grounded in the schools demographics and invested in examining what that shift meant to the students. Sam wrote in her final project:

The immigrant interviews probably had more impact than I could have imagined. Many students’ expressed increased empathy and surprise at learning how much in common they had with the student(s) they interviewed. Others were shocked to learn that their interviewee had already lived in the U.S. several years (or in some cases, had been born in the US) or already spoke English fluently. Students raised questions about why such students were put in ESL classes, thus de-constructing the process of school categorization that is so potentially violent. (p. 28)

The students were investigating what is means to be an immigrant in a predominately white community that puts a lot of effort into challenging and hiding your existence. Although they were not co-writers of the counter-narratives they heard, they were required to represent their interviewee’s perspective and reflect on what that means about 21st century immigration. As Sam explains, “having counter-narratives that were personally connected to their school and community, and that now had a face, a name and
a story behind them made both the issues and the readings come alive for my language arts students.” (p. 29).

The work that Sam planned and enacted with students at Kennedy is an example of one tenet of CRT, counter-storytelling. DeCuir & Dixon (2004) define counter-storytelling as:

A means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes. The use of counter stories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses…therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups. (p. 27)

The students in the ESL class were able to present their story and in turn complicate the knowledge students from Sam’s language arts classroom relied on to inform their understanding of what it means to be an immigrant in the 21st century. By centering the knowledge of marginalized students of color, Sam made it possible for the students to question their knowledge sources and generate resistance to why schools and society operated as they do. Sam reported that her students raised questions about how students were placed in ESL classes, particularly if they were born in the US and already spoke English. In Sam’s opinion this served as evidence of the students’ attempt to “deconstruct the process of school categorization that is so potentially violent.” (p. 28).

As with any attempt at new critical practices, the implementations of Sam’s ideas were not without problems. Although she tried ensuring equal footing among the students during this process, the children in the ESL classroom were not as informed about the
process and goals of the unit as Sam’s students. She had to rely on the ESL teacher to share and discuss many of the ideas with the ESL students, and in turn their voices and ideas were not a large part of the planning for the lessons. She felt her attempt to avoid “Othering” this group of students was not always on target. That being said, Sam did as most reflective critical practitioners should do. She reflected on the shortcomings of her lessons and made notes on how to avoid these situations in the future. The fact that as a novice teacher she took note of and made a point to analyze the flaws in how she enacted critical pedagogy, leads me to believe she understands the overall goal of critical conscious work with students. She created lessons that worked toward building a critical consciousness and beginning to define what actions can be done to address inequities in our society.

Sam took the initiative to seek out allies in the building to address some of her students’ misgivings and racist attitudes towards immigrants. The data points to how she made sense of the information her students were sharing and what her response of next step should be to push them forward. Her pedagogy was tied to their interests and academic needs, but always with an eye for expanding their sense of social responsibility. The partnership she formed with the ESL teacher led to the peer interviews her students did with the ESL class. Sam capitalized on every opportunity to extend her students learning while challenging their ideas about race, equity, and power.

As a result of the unit on immigration the students in Sam’s class were able to create cracks in the curriculum and begin to unearth other narratives and realities that
were not being taken up at their school. The students pushed back on the curriculum by challenging common-sense practices that were exclusionary at their best, and systematically racist at their worst. They wondered how they could attend the same school as immigrant children and not even be aware of their presence. They begin to wonder why the system was set up that way and who was being benefiting from this arrangement.

*Power and Place*

Attending to issues of power, language, and schooling are difficult topics for seasoned critical educators to intertwine into meaningful inquiry based lessons. Sam chose to address the sociopolitical nature of immigration and stereotypes because her students conveyed an interest in the topic and they shared information that was based on flawed and outmoded assumptions about immigration. She made an explicit point to move away from the heroes and holidays approach to ethnicity, in order to delve into issues related to power and access. This meant presenting multiple sides of the issue, from many voices and examining how this is taken up in our society.

Within the first two weeks of her placement, Sam experienced several incidents with students that shaped the direction of her teacher research project. Her initial concerns about the exclusionary practices at Kennedy were evidenced by conversations and comments made by students at Kennedy. The students in her class shared the following concerns while brainstorming ideas for a business letter to send to a presidential candidate:
• Immigration issues
• People climbing over our walls

The students gave the impression that our country was under siege and their safety was at risk. During this lesson Sam reflected on the tenor of the conversation in her reflection journal. She wrote:

As a class, the students brainstormed a very sophisticated list of possible topics on which they could write to the men and women running for office. Among these were Iraq/war, stem cell/medical research, hunger/poverty, global warming/polar bears/ Antarctica. One, which particularly caught my interest, was the response, “What’s it called when…oh…people climbing over our walls? People climbing in?” This was met with lots of “Ooh! Yeah!” type responses. I waited it out a while, not wanting to give them the words I knew they were looking for. Finally, Raymond (who is from Eretria) shouts out, “Illegals! Illegal immigration!” I added immigration to the class list, thinking about the changing demographics of Hilliard, and wondering how these kids will respond to the changes.

Sam wrote that the students and their families were experiencing a shift in the make-up of their community. Although the students were aware that their neighborhoods were becoming more diversified, the majority of students in Sam’s class had no idea there were immigrants who did not speak English as their first language attending their school. Sam explained that her students, fueled by shows like the O’Reilly Factor, Fox
News, and Channel 1 (sanctioned school news network), believed that our nation and their community were under siege by illegal immigrants. What bothered Sam was that most of her students were only relying on these sources and popular culture (sitcoms, movies, video games) to influence and inform their opinions. She began to note how sophisticated their understanding of 19th century immigration was, but how little they relied on primary sources to inform their understanding of current immigration issues.

Sam began the next phase of her unit with a historical overview by having the students work in small groups to read and analyze an historical document related to immigration. She removed information from the text that would indicate who the subject of the text was. I observed this lesson and noted how the students worked to uncover the subject and origin of the text. The majority of groups thought the text was written by Nazi’s about America. A few other groups thought Stalin or the Japanese wrote the piece. What I found interesting is that without the context of the piece being offered to the students, they had to read the political landscape of the time they believed the article was produced. Their rational about why they believed it was this person or that person was very telling about how they interpret history. For them the subtext of the article was hate. So they discussed what people or countries hated the United States at some point in the past. One group felt the article was targeted at the United States because of our educational system. It was public and non-exclusive. It made sense to this group and many others that Stalin or the Japanese would feel this way because of their need to feel superior to the US and their belief in communism. Only one group believed the article
was written by the Taliban, but that theory was refuted by another group because they
argues the Taliban only existed after 911, not in the past. They brought their awareness of
the sociopolitical to the text. In essence the reading was more about what they knew
about the world and political relationships as much as it was about power and access.
Viewing an historical document set the tone for how issues of immigration are
resurfacing, but the same vitriol and fears still persist.

After the students shared their ideas and supported their assertions, Sam shared
with the students that the subject of the letter and numerous such texts were the Irish.
Given that many of the students (more than ¾) claim Irish heritage they were shocked
that their country was not always in favor of them being part of the social fabric. In fact,
many people in their country did not want their kind to live or work here for similar
reasons being touted on Fox news about the new faces of unwanted immigration. This
was difficult for them to digest. After reading and responding to the political cartoons
(Appendix C), it became clear that inclusion in the American dream was not a given in
this society.

*Barriers*

A couple of parents questioned the work Sam was doing; one family even wanted
to meet with her to discuss why she would need to talk about such topics with a sixth
grade student. Sam approached the meeting with the same care and commitment she used
when teaching. She explained how the topic of immigration became visible in the
classroom and why she planned to take up the students’ questions and concerns around
the topic. For Sam, this was a lesson in addressing highly contextual beliefs about privilege and the role of education. The parent she met with eventually gave her consent to the unit, but was still unclear and unsold on why race was an essential component in discussing immigration. She even went so far as to say that she didn’t see the connection and didn’t want her child forced to discuss any unrelated topics.

This response could be labeled as resistance, but CRT allows us to theorize why a parent would want to separate race from immigration. If the two were somehow connected or intertwined many of the privileges and taken for granted rights their family enjoyed would be called into question. If it is believed that operating as colorblind is the only polite way to ignore or sidestep race, engaging in conversations that explicitly discuss how race is a factor in gaining access or being denied admission into this country, that “family value” is challenged. Sam’s foray into uncharted territory pushed the bounds of what some White families were able to allow. Thus, Ann became more that in successfully navigating conservative social and political spaces of teaching and learning she would need to understand the motivations behind parents’ resistance. Sam’s role as a critical educator evolved as the unit progressed. She created lessons and interactions that called into question the sociopolitical context the students navigated on a daily basis. Her pedagogy de-centered the narratives of privilege that many students unconsciously subscribed to but reconsidered through their growing ideological commitments about how their society operated on a local and national level. She navigated the sociopolitical context by following the students’ interests and using those to examine the curriculum.
Advocacy and Action

Occupying a position of transformation is not an easy task for any educator. Sharing your ideas and commitments toward anti-oppressive education does come with risk as well as rewards. Sam shared her passion for advocacy through her actions and words. Every paper she wrote, every response in class, the questions she raised about her teaching, all centered on doing the best for all children to be successful. What set her commitment to critical education apart from the other preservice teachers in her cohort was her sophisticated understanding of the social and educational inequities many students endured on a daily basis. She did not need to be convinced or converted into believing that her role as a classroom teacher could encompass the role of advocate. She did not see the two as mutually exclusive, but symbiotic.

She believed that all teachers had the potential and the obligation to be agents of change. She understood that the school curriculum was loaded with values and ideologies that maintain the status quo and did not support disrupting common held assumptions about the social and political nature of our society. She made the choice to work from within the system to dismantle issues that marginalized students of color, poor students, and students receiving ESL services. Her engagement in this topic and willingness to push students to cross borders and enter spaces with each other that were typically roped off had an impact on student learning. Exposing deeply held ideologies prompted students to try an understand what it means to be an immigrant student in this space,
inhabiting the body that they occupied, being marked as different projected upon it from members of your community.

