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In Pursuit of Raising Critical Consciousness: Educational Action Research in Two Courses

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In Pursuit of Raising Critical Consciousness: Educational Action Research in Two Courses

By
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores some of the challenges associated with having in-depth and critical conversations in Black Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies 16 week semester courses. The data are derived from my practice as a lecturer at Northern Kentucky University (NKU). The aim is to heighten awareness of equity and social justice values in students attending general education courses. These conversations are crucial to aid students in participating in a democratic society, and to see the virtues therein from a broader perspective. NKU has identified critical thinking and analytical thinking as an ongoing goal. Examining this process by which learners move toward critical consciousness will assist me as a higher education educator as I work to expand best practices for higher education classrooms. Looking specifically at how combining Critical Pedagogy, Afrocentric theory, Black Feminist theory, and Equity theory combine to create a new theory aimed at raising critical consciousness. This process can be part of the core of liberatory education. It means revisiting prevailing understandings to reach new levels of awareness—in particular, awareness of oppression, and identifying inequities in the world through readings, dialogue and written work to aid in becoming part of the ever changing world.
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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Context of This Discussion

My 74-year-old mother is a Civil Rights Movement survivor. She was chased by dogs, sprayed by high-pressure water hoses, and ostracized by white children, teachers, and administrators at Walnut Hills High School. She fought for equality in ways that many of my generation will never understand. Motivated by her many battle scars, she protected me from the ugliness of racism. She raised me in a white suburb of Cincinnati and she sent me to a predominantly white private Christian school. After my first Black studies class at the University of Cincinnati, I felt that I had been living a lie. Worse yet, I participated in the oppression of “my” people. I discovered how offensive (often unintentionally) my friends were when they said things like “you are not like other Black people; you’re cool,” or when they would talk to me in slang, or question me about my hair and make fun of it. My course work at the University of Cincinnati raised my consciousness and my desire to understand the intricacies of the often-ignored unprivileged and to work for justice and equality.

I joined an AmeriCorps program, Public Allies, that allowed me to work with first-generation college students from poor or under-represented populations on campus. Working with these students continued to transform me and increase my passion for education.

In this study, I seek to better understand how to reach and transform students, regardless of their background or status, as way to contribute to the transformation of our region and our society.

The aim of this dissertation is to illuminate some of the challenges of having in-depth and engaging conversation to instill equity and social justice values in students attending general education courses. These conversations are necessary to aid students in creating a regard for
In pursuit of