As a result of her work at Kennedy, the administration and staff decided to implement many of the ideas Sam worked on during this study. ESL students are now evenly distributed through the building instead of being isolated in one wing. Each class begins the year reading *Seedfolks* and engaging in cross-cultural community building.

Sam had mixed feelings about how her work was being taken up after she left. She was excited that her ideas and work with students interested and motivated people to make some systemic change. However, she was also aware that inviting other teachers to use ideas from her lesson plan without any investment in the issues would be superficial.

Her response to this dilemma is characteristic of someone who is invested in social change one small step at a time. She wrote, “… It is nonetheless interesting and encouraging to note the shifts, and indeed the possibilities…” (p. 32) the future holds for Kennedy. For Sam, recognizing, reflecting, and then acting upon the need for movement or shifts in classroom practice and school culture are indicative of reflexive praxis.

Sam’s work with the students at Kennedy represented the essence of promoting social justice by deconstructing the bridge of illusion they were traveling across in the guise of meeting the needs of all learners.

*Race*

Sam entered the M.Ed licensure program as an advocate for social change. She linked her role in the classroom to promoting conditions that would foster democratic
education through anti-racist and anti-oppressive pedagogies. She relied on multiple venues to critically reflect on the role race, equity, and social change should have in her teaching. During winter quarter, she wrote:

If we frame racism in terms of a “social disease”, what is the remedy? Are all of us not infected to a certain extent? What are the symptoms? What is the difference between “racism” and “racial injustice?” Why do we continue to feel so defensive about being labeled racist? How do we effectively address the social/systemic roots of racism?? Is it not effective to ignite individual examinations or discussions/ where do we start, where are we headed, where would we like to be? Does the metaphor of being “diseased” with immorality or racism relieve the bearer of that disease from responsibility for his/her actions, thoughts, speech?

Sam struggled with how to define race and racism, and the consequences of those definitions. She drew on her own experiences as a child growing up in the south to anchor how she would grapple with these issues in the classroom.

During a class discussion in reflective seminar Sam responded to a classmate’s question about how to begin teaching for social justice. Her response was, “…in order to teach for social justice, one must know their students. To me, this feels like it should be common sense, yet there are times in which assessing our students’ needs falls short of assessing our own needs. We often teach lessons that feel right to us, but completely miss the opportunity to teach lessons that are meaningful to our students.” (Field notes, 3.07).

The more she worked with students in the field, she began to reflect on her motives for
teaching and made an effort to make sure her ideas did not overshadow the curriculum or the interests of her students.

Sam used the university coursework and her field placement experience to expand theory into practice. She noticed that teaching in a diverse setting was not always a prerequisite for addressing issues related to race and equity. In a reflective response, she wrote:

“In my first placement, roughly a third of my students were African or African American; a third were Latino and a third were white, with various other ethnicities (Middle Eastern, South and East Asian) were mixed as well. In my current placement, things are much more racially and ethnically homogeneous. However, these statistics do not necessarily correspond to the degree of multicultural or anti-racist education being practiced in each school. In many ways, the scripted, rigid, standardized instruction teachers are forced to provide at my first placement allows less room for conversations around than would potentially be the case in my second placement.” (3.07)

If that is the case, Sam felt many teachers with more freedom, but less pressure to address race, equity, and power, have an easier time dodging the topic and maybe re-inscribing racist, sexist, and classist biases through their teaching.

She began to question the assumptions and practices about diversity, equity, and pedagogy that often get sidelined during staff meetings or professional development workshops. Later in her response she wrote: “Having had such an awakening myself,
however, I now have a moral and professional obligation to stick my neck out and have those conversations with my students, and perhaps even my colleagues… I find it getting less difficult already.” (3.07). Her work in the classroom served as a testament to her commitment. She crafted lessons that helped students make connections between the way “religious/cultural/racial minorities are talked about today and the historical perspective of hateful speech direct against a group with which they more readily identify” (Survey, 1.07). By asking critical questions of her pedagogy and reflecting on her practice, Sam was able to create a bridge that joined the less academic topics of race, equity, and power, with the district’s standards based language arts and social studies curriculum.

At the end of the unit she designed, she still struggled with some of the same questions she shared on the survey given at the beginning of the study: How do I mediate interactions around race, silence, and power? How do I make sure my agenda does not co-opt the curriculum? Overall, Sam’s ability to critically question her motives for teaching topics, her concerns about 'othering' non-white students during discussions about race and social justice, and the questions she continued to raise about race and equity demonstrated an on-going commitment to reflexive critical praxis.

Summary

Sam’s work with students engaged all four domains of the framework: Curriculum, Power and Place, and Advocacy and Action, and Conceptualizing Race. Her planning, teaching, and reflections were always focused on working with her students to uncover the roots of inequity and do something about it. When analyzing the data for
Sam’s case, I created the table below to distinguish the extent she was able to take up each domain. The shading is done in gradations. With the darkest shaded area representing the domain that she was able to engage more frequently through her teaching and planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Power and Place</th>
<th>Advocacy and Action</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Roles that solidify and limit</td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Vision of self as future teacher</td>
<td>Reading and acting on subtext</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td></td>
<td>Experience with agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 Sam’s Domain Analysis

Sam was able to attend to the construct within each domain across the eight-weeks of student teaching. Her experience with advocacy work, and her in-depth knowledge of her students and the curriculum allowed her to forge space in the classroom to take up issues of race, power, and access from a critical perspective.
The Case of the Unlikely Advocate: Ann’s story

At the conclusion of Ann’s student teaching she wrote in her final reflection paper:

I have realized the importance of teaching for social justice in the classroom and the impact it can have on students, and I am determined more than ever to incorporate this type of learning into my teaching instruction. (Capstone Project, p. 2)

Ann began her journey in teacher education with a traditional conception of teacher and student. She believed her role in the classroom was to provide content-based instruction in a structured environment. She did not articulate any goals related to advocacy or social justice teaching pedagogy. By the end of her program, her conception of teaching and her priorities had shifted. One practice that she engaged in on a daily basis that guided this shift was called “up close and personal”. This practice involved their class gathering their notes or ideas and creating a circle in the front of the classroom.

I find myself drawing on the wisdom of Alice Walker for the introduction to this final case. It is fitting to share her ideas about the power of circles and the potential they have for disrupting oppressive practices in our society. I will begin with a quote she cites in her book *We are the ones we have been waiting for*:
A circle is a healing and connecting prescription accessible to everyone. Every family, any of people can form one. “Circles encourage connection and cooperation among their members and inspire compassionate solutions to individual, community, and world problems. We believe that circles support each member to find her or his own voice and to live more courageously. Therefore, we intend to see and nurture circles, wherever possible, in order to cultivate equality, sustainable livelihoods, preservation of the earth and peace for all.

(Boeln, M.D as cited in Walker, 2006, p. 212)

Ann tapped into the power of circles by gathering her class together for daily discussions related to social justice topics. She created a space built on “…impartiality, equality, and equanimity” (Walker, p.213); in essence a space that thrived on sharing ideas and forging agendas to challenge social injustice.

Problem-posing literacy education places students at the center of the inquiry. Instead of relying on the teacher as depositor, as commonly practiced within the banking method, a problem-posing approach emphasizes the need for reflection and action. It moves teachers and students from the periphery to the center and allows them to take on the stance of advocate, building on their knowledge of the world informed by experiences in school and out of school (Freire, 1970; Wallowiz, 2008). The work Ann engaged in during her student teaching at Russet Middle School attempted to put those ideals into practice. She worked with two sixth grade classes as part of her teacher research project, but for the purposes of this dissertation study, I will focus on the second period language
art class. There were twenty-two students in Ann’s second period class. Below is a chart that displays the demographics of her classroom:
Field Placement

Ann’s experience at Russet Middle School was unique because of the commitment to social justice her mentor teacher already established in the classroom. Her mentor (middle-aged White female) was well known for taking up issues related to race, class, and gender oppression. Before Ann began her full-time student teaching the students in her second period class had just completed Mildred Taylor’s *The Gold Cadillac* (1998/1987). They were accustomed to reading and responding to texts that were about racial discrimination in a variety of ways and in a variety of arrangements. Mrs. King, (Ann’s mentor) had worked with the students to create an environment that mimicked a large retail bookstore set in a coffee house. The furniture was often rearranged to accommodate small groups, partner work, and whole group conversations that were referred to as “up close and personal”. There were books displayed around the
room inviting students to browse and select a title that sparks their interest. There were anchor charts displayed as well that served as a visual reminder of topics and lessons previously addressed (Appendix D).

Mrs. King supported Ann’s work and her development as a critically conscious teacher. She met with her before and after school, during the weekend, and discussed ideas with her over the phone as needed to help her plan lessons and address issues that impacted the classroom. She was present for each lesson Ann taught and provided constructive feedback between classes. Mrs. King also participated in discussion by sharing information from lessons that Ann may have overlooked; offering her opinions on topics; or raising questions that students should be considering during discussions.

**Curriculum**

Ann was committed to incorporating dimensions of critical literacy in her classroom practice. She based her work on Luke and Freebody’s (1997) definition of critical literacy as “a set of literacy practices and civic competencies that help the learner develop a critical awareness that texts represent particular points of view while often silencing other views”. She explained that critical literacy provided a framework for guiding her students to look beneath the surface of all types of texts. The first step is realizing that texts are social productions that are laced with ideologies. The goal is to question that benefits from those ideologies and raise questions about how that sustains inequitable practices. Drawing on Lewison et al’s (2002) categories focuses on how a novice teacher put these ideas into practice.
The question for Ann’s teacher research capstone project was: *What happens when a variety of texts are used to complement a classic novel for the purpose of teaching for social justice in a 6th grade Language Arts classroom.* This question emerged from Ann’s interest in reading and responding to literature to address issues related to social justice. She chose multiple genres of texts that would bring in multiple perspectives about social justice, equity, and race. She also developed the following sub-questions:

a) How does crafting a safe place and space in the classroom enhance student discussion regarding issues of social justice?

b) How does critical literacy help students become caring and competent citizens?

The rational was twofold, first to explore a topic from voices that are not always made visible in the school curriculum and, second, to expand their experience with different modes of literacy. For texts, she relied on music, song lyrics, poems, film, music videos, children’s and young adult literature, and primary source documents.

*Knowledge Production*

Ann’s plans and teaching engaged students in reading and responding to texts in ways that disrupted commonly held notions about oppression in our society. She began this process by charting out literacy experiences that would help her understand the ways students were making sense of the language of social justice. She engaged the students in a series of literacy practices designed to get them to share ideas about language and how it is used to control or define people in our society. First, she asked her students to create a word wall for the terms social justice and social injustice (Appendix E). Each student
had the opportunity to share their definition with the class and provide feedback to each other about their understanding of the terms.

Following the word wall activity, Ann instructed the students to read a poem by Dr. Seuss titled, *The Sneetches*. She incorporated this poem into the unit to start the discussion about difference in society. After reading and discussing the poem, she asked the students to think about difference in our society that are relevant to their daily lives. She made a conscious effort to include texts and would speak to the interests and lived experiences of her students. She wanted them to deeply engage with the topics by analyzing the texts and then using those same skills to analyze their world.

*Literacy Events*

There were two key events related to the inquiry that pushed students to think about how the characters in the narratives they were reading navigated multiple layers of oppression. In the first event Ann divided the class into four groups and provided each group with a contract outlining how their lives would be experienced under the system of sharecropping. She placed artifacts around the classroom that exposed the poverty, cruelty, and economic sabotage that African American families faced under the sharecropping system. After the students read through the contract and viewed the artifacts, each group discussed if this lifestyle would be considered a social injustice. Ann asked the students to consider who held the power in this arrangement and whose voices were silenced. She explained that she designed this lesson to evoke empathy and allow the students to step into the shoes of someone presented with this option.
The second event was created to compliment the sharecropping lesson. Ann presented another perspective about living within the confines of an oppressive racist patriarchal system. She asked the students to read “Still Livin’ Under the Bonds of Slavery Minnie Whitney Describes Sharecropping at the Turn of the Century”. She chose this primary document to juxtapose the voice of a woman experiencing sharecropping to that of the main character in Sounder (Armstrong, 1969), a novel they would be reading in the coming weeks. Again, the goal was to keep expanding the base from which students posed questions about equity and social injustice.

Another literacy practice Ann relied on to examine social issues was Socratic seminar. This method of teaching involved the teacher and students sitting in a circle on the floor and discussing texts. The students brought their ‘talk worthy questions’ to the circle, and the discussion began. Ann defined talk worthy questions, “…as a question about a text that is open-ended, requires an opinion, and one in which the answer cannot be found directly in the text.” (p. 15). Ann and her mentor teacher commented on several occasions that this space was the pulse of their teaching. She felt that it encouraged students to listen and respond to each other’s opinions and questions with honest feedback. I observed Socratic seminar on many occasions and every student participated in the discussion. They didn’t always agree with each other and they relied on Ann and her mentor to keep the focus of the conversation on the text they were reading; still, the students’ opinions and questions made the biggest impact on its success. They wanted to
learn more from each other and directed questions at each other to make sense of the text and how they connected with the major themes from each story.

This balancing act extended to the work students engaged in during literature discussions and partner exercises. Ann created packets for students to complete during and after their literature study group discussions that required them to address the literary elements from the texts such as theme, vocabulary, character traits, and setting. Ann crafted mini-lessons on each of those devices as she read and discussed *Sounder* with the class. She created a large storyboard as a model and guide that served as a visual representation of the work each group would complete as they read and discussed their separate books. Ann expected the students to demonstrate their understanding based on their reading and discussion of complementary texts.

Next, Ann asked the students to pair up and choose a picture book that addressed a social justice issue they were interested in analyzing. Their goal was to read and discuss the story and then create a symbolic representation (Enciso, 2002) of the issue addressed in the picture book. I observed the students working on these cut paper representations and found their discussions and ideas about how to represent issues of social injustice from the text fascinating.

The students’ presentation of their ideas provided insight into how they were processing the unit in relation to the themes found in the picture book. Each pair presented their symbolic representations and the class asked very complex questions around how the decision-making process regarding the symbols. The goal of this activity
was to have the students merge their developing understandings of social justice with the perspective presented from the characters in the book. For example, two female students read *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (1995) by Robert Coles and used red, pink, black, and brown scraps of construction paper to represent an important idea about social justice from the text.

The red pieces represented all of the hateful actions and words White people subjected Black people to during this time period. The pink pieces that flagged the big black square in the corner represented the White people that were mad at Ruby for enrolling in their school. The large black square represented Ruby’s classroom. The small brown square located on the large black square represented Ruby, and the small pink square represented her teacher. This image and the explanations the students gave for their work, provided insight into how students were making sense of the texts, the multiple perspectives presented in the text, and their growing understanding of social injustice.

Ann did not want her interest in examining the impact critical literacy has on student discussion to interrupt her students’ course of study. She wanted to weave social justice into the curriculum so it didn’t stand out as an add-on to the students’ real work.

*Agency*

Ann began to investigate theoretical models to draw on for her unit and she found the work of Blackburn (2003), Sizemore (1990), and Asante (1991) helpful in crafting a lens to make sense of the work she wanted to accomplish with students. Based on her
understanding of Sizemore’s (1990) work, she took up the notion of “pluralistic curriculum”, which is defined as “one that enlightens and takes into account all the groups in society and their need for freedom, equality, work, and peace” (Capstone Project, p. 83). She believed that her role as an educator was to prevent the spread of discrimination by addressing the impact it has on the lives the students she works with and their community.

Although Ann did not begin the program with an explicit agenda connected with social justice, she ended her student teaching believing that it “…should be an integral part of the school curriculum.” (Capstone Project, p. 7). Ann created lessons based on the belief that examining multiple viewpoints and experiences with oppression or social injustice would support students in developing a critical consciousness. She believed that if her students were never exposed to other versions of the truth, they would not have the opportunity to critique or challenge the versions that often get passed along as common sense or natural.

The anchor text for her unit was Sounder (1969) by William Armstrong. Ann chose this text because it was on the list of books approved by the school board; it addressed issues of racism, poverty, and power; and it focused on the importance of community, family, faith, and hope. Despite the book’s dated qualities, Ann felt these topics were at the heart of any critical social agenda and would compliment her plans to draw on a critical literacy framework. She chose historical and contemporary texts that would invite students to examine different perspectives across time and space. Ann
highlighted that “social issues inevitably tap into the conflict among groups struggling for control over resources and ideas. Learning how to discuss and debate these emotionally charged and messy issues is a crucial first step toward working with others to solve collective problems.” (Kelly and Brandes, 2001 as cited on p. 10). To support an inquiry-based approach, Ann focused on multiple groups of people who have been the victim of racial or social injustice. The texts she and her students read captured the experiences of slaves, former slaves, holocaust survivors, women surviving an arranged marriage, homelessness, racism, and social critique.

The students in her class read multiple texts during this eight-week unit that worked in tandem with their reading of *Sounder*. In small groups the students participated in literature study discussion reading a variety of young adult novels with social justice themes. The students created storyboards to showcase their growing understanding of social justice and how characters in the texts responded to various situations involving equity and power.

Ann used a variety of genres and perspectives to compliment her anchor text, *Sounder*. Before reading *Sounder* to the class, Ann relied on other texts to introduce topics related to racism, poverty, and equity while addressing the district’s literacy curriculum standards. For example, she had the students read the lyrics to Waiting on the World to Change by John Mayer and “If Everyone Cared” by Nickel back. After the students discussed the lyrics and watched the video for “If Everyone Cared” Ann asked the students what message they took away from both texts. Students responded by saying.
Next, she began to explain the concepts of mood and tone. The students completed a graphic organizer she created to share their understanding about mood and tone as related to the poem, song lyrics, and video.

*Power and Place*

It has been my experience in life that teaching and learning can fall on a continuum from progressive to restrictive or creative to repetitious. Developing a sociopolitical stance as a literacy educator is also a process in action – always shifting and in the process of becoming more meaningful. As Ann progressed through the program and began to take ownership of the language of social justice she was learning about in her university courses, she moved on the continuum. By the end of her licensure program, Ann described herself as “an educator who takes a sociopolitical stance in my work” (Capstone Project, p. 10). She drew on the work of Hall (2003) to define what this stance meant for her work in the classroom. She planned and taught lessons that placed race, class, gender, ethnicity, and oppression at the center of her inquiry with children.

As a student teacher creating lessons that examined social injustice, Ann had to learn how to operate within the political terrain of her field placement site. She had to develop a sophisticated understanding of what students were learning about social justice in and out of school, and how their experiences shaped the work she was going to take up during her student teaching. She took two steps to address this: 1) create and maintain a supportive classroom space and 2) work with students to challenge status quo. She
explained that creating a safe space for her students to confront issues of social justice would allow them to share their thoughts and ideas openly and honestly.

Ann was constantly trying to strike a balance in her approach in teaching the standards and addressing issues related to social justice. As a preservice teacher, a novice in constructing curriculum, she did a great job of working within the system. She didn’t want to choose between meeting the curriculum guidelines or teaching for social justice, so she figured out a way that she could do both. This was a politically savvy move that speaks to her ability to navigate power—in her own interest, and in the interests of her students.

Ann was not under the same pressure to de-center the teacher as the sole provider of knowledge in the classroom as Jill had been in her classroom. Her mentor, Mrs. King, had already established an environment where the students viewed themselves as contributors to their knowledge production. Ann was able to build upon this foundation by pushing the students to understand how their life experiences shape the ways they engaged the world. She wanted them to share their work and opinions with each other to expose them to multiple narratives that could strengthen their stance on social justice and serve as a counter to the dominant discourse they are inundated with on a daily basis. Interrogating multiple viewpoints served many functions beyond the text- it meant interrogating how their lives were being read and what options they had to speak back to those stories or misconceptions.
Ann drew heavily from Blackburn (2003) and Singer and Shagoury’s (2005/2006) notions of safe learning spaces and the need to make sure classroom contexts promote risk taking and dialogic interaction. Ann wrote:

“The classroom is a space where teaching and learning take place simultaneously and students need to be part of an atmosphere that will encourage them to not only take risks in their thinking and learning but to challenge themselves and to expand their knowledge. Throughout my study, serious issues like racism, poverty, and discrimination will be explored daily, and if I fail to create a “safe” space for my students, I do not think that our conversations will be as rich as they could be.” (p. 9)

She understood that real learning involved honesty. If students were unable to be honest about their positions, how would they be able to share their thoughts and challenge each other to move forward in carrying out a mission of social change?

Although Ann never linked the two, the data from her case suggest that she did see this as a pre-requisite for engaging in critical literacy practices with students. She used the term community of learners to describe this process, but I believe the term critically conscious learners would better illustrate her ideal. She wanted students to leave her class questioning how power operates in the lives of oppressed groups. What’s missing from her argument is a definition of safety.

Ann began to understand that reading texts that addressed social issues from a critical perspective could invite parents, students, or staff to object to her agenda. She
took great care in linking her objectives with the district’s language arts curriculum and keeping her mentor teacher informed of her ideas and how she wanted to take them up in the classroom. I also shared my IRB forms with her mentor teacher and she requested a revision. She did not want students to have the option of not participating in the lesson. She felt Ann’s plans were well thought out and took into consideration the students’ academic needs and learning styles. Mrs. King also felt the unit Ann designed was in keeping with the critical literacy perspective that informed her teaching and she did not want to provide an option for students or families to dismiss this work.

In the beginning of Ann’s student teaching she realized the need to understand the context of the school she was working in and issues that were bubbling just beneath the surface. Russet Middle School was the newest middle school in the larger suburban district where Ann was placed for student teaching. It was also the least socioeconomically, racially, and linguistically diverse middle school. To counter the reputation Russet had of being the “country club school”, the district re-drew attendance boundaries to include more children of color and children from economically fragile homes. The children that were bused in from the other side of town were usually children of color and poor white children. There is evidence to suggest that students were aware of the class, racial, and linguistic differences at their school and how these differences manifested in class assignments, disciplinary action, and course selection. On several occasions I was included in conversations with African American students who discussed their experiences at Russet and theories about why certain students seemed to get “called
out” for behavior that other students engage in without consequences. I did not speak with Ann at length about these conversations, but I did ask her about her impressions of the school climate and if she discussed any issues of social injustice with her students of color.

Ann was nervous about discussing issues related to racial injustice, particularly when addressing present day concerns. She didn’t know what the students or parents would think about her if she brought up issues of race or equity. She read about teachers exploring these issues with their students and wanted to do the same as a student teacher. She realized that all year she had been reading about theories related to social justice and equity, but wanted to put those ideas into action in her setting.

The context of this setting presents an interesting dynamic to account for in a classroom that will be examining issues of race, power, and oppression. Two themes emerged from data - 1) the need to reconcile the standards based discourse with an explicit social justice agenda; and 2) understanding the political dimensions of the school.

*Balancing Act*

Ann made her commitment to engaging in critical literacy practices clear from the outset of this study. She was also just as clear about the need to be thorough and explicitly account for the language arts standards and district curriculum. Often she would discuss both needs simultaneously, linking one discourse to the other. She believed that teaching from a critical perspective would help her students “…build good reading strategies and critical thinking skills.” (Capstone Project, p. 8). Although a lot of
preservice and in-service teachers conflate the two ideologies, Ann saw a relationship between the two and always discussed them as mutually beneficial. Her lesson plans and conversations often blurred the line between both orientations (sociopolitical and cognitive), but her written presentation of each concept made clear distinctions in the purposes of engaging both a sociocultural and sociopolitical literacy agenda, while attending too and providing guidance around a cognitive based approach to reading.

She often used both discourses to describe her work without ever acknowledging the inherent tensions between the perspectives. For example she explained in her final capstone project that engaging in critical literacy practices would “lead to the interrogation of the ulterior motives and surface ideas of all types of text, including visual, print, digital, and audio” (as cited in Ciardiello, 2004, p. 138) as well as “build good reading strategies and critical thinking skills.” (Capstone Project project, p. 8). Ann decided to merge both perspectives by engaging students in literacy practices that challenged the status quo while explicitly meeting the district literacy benchmarks.

There are multiple examples throughout Ann’s work in the classroom to support this notion, such as creating a chart to keep track of character quality words; providing students with time to illustrate and descriptive the main conflict in the texts; making sure each student had an opportunity to create talk worthy questions that would be taken up in Socratic seminar to examined issues of social justice/injustice in the texts.
Advocacy and Action

Social justice became part of Ann’s teaching philosophy as she spent more time learning about it and working in the classroom. However, it was not part of her teaching agenda until she was told that she would be evaluated on how well she addressed this component in her teacher research project. Ann defined teaching for social justice as a classroom where “…real world issues such as racism, poverty, discrimination, sexuality, classism, and gender inequalities are openly discussed in the classroom, thus providing students the opportunity to think critically while considering different perspectives.” (Capstone Project, p.2).

Her goal was to make sure her students would leave the classroom equipped with the tools necessary to “…fight for what they believe in and stand up for change…” (Capstone Project, p.6). She designed lessons to incorporate social justice into the classroom to provide students with a chance at actualizing the promise of democratic education. To her that meant motivating students so they want to make a difference in the world. She worked to make social injustice so explicit that students would recognize and discuss inequities in their society and then take action to make a change.

Based on her coursework and understanding of the context she was working in, her intention was “to imbed issues of social justice into my daily lessons so it becomes a natural component of my curriculum throughout the year.” (Capstone Project, p. 10). Ann created lessons that invited students to read literature and ask critical questions, seek alternative viewpoints, and examine the role of race and power in texts.
Ann’s work made discrimination, racism, and power topics that were appropriate for the classroom. She wrote, “I believe that issues like racism and discrimination should not be avoided in the classroom but instead questioned and challenged.” (Capstone Project, p. 19) even if some students are uncomfortable. Students didn’t have to leave those conversations on the bus or lunchroom. There was a space to theorize and share how these experiences impact the learning community at Russet as well as shape racial, power, and equity dynamics within our country.

The students easily made connections to injustices that were occurring everyday at their middle school such as gender inequities and sports and class based preferences and exclusions. Ann wrote: “…when you use complimentary texts in order to teach for social justice, students begin to recognize social injustices. They take a stand on these issues, and they have a space to voice their opinions.” (p. 31) An excerpt from the following transcript supports this assertion:

June 5, 2007 (transcript from Ann’s student interviews)

T= Teacher
Students: M-Melanie Z- Zeek C-Chris S-Samantha N-Nick MK- Mitch L-Logan CB-Christian
T: How has your perspective about social justice changed as a result of the work we have done in class?
M: Well like how it got better?
T: Yeah. How has your outlook or view changed? Maybe you didn’t know anything about it before.
Z: Um. Well I sort of saw, I didn’t know there were so many different types of it and then sort of seeing lots of it.
C: I’m gonna piggyback off of him and I didn’t really know that many of them but when you guys like explained them to us, it kind of helped.
MK: I agree with Zeek and Chris. I look at things in more detail to make sure I’m making the right decision about should I be doing this or will it be unfair to other people things like that.

T: Ok

S: It kind of like changed me cause it showed me how people would feel from their point of view, and like it like tells me to not do the bad things and just do the right thing cause you know how they feel.

M: Well, I’m gonna like say what Zeek said. I really didn’t know what the difference was until you guys taught it to us. I thought social justice was just like major conflict. Now I know social justice means.

As demonstrated in the excerpt above, Ann was correct to believe that her work in the classroom created multiple avenues for students to process texts and discuss issues of social justice and injustice as they occur in the real world. Her work shows us that preservice teachers can be responsible for making sure social justice is not seen as a punishment or an add-on to the curriculum.

Although some students may feel reluctant to participate in discussions or activities if the topic causes them to feel uneasy, critical pedagogy encourages educators to assume it was there responsibility to encourage students to speak up and voice their opinions, but be willing to embrace the moments of awkward silence. Ann’s teaching serves as a model for other novice teachers who desire to stand up for what they believe in, even if it means challenging the norms of school discourse, use of space in the classroom, and traditional roles of power and dominance.

We need more examples of preservice teachers like Ann who are willing to take a chance and to teach their students “…how these issues are relevant to their lives and the larger society” (p. 4). This work is not without risks and requires a firm commitment to anti-oppressive education. Ann explained “… as a student teacher, taking on the
responsibility of teaching for social justice was quite challenging and frightening. I wondered what my students would think about discussing such serious issues on a daily basis with a young, new female teacher…” (Capstone Project, p.11). She had to take risks as a preservice teacher and merge her private views on race, power, religion, and politics in the public domain of education. This is a lot to ask of a preservice teacher.

Ann chose to pursue this line of teaching because she believed it was what her students needed, and describes her commitment the following way:

As an educator, I believe that I play a significant role in the lives of each and every student that enters my classroom. It is not only my goal to educate my students in the content area, but to nurture my students to strive to become citizen who are active in the community and the world. It is important that I teach for social justice in the classroom by providing a space to learn and discuss issues of injustice that obstruct democracy. (Capstone Project, p. 5)

Ann’s ideology shifted during her work in the teacher education program. She began with a very sterile conception of teacher and student and moved towards understanding her role as one that included advocacy and action in education.

Race

Ann relied on multiple spaces and people to assist her with critically questioning the role race, equity, and social change should have in the language arts curriculum. She entered the M.Ed licensure program with a strong developmental and behaviorist
approach to teaching and learning that viewed diversity as simply a cause for celebration. Although she advocated for teachers to present material and lessons in meaningful and exciting ways, she accounted very little for the sociocultural influences on her students’ learning. In her Philosophy of Teaching Paper written in July, 2006 Ann wrote:

…I believe that adolescents need to learn and understand the basic curriculum required by the state. Although content knowledge is crucial in middle schools to help expand students’ knowledge, it is also important that students learn the importance of socialization and celebrating cultural differences. Celebrating differences helps students respect one another and treat each other equally.

As evidenced by this statement, Ann began her journey with a one-dimensional view of race. She described diversity as something to “deal with or handle” to prevent disruptions or disagreements. In an observation paper she wrote during the fall, she noted: “Despite the diversity present in the classroom, the students seem to treat each other equally…” (10.06). At this stage in the licensure program, and in her personal life, Ann had not been asked to define or explain how race and power function in society. She was drawing on her experiences as a student or classroom volunteer. She was still a voyeur taking in and trying to make sense of the information around her.

As she engaged with literature that raised questions about race, equity, and power, she began to shift her discourse and in turn begin to ask questions about addressing some these issues in her role as a teacher. After reading Lessons from Teachers (Delpit, 2006) Ann wrote:
I don’t understand why some teachers in urban schools stop teaching Black children in order to be kind. It’s not necessarily that they actually stop teaching, but that they may teach less content to them…. I thought this was interesting because I never would have expected that teachers would teach less challenging content to urban children. 11/02/07

Ann was beginning to understand and grapple with the systemic nature of racism in our educational system. She was unaware that teachers would view race as a means to lessen the rigor of their curriculum. The data suggest that she was not accustomed to using race as a lens to analyze oppression, and believed that perception of cognitive ability should be colorblind. It was difficult for her to reconcile how race could be a factor in determining access to high quality teaching and expectations.

Of the three participants in this study, Ann’s ability to critically analyze her perceptions of race, equity, and social change, made the most visible shifts. During winter of 2007, she began to pose questions such as: 1) How do I initiate conversations about race if the students are not willing to talk about it? 2) Why can’t we discuss these issues without fear of saying the wrong thing? 3) How can I, as a teacher, make the students more comfortable in talking about race?

On the survey for this study, Ann explained that she would feel comfortable discussing issues of race, equity, and social justice with middle school students by reading and responding to literature. She felt books would help students “ease into the conversation because these issues would be embedded into the story” (Survey). At this
point in her program, she had not engaged students in these discussions, although she was becoming more comfortable expressing her thoughts and ideas about how these conversations could be broached in the classroom. One concern that she shared before the study began was that some students and parents may not see the value in incorporating race, social justice, and equity into the curriculum. She recognized how politicized this approach to teaching and learning could be and was not sure how to navigate the fallout if parents or students complained about her pedagogical choices.

Ann had various outlets to process her apprehensions and work through some of her conceptual misunderstandings as she planned lessons that addressed race and social justice. She met with her African American male supervisor on a weekly basis to discuss her plans and questions about the unit; she debriefed frequently with her mentor teacher about her ideas and lessons; she shared her plans with me and discussed some of her fears and uncertainties about the work she was doing with students; and she used her reflective log and teacher inquiry project as a space to problem solve and document her process.

**Summary**

Ann’s work with students engaged all four domains of the framework: Curriculum, Power and Place, Advocacy and Action, and Conceptualizing Race with varying degrees of success. When analyzing the data for Sam’s case, I created the table below to distinguish the extent that Sam was able to take up each domain. The shading is done in gradations. With the darkest shaded area representing the domain that she was able to engage more frequently through her teaching and planning.
Table 4.6

As stated earlier, including a focus on social justice was not part of her original plan for student teaching. However, Ann understood how to ‘do school.’ She knew that her grade was dependent upon how she conceptualized and attended to issues of equity within her placement. After meeting with me a couple of times to discuss what her options were, she embraced the challenge and created a very engaging unit that examined race, equity, and social change from both historical and modern perspectives. Her case highlights the power of providing students with models and support during their attempts at applying critical theory into practice.

Each participant in this study was committed to enacting pedagogies of critique and hope. Collectively, their goal was to encourage students to examine the relationship among knowledge, power, and oppression in our society. Jill, Sam, and Ann planned lessons that explored multiple perspectives and helped their students understand how sociopolitical issues shape relationships among knowledge, access, and opportunity in our society. Relying on critical pedagogy as a framework for making voices and ideas
visible, each participant drew on her intellectual energy and political insight to redress issues in their field placement sites.

As mentioned earlier, each participant moved along this continuum at her own pace and informed by her own experiences. The diagram below is a visual representation of the data and suggests that while each participant linked the role of classroom teacher to advocate for equitable education, the visibility of that understanding was not the same.

![Diagram of the role as advocate](image)

**Figure 4.2 Role as Advocate**

Implicit in each case is an underlying thread of commitment to transformative education. Each participant entered the classroom willing to reflect and act on the world to transform it (Freire, 1970).

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Chapter 5

**Introduction**

Preservice teachers who envision literacy as a means to democratic education operate under the assumption that teaching and learning are political acts. Three qualitative case studies are presented in this dissertation that examine critical pedagogy in practice. This study documented three preservice teachers’ initial questions and understanding of race, equity, and social change during their student teaching. The goal of this study was to better understand how each case participant linked theory and practice to create lessons that addressed issues of equity with the students in their classroom. The following four domains emerged from the data and served as useful constructs in answering the questions that guided this study:

1. Curriculum
2. Power and Place
3. Advocacy and Action
4. Conceptualizing Race

**Purpose of study:**

Drawing on four interrelated bodies of research, teacher education, critical literacy, critical pedagogy, and critical race theory, this study considered how preservice teachers’ conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change informed how they
planned and implemented critical pedagogy in the classroom. Documenting how each context influenced the literacy practices and pedagogical tools selected to mediate discussions about race, equity, and power, this study provides insight into how preservice teachers can be strategic about their work with students to raise critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

This study was designed to address a gap in the literature concerning preservice teachers’ work with critical pedagogy as they address issues related to race, equity, and social change. Most studies focus on white preservice teachers’ resistance to multicultural education (Sleeter, 2001); using race as a lens to examine systemic inequities (Milner, 2003); or critical approaches to literacy education (Leland, Harste, & Shockley, 2007). My study offers the field a close examination of how three white preservice teachers, not resistant to multicultural or anti-oppressive education, relied on their emerging understanding of race and equity to enact pedagogies that promoted critical inquiry in the classroom.

I generated the following research questions to provide contextual dimensions of the student teachers’ understanding of critical pedagogy:

1: What pedagogies do preservice teachers draw on to mediate discussions about race, equity, and social change in their language arts classroom?

2: How do preservice teachers critically question their conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change?
3: How do preservice teachers draw on critical pedagogy to plan lessons that interrogate students’ conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change?

Summary of Methodological Details

Each participant was a student in the Middle Childhood M.Ed teacher licensure program from 2006-2007. As part of this program, each participant worked with students in grades four through seven in two content areas. The participants also conducted their own teacher inquiry projects during the last eight weeks of their student teaching to document their work with students around race, equity, and social change. Other participants in the study included students in the classrooms and the mentor teachers.

This study took place across four sites during the 2006-2007 academic year. Site one was a large mid-western university. At this site, I was the instructor for the participants’ Reflective Seminar course, the Program Manager for their M.Ed licensure program, and the instructor for their Master’s capstone course that took place during the summer of 2007. The participants attended Reflective Seminar once a week for 1.5 hours a week over three quarters. The Master’s capstone course met twice a week for 2.5 hours over a five-week period. I collected participant-selected data from each of the above courses, as well as other methods courses they were enrolled in as part of the licensure program.

The second, third, and fourth sites were each participant’s middle school field placement and student teaching locations. I visited each participant weekly for at least one class period during the last eight weeks of her student teaching. The number of
visitations varied based on requests from the participants or school events that were scheduled during observation times. The purpose of the observations was to record how each participant implemented lessons that address race, equity, or social change from a critical literacy perspective.

I digitally audio recorded each observation and captured student teaching observations in field notes. Three interviews were conducted with each participant over a six-month period: during their field experience, at the beginning of student teaching, and at the end of their student teaching. All interviews were documented in field notes, but the second interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed.

**Overview of research findings and insights**

Findings indicate that all three preservice teachers were able to account for developing conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change through their pedagogy during student teaching. Jill’s shift involved expanding her knowledge base, working from theory to practice and back to theory. Sam’s shift involved navigating the political terrain at her school to work within the system. Ann’s shift occurred on an ideological level as she sought ways to incorporate themes of social justice into the curriculum. These shifts resulted from critical reflections stemming from teaching experiences, reading and discussing research related to race, equity, and social change in their university courses as well as in their middle school classrooms, and the process of planning lessons to examine how race, equity, and power operate in our society.
The findings also suggest that preservice teachers relied on various critical pedagogical strategies to mediate conversations about race, equity, and social change in their middle school settings. Literacy practices such as peer interviews, reading and responding to children’s and young adult literature, and creating anchor charts to keep track of questions and ideas related to race and equity, created spaces for intensive dialogue about issues of race, equity, and social change. Drama, movement, and arts based responses also expanded how students interacted with text and demonstrated understanding of complex ideas. Each participant based her lesson plans on ideas, interests, or questions that students raised regarding race, equity, or social change.

During the eight weeks of student teaching, each participant incorporated their students’ inquiry into lesson plans, thereby drawing from their cultural knowledge and lived experiences from home and school communities. By fusing these two worlds, the participants were better able to help students understand the systemic nature of oppression and discrimination and how it operates in a variety of places in their lives. The participants examined how race, equity, and social change matter in teaching and learning by connecting these ideas to the everyday lives of the middle school students they worked with in the classroom.

Each participant encountered various barriers when working to enact critical pedagogy in their student teaching placement sites. The role of the mentor teacher influenced how each participant approached their work in the classroom and the type of resources they were able to gather in preparation for their units of study. Sam and Ann
worked in settings with mentor teachers who did not object to the questions or methods they were using to address race, equity, or social change in the classroom, but offered various levels of support. Jill’s mentor teacher was not as supportive of her goals; although he did allow her to deviate from his plans to do what she felt was in the best interests of their students.

Parents also played a role in how the participants approached planning and creating assignment to extend the conversations they were having with students outside of the classroom. Jill was concerned that the majority of students in her classroom would not return homework or individual projects if she assigned them, and shared on many occasions that it was very difficult to get in touch with a lot of parents from her eighth period class. I offered to go on home visits with her so that she could experience meeting families on their terms and learn from them what they value from schoolwork or what they feel their children need to work on at home. Jill expressed interest in the home visits, but did not have time to follow-up with her mentor or recruit students to visit outside of school.

Sam had a different relationship with the parents in her classroom. They frequently visited the school and attended events and meetings hosted by the school staff or PTO. After permission forms were sent home for this study, a couple of parents contacted Sam to discuss the study and her motives for engaging in this type of work with sixth grade students. Sam had to learn how to navigate parental involvement that assumed lessons of study and assignments given by the teacher were always up for discussion and
were malleable to their ideology or preferences. Ann had a similar experience with a parent in her second period class and learned that when political ideologies clash, parents can operate as adversaries instead of allies. This study demonstrates the important role context has on teaching and learning from a critical perspective.

The following section returns to the questions that guided this study and a summary of the findings for each.

**Question 1: What pedagogies do preservice teachers draw on to mediate discussions about race, equity, and social change in their language arts classroom?**

Emerging definitions of critical pedagogy

Each participant began this study with different orientations to pedagogy and how to approach the curriculum from a critical standpoint. Each orientation served as a guide to the types of pedagogies each participant drew upon during their student teaching. All three participants developed a working critical pedagogy based on their understanding of teaching and learning, the developmental needs of middle school students, and new ideas they were introduced to during their teacher education program. The goals and motivations behind the pedagogical choices that each participant made were inextricably linked to the histories and lived experiences of the students they were working with during their student teaching.

**Jill**

Jill began the M.Ed program with a commitment to enact culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) with her students throughout the school year. She saw CRP as a means
to rid students from oppressive learning environments that did not build on their strengths as learners or cultural knowledge that shaped how they engaged learning. Jill’s pedagogical choices included the use of dialogue, personal relationships, and literacy practices.

*Dialogue:*

Jill believed that learning was a social practice. Students were constantly participating in whole class discussions, being asked to work in small groups, or have ideas with a partner. Jill kept charts of her students’ ideas and asked them to be responsive to ideas or opinions shared by classmates. De-centering the teacher’s voice as the dominant source of knowledge provided an opportunity for the students to demonstrate how they were making meaning of the curriculum. Their questions, concerns, ideas, and critiques became the source from which the curriculum was being navigated and debated.

The dialogue took place in small groups, whole groups, with partners, or check-ins with her as she moved around the classroom to assess how they were making sense of the daily assignments. Jill designed lessons that built on the social and physical nature of their interactions. For example when posing a question to begin a lesson, Jill asked the students to move to the side of the room that reflected their opinion. Then, she asked them to discuss their opinion with the students in their newly formed group and create a list of reasons to support their opinion.
Establishing Personal relationships:

One of Jill’s overarching goals was to personalize the role of teacher for her students. During each observation of her class I noted how she would share what would appear to be extraneous information about her life, which she would later share was a deliberate attempt at connecting with her students. For example, she would mention songs she heard on the radio on a road trip with a family member and ask students about the artist. She would bring up her favorite candy and how she grabbed the wrong flavor of jawbreakers and had to drink a lot of water to recover. To someone who is not part of a cultural group that spends a lot of time debating hip-hop music and artists, along with flavors of jawbreakers and Chico sticks, this information may seem trivial. But, to the students in Jill’s class, this information was part of their daily conversations. She knew this and made a point to share how she enjoyed these same experiences.

This is also part of her work in destabilizing the rigid teacher-student power relationship that was established in the classroom. She wanted the students to view her as a real person, with hopes, feelings, fears, successes, and failures. She made a point to tell students when they had a good idea, raised an interesting question, or did a great job on an assignment.

Literacy Practices:

The lessons Jill created for her students centered on references to popular culture. She also made an effort to provide a variety of options arts based responses to classroom assignments that stemmed from those popular culture references. Students created
collages; made CD covers to represent their hopes and dreams; and participated in lessons designed to have them embody responses to texts and ideas from lessons.

The goal was to move away from paper and pencil based assessments to allow students more opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in different mediums. Jill did not abandon the literacy practices her mentor established; she expanded the options available to students. The intent of her pedagogical choices was to capture the knowledge students bring from home or popular culture, and mesh those with the school curriculum. The overall impact for the students was more space to carve out their interpretation of what they were learning. Below is a chart that outlines how Jill’s pedagogy expanded the options available to students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Practices: Mentor Teacher</th>
<th>Literacy Practices: Jill’s Student Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>Guided notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Visual media (slide shows; video; maps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read from textbook and answer questions</td>
<td>Group projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual work</td>
<td>Arts-based projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work in multiple configurations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner reading and responding to questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Jill’s Literacy Practices
Sam

Sam relied on similar pedagogical strategies, however she located these strategies in a critical paradigm that was informed by her role as an advocate for social change. Sam chose pedagogies that would disrupt stereotypes and marginalization of non-white students, while seeking ways to affirm of the humanity of everyone in the learning community. It was never her intention to shame students for growing with privileges they enjoyed, but it was necessary to help them construct ways to question those privileges and how they function to mask oppression in our society. Sam engaged students in three types of pedagogies that embodied her commitment to equity base education. 1) inquiry 2) creative responses 3) dialogue.

Inquiry

Inquiry functioned as a tool that allowed Sam to craft experiences for the students that would challenge them to question inequitable practices in their community. As detailed in her case above, Sam had students brainstorm ideas about topics they were interested in learning about; she drew on their questions as the basis of the curriculum; and she provided space for them to shape the direction of the unit on immigration by incorporating their uncertainties and gaps in knowledge into her lesson plans.

Creative responses to texts

Sam’s interest in expanding how students responded to texts provides additional support for my argument that she was interested in pedagogies that affirmed students’ strengths and multiple sources of knowledge. The students in Sam’s class created murals,
worked as a team to create tableaus based on word webs, conducted peer interviews, and shared key passages from texts that pushed them to reconsider their ideas about immigration and power. The students were always reading and responding to texts.

Sam explored many mediums for these responses and the students were able to showcase their understandings in a variety of formats. Her ability to incorporate the arts, drama, or poetry into lessons provided more avenues for students to push their thinking and challenge each other to consider multiple perspectives on an issue. I saw these exercises as a way to blur the boundaries of autonomous literacy practices the students were accustomed to learning in their classrooms. Recognizing multiple ways of sharing opinions and perspectives allows critical educators and students to explore what literacy learning means for different groups of people and highlight literacy practices that are not acknowledged within traditional academic settings (Blackburn, 2003; Kinloch, 2007; Street, 2005). Creating space in the classroom for students to engage in critical work around literacy practices and texts, they become creators of meaning. The students would be active participants in constructing how texts are taken up and what actions can occur to address issues related to empowerment.

Dialogue

Sharing ideas about immigration, power, and equity were the pulse of Sam’s classroom. The students read literature and discussed their ideas in small groups, with partners, in a whole group setting, and during individual conferences with Sam. Talk mattered in this classroom and was used to think through ideas and responses to
characters actions in productive ways. During read aloud Sam would ask students to turn and talk with a partner about an event that just occurred in the story or find a passage that revealed something new about immigration or power that they had not considered before to read aloud and discuss with the group.

The peer interviews she set up with students from the ESL class serve as another example of talk providing a frame for sharing ideas and disrupting previous assumptions about race, equity, and social change. It was through dialogue that students could share their stories and begin to ask questions about how those stories shaped their experience of school, community, and living in this country. Sam could have relied on print or film media for similar results, but choose to have students engage each other in this conversation to push their thinking with real stories from students that walked the same hallways and lived in their community.

Ann

Ann and Sam’s approaches to teaching shared many similarities. Ann’s goal was to incorporate elements of critical literacy into her daily practice to interrogate issues of race and social justice. The pedagogies she engaged students in were designed to extend their thinking about race, power, and equity; provide a safe space for them to explore their ideas related to those topics; and apply the information they were learning to situations in their daily lives. The data analysis show that the pedagogies she relied on to mediate conversations about race, equity, and social change, share similarities with Sam’s
categories: reading children’s and young adult literature, creative responses to texts, and dialogue.

Children’s and Young Adult Literature

Ann relied on a variety of tools to shape the lessons she created for the students in her classroom. Children’s and young adult literature was the anchor she cast to begin and mediate discussions about race and social justice. She relied on the stories in the literature to expose how injustice and racial inequity operates in the lives of people from marginalized groups.

The students would read poems, articles, song lyrics, or narratives that centered on an issue related to race, power, and equity. Then Ann lead them in discussions about that issue, how it was manifested in the text, its relationship to issues that we experience in our communities today; and what can be done to end these types of situations. Literature served as the anchor for each activity. As earlier stated in Ann’s case, students read and responded to texts in a variety of configurations. She crafted literature-based pedagogy to examine multiple perspectives, study the relationship among language, power, and equity, and expose the sociopolitical contexts that her students navigate on a daily basis.

Creative responses to texts

Ann’s perspective on teaching and learning is always attached to creative thinking. She shared on many occasions that “… it is essential to provide students with creative learning experiences that challenge their thinking and allow them to understand
new perspectives.” (Capstone Project, p.2). Understanding new perspectives sometimes meant experimenting with new media to share their understanding.

Creating a storyboard, word wall, symbolic representation, sketches of important senses, and arts based projects connected with the literature discussion groups pushed students to share their thinking in multiple modes. Each shift away from traditional print-based responses required students to think in different sign systems. This type of pedagogy implicitly pushes them to consider alternative ways of looking at an issue and alternative means to represent their ideas. In essence creating responses from different media allows students to approach a topic from various stances, comparing and contrasting what they are learning from each stance as they alter the format of their response. Students shared these responses with each other and discussed how the product and the process of creating them helped them understand the complexity of race and social justice.

*Dialogue*

Ann’s journey of exploring race and social justice with sixth grade suburban students was grounded in a pedagogy that drew heavily upon dialogue. Ann’s use of Socratic seminar was pivotal in her ability to broach topics of race, oppression, and social justice from an inquiry stance. The students’ questions guided each Socratic seminar discussion, and the ideas they generated from those discussions served as a springboard for many of Ann’s future lesson plans. Mrs. King participated in these discussions as
well, posing questions for clarification, asking questions to support student ideas, or sharing information to support Ann’s developing knowledge base and pedagogy.

Providing students with opportunities to talk and share ideas was always at the forefront of Ann’s lesson plans. Each day there was space for students to work with a partner, small group, or share information with their peers. Ann took notes as she listened to students to capture ideas they shared, and she used that data to think about alternative ways to address a topic in a future lesson. She also made note of how difficult it was to account for time and stay on schedule when students have so much talk about and want to share ideas. There is no script or outline of how much time to provide, or when to end the discussion. She struggled with trying to find a balance between staying on pace with her unit plans and allowing students the time to process the information they were learning about throughout the study.

Teaching within a critical framework requires preservice teachers to take ownership of text selection and create spaces that promote and sustain open dialogue about sensitive social issues. This type of pedagogy avoids binaries by operating from a space of multiplicity. Each participant tied race to discrimination and used the classroom as a space to examine how discrimination operates in our society.

**Question 2: How do preservice teachers critically question their conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change?**

Discussions about race and equity are difficult topics to broach in multi-racial configurations given the best circumstances and commitment to anti-racist work from all
participants. Engaging in these discussions with white preservice teachers who have little experience constructing responses to these types of questions adds another layer of complexity to the work of critical teacher education. Each participant charted their developing understandings of race, equity, and social change by writing papers and critical responses to articles and topics discussed in their university courses; writing weekly reflections about their teaching practices, responding to my questions in survey and interview format as part of this study, and completing a teacher research project that focused on race, equity, and/or social change during their student teaching.

All three participants took an anti-racist and anti-oppressive stance in their written assignments for university courses. Each participant was aware of tensions in the educational community regarding the discourse of equity, race, and social justice. There was a deliberate attempt on the part of some students in the cohort to silence any dialogue in support of an equity-based approach to teaching and learning. This resistance led many novice practitioners’ feeling inept, self-conscious, and certainly dysconscious in their analysis and articulations of race in education. Consequently, the participants in this study learned to understand the politics involved in declaring oneself an anti-racist educator, and how a teacher who embraced or promoted mere tolerance of diversity may view that differently.

Jill realized that refusing to give up on students that others had written off was viewed as a waste of time by other staff at her school. Although she was not ostracized for continuing to teach students and hold high expectations about the quality of the work
they produced, she always felt the need to explain her rationale to others when the topic came up in conversation. Sam also began to question why the onus was on her to explain her stance as a critical educator instead of the other way around. Why didn’t parents question teachers about the absence of topics related to race, equity, and social change?

It seemed strange to Sam that by working to disrupt stereotype students held about immigrants in their community, parents would question the importance of race in a unit on immigration. Ann had a similar experience during her student teaching that pushed her to question how classroom teachers can promote equitable teaching and learning without fear of censorship. Overall, each student had to work through their questions to understand the way power can operate to silence perspectives that are intended to disrupt the status quo.

**Question #3: How do preservice teachers draw on critical pedagogy to plan lessons that interrogate students’ conceptualizations of race, equity, and social change?**

Understanding the role race and equity play in 21st century education is paramount for preservice teachers committed to anti-oppressive education. Each participant in this study enacted variations of critical literacy in their middle school classrooms to examine race, equity, and social change. Drawing on Lewison et al’s (2002) framework for critical literacy I summarize the work each participant engaged in throughout this study.
In Jill’s classroom, “seeing the everyday through new lenses,” (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383) meant drawing on her understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy from critical perspective. Jill’s emerging philosophy guided her in a different direction from her mentor teacher. Her goal was to find a pedagogy that allowed her to engage her students by drawing on their cultural backgrounds and interest in popular culture. She wanted to disrupt the normative practices that made her students feel isolated by constructing a space to engage in inquiries about equity and race within a multicultural environment. She stated in an interview that culturally relevant pedagogy offered options that the current system of instruction was not exploring. She often questioned, what could a learning environment look like that was grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy? During the last few weeks of school, the students in Jill’s classroom learned to engage and become an active part of their learning in a manner that was not accessible before she took over the classroom.

Sam viewed critical pedagogy as a means to disrupt the commonplace (Lewison et al 2002) by shifting literacy practices, presenting counter-narratives, and making conversations about race, equity, and power explicit. She shared on many occasions that her goal was to disrupt any one-dimensional images of immigrants and English Language Learners that her students held to call their stereotypes into questions. This meant
expanding the choice of texts and how students talked about texts to develop a way of critiquing stereotypes prevalent among students in the classroom and in their community. Introducing the class to books such as *Barrio: Jose’s neighborhood*, *Mama & Papa have a store*, *Family pictures/Cuadros de familia*, and *My diary from here to there/Mi diario de aqui hasta alla* served as a tool for problematizing stereotypes about immigrant families and English Language Learners. Sam’s goal was to make sure her students understood the role they could have in challenging dominant ideologies that were in conflict with ways of being that promoted equity and social justice.

*Ann*

Ann relied on multiple spaces and people to assist her with critically questioning the role race, equity, and social change should have in the language arts curriculum. She entered the M.Ed licensure program with a strong developmental and behaviorist approach to teaching and learning that viewed diversity as simply a cause for celebration. Although she advocated for teachers to present material and lessons in meaningful and exciting ways, she accounted very little for the sociocultural influences on her students’ learning. As she gained more experiences with critical literacy and understood the impact it had on her thinking about teaching and learning, her ideas and commitments shifted.

She began to draw on the principles of critical pedagogy to shape the types of questions she asked students; how she planned lessons to provide space for new understandings to emerge and bump against older ways of thinking about power and
privilege in our society; and expanding the kinds of texts students read to incorporate multiple perspectives on race, equity, and social change.

Discussion and Implications

Findings from this study highlight how preservice teachers come to understand the role of teacher as an agent of change. My findings match those from Bartolomé’s (2004) study in that “All three preservice teachers shared counter-hegemonic beliefs to dominant oppressive practice, a strong sense of student advocacy, as well as commitment to creating a more just and humane schooling experience for their students” (p. 101). This was evidenced by the texts they chose to read with their students, the literacy practices they engaged in to discuss themes from the texts and their applicability to our society, and the public nature of the work they engaged in with students. Each case explores a different facet of critical pedagogy and highlights contextual factors that shaped the participants’ engagement in each site.

To begin with, Jill’s life experiences shaped how she conceptualized her role as classroom teacher. Her knowledge of urban schools, coupled with her desire to combat practices that undermine student success, motivated her to create lessons that were challenging and extended her students’ cultural knowledge.

When considering Sam’s experiences, her case emphasizes the role previous advocacy work has on re-constructing curriculum to account for multiple perspectives. Sam’s grounded approach to critical pedagogy is part of her lifestyle. She carried her
commitment for ending oppressive living and learning conditions with her from the community to the classroom. Bringing that perspective to her work informed every decision she made. It almost appeared logical that Sam viewed the curriculum as a space for social action; she did not impose a velvet rope on her political commitments and therefore did not erect any barriers between school, community, or social change.

Finally, Ann’s case draws attention to the possibility of movement towards advocacy from preservice teachers with little experience working to address social issues with students. Ann learned that there is room in the curriculum for multiple agendas, but as the classroom teacher she has the power to choose which agenda to foreground with her students. At the end of her student teaching she realized that embedding questions that examined power and privilege into the curriculum opened up spaces for students to draw on their experiences to make sense of texts and engage in meaningful discussions.

In each case participants’ made their ideology visible in spaces where teaching was viewed as a neutral practice. By enacting a multicultural, anti-racist and anti-oppressive agenda, the participants’ were subjecting themselves to increased scrutiny from various stakeholders. After analyzing the data I questioned why each participant was willing to take this risk? Why critical pedagogy? The data suggest that each participant wanted to take an ethical stance against oppression. However, by framing their stance in opposition to something it may be unclear what ideals they supported through their practice. Encountering theories for the first time (with the exception of Sam) in their academic career that examined inequity in education, prompted the
participants to respond in reaction to what was wrong in the system. Their ideas were framed against something. This type of reaction can make developing ideals unclear as students have yet to experience many of the ills they are reading about in the university setting.

The data support the assertion that each participant wanted to evoke a more ethical stance on humanity. I draw on Aronowitz’s (1998) notion of a humanized society to interpret the teachers’ views and actions. According to Aronowitz, humanized society requires “cultural freedom”, which he describes as “the ability of the individual to choose values and rules of conduct that violate social norms, and in political and civil society, requires the full participation of all of its inhabitants in every aspect of public life” (p. 19). For the participants in my study this meant learning and working with their students to disrupt or violate social norms that sustain oppressive practices along the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. It meant breaking the silence about race, stereotypes, discrimination, and social injustice.

During their student teaching, each participant embodied the type of “rigorous ethical grounding” Freire (1998) advocated for to combat discrimination. With each book that they read to students and through literacy practices they planned, the participants worked towards helping their students make visible, and in some cases, recover their humanity, by calling into question systemic practices that worked against ‘ethical grounding’. This process occurred in cyclical phases for each participant, and represent concrete ways shifts in practice occurred: 1) acknowledging conditions that are
oppressive; 2) working to understand factors that sustain these conditions; and 3) working within the system to dismantle these oppressive systems and replace them with an infrastructure that supports more humane conditions for living and learning.

In essence, each participant treated education as an intervention. Freire (1998) explains:

When I speak of intervention…I refer both to the aspiration for radical changes in society in such areas of economics, human relationships, property, the right to employment, to land, to education…to the reactionary position whose aim is to immobilize history and main an unjust socio-economic and culture order. (p. 6)

The participants in this study learned that when you try to implement radical changes in the curriculum and help students understand how and why it functions as it does, conversations that ensue can become messy and unpredictable, but meaningful, authentic, and energized. Intervening in the daily functions of school to address topics such as race, equity, and social change is a complex process that is difficult to navigate regardless of your experience or commitment to equitable learning. This type of work requires a lot of energy, patience, and confidence.

Overall the data revealed that each participant had genuine respect for children’s, knowledge and experiences in the world. They reflected on their practices and revised their instructional goals and techniques to meet the needs of their students. Their approach to crafting lessons that interrogated race, equity, and social change were
premised on the notion “that to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge” (Freire, 1998, p. 30).

**Implications**

The implications from this study provide valuable insights for teacher education programs as they work to establish curricula that foster critical perspectives on race, equity, and social change among the teacher licensure candidates.

First, teacher education programs must engage licensure candidates in discussions about race, equity, and social justice. These conversations can no longer stay at the theoretical level, but must penetrate the preservice teachers’ pedagogy and interactions with students in the classroom. Critical pedagogy and the school curriculum must be viewed interrelated processes. Providing opportunities for preservice teachers to have interactive and engaging discussions that examine and challenge multiple viewpoints related to race, equity, and social change will push them to define critical pedagogy and in the process reflect, and expand their teaching ideology as they become more aware of systemic issues of oppression.

Using the university classroom as a space to engage in more critical explicit conversations around social justice will provide ideas about how to engage in this work in the classroom. The preservice teachers in this study wanted to learn more about how oppression works in our society, and what role they could have in dismantling systems that support inequitable practices. Teacher education programs need to have sustained
conversations with preservice teachers about race, equity, social change and pedagogy by integrating this topic into every facet of program.

Second, teacher education should recruit mentor teachers who approach teaching and learning from a student-centered, critical perspective. The practices these teachers engage in with students should serve as a model of critical pedagogy in action. By placing teacher candidates with mentors who explore a pedagogy of advocacy with students on a daily basis, preservice teachers would have more time and experience to reflect on how these ideals can be expanded and applied in various contexts.

Third, teacher education programs should invest in resources for preservice teachers to use when planning and teaching lessons from a critical perspective. The participants in my study had a difficult time locating resources to use that addressed race, equity, and social change in relation to the topics they were studying. The participants in this study received additional support from me as they planned lessons and brainstormed resources to use in the classroom. Even with the extra support I provided, it was still difficult at times to locate all of the resources needed for lessons the participants were planning. If teacher education programs maintained a resource library that had podcasts, children’s literature, primary documents, videos, articles from newspapers and magazines that were organized by topic, students would find more support for planning lessons from a critical perspective. Providing additional support, resources, and models could increase preservice teachers’ willingness to engage in work that requires more public risk taking, work outside of the classroom, and intellectual energy.
Fourth, teacher education programs need to consider whom they are recruiting or admitting into their licensure programs. This study indicates that students with varying commitments to social justice education are capable of making shifts in their ideology when involved sustained conversation about equity and social justice. Teacher education programs have to ask what types of candidates do we want working in our programs? Do we only bring in students committed to ideals of social justice or work with students who are developing these ideas? The answer lies in the amount of work and resources these programs are willing to invest in the students they admit into their licensure program.

In conclusion, my role had implications for how this project was received by teachers, parents, and school administrators. I was able to share information with those groups and be available to answer questions or listen to concerns with the students. Having a member of the program work with students to document their efforts offers a level of legitimacy that may not exist with the student engaging in this work as a solo effort. I would recommend to other researchers and teacher educators to move toward more participatory action research projects with their preservice teachers as a form of advocacy for social justice work in the classroom.

**Future Studies**

In the following section I examine how future research can build on the work from this study. Scholarship that examines teaching and learning in school communities, curriculum design, and student perceptions of critical pedagogy would provide teacher educators with contextual data that links theory and practice on multiple levels.
Teaching and Learning in School Communities

It is important to for future research to provide insight into how families conceptualize their role in democratic education by engaging in research that involves conversation and action in their community. The following questions would provide a more complex understanding of how university and community partnerships can be extended by applying principles of critical pedagogy: What happens when preservice teachers expand conversations about race, equity, and social change to include families? How would pedagogy that incorporated political transparency promote transformative education? I believe through these studies the field of teacher education can forge a reciprocal relationship based on community involvement and activism that extends beyond the administrative office of the local school district.

Curriculum Design

Preservice teachers and teacher educators need space within their programs to have sustained conversations about designing lessons from a critical perspective. If the goal is to create opportunities for critical reflection on race, equity, and social change, and then translate those reflections into practice, preservice teachers need explicit models of how to construct lessons that interrogate those concepts. Studies that examine the underlying causes for preservice teachers’ shifts in perception about critical pedagogy and social justice would be useful in understanding how to design syllabi that engage those dimensions.
Transformative education occurs when teachers understand how to design lessons that support students in their efforts to interrogate oppressive conditions in our society. Teacher education programs have a unique opportunity to influence how this work is taken up in the classroom, by modeling and supporting their preservice teachers’ attempts at constructing lessons informed by problem-posing and humanizing pedagogies.

Classroom students’ perceptions of critical pedagogy

Many preservice teachers begin their licensure programs with hopes and dreams of making a positive difference in the lives of young people. Quite often I have observed many of my students teach lessons that they spent hours creating, without looking up from an overhead projector to see if the students they are teaching are engaged in the lesson. It has been my experience that preservice teachers get caught up in trying to demonstrate their creativity and intellect, and as a result lose focus on their mission in the classroom. I recommend that future studies examine the classroom students’ perceptions of critical pedagogy in their classroom.

Examining the following questions has the potential to inform the work of teacher educators from various theoretical perspectives: How do middle school students working with critical educators perceive the work they are doing in the classroom? What do students’ believe critical pedagogy can do to inform their lives? What ethical obligations do we have to our preservice teachers and their classroom students when requiring this type of commitment in our teacher education programs? The field of teacher education
has little data to make claims about the effectiveness critical pedagogy has socially, politically, or academically for students in the classroom.

**Summary**

This study examined how three preservice teachers moved from theory to practice and back to theory. Each participant entered this study with a commitment to plan and teach lessons that examined race, equity, and social change with the hope of helping their students become better stewards of democratic education. I presented the data in a manner that would account for the academic, political, and social support structures and barriers each participant experienced during the program.

Throughout this study the participants shared their stories, their developing understandings of critical pedagogy, and their commitment to equitable education for all children. Teacher educators have the opportunity to learn from each case the important role a mentor teacher has in supporting and extending new ideas or pedagogies that disrupt previous notions of what it means to be a learner in particular communities. Each participant approached their work in the classroom with an ethic of activism (Reed & Black, 2006) that nurtured their effort to engage in social justice work with their students.
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Selected Children’s Literature


Appendix A

Winter Quarter Survey

I would like for you to answer the following questions that deal with using young adult or children’s literature to mediate discussions about race with middle school students. Please feel free to elaborate on any of the questions, skip questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, or ask for clarification. Thank you for your participation.

1. Gender: __________
2. What grade(s) level are you working with? ________
3. How would you describe your current placement? Urban/Rural/Suburban ______________
4. Have you been involved in discussions about race that were initiated because of the use of a YA or Children’s literature novel?

   If so, list the title(s) of the text(s)?

   What was the tone of the discussion?

   What purpose did the discussion serve?
5. Would you use a YA or Children’s literature novel to discuss race with middle school students?
   If so please list 2-3 reasons why?

   If not please list 2-3 reasons why?

6. Do you believe teachers and students should use YA or Children’s literature to discuss/explore/debate/examine issues of race in the classroom?
   a. Why or why not?

   b. If you answered yes to question #6, what texts would you use? Why?

   c. If you answered yes to question #6 what texts would you stay away from? Why?
7. What type of environment would be appropriate for discussing race? Why?

8. Is there an environment that you feel is not appropriate for discussing race? Why?

9. What concerns do you have about using YA or Children’s Literature to discuss issues of race?

10. Would you like to be apart of a research project that investigated these concerns? If so, please write your name and contact information (email) below:
Additional comments:

Thank you
Appendix B
Appendix C
Appendix D
Say Something!

1. With your partner, decide who will say something first.
2. When you say something, you may do one of the following:
   - You can make a prediction.
   - You can ask a question.
   - You can make a comment.
   - You can make a connection.
3. If you can’t do one of these four things, then you need to reread.
Appendix E

2. quality of being just, fairness, righteousness

do justice to

1. to treat fairly 2. to show the good points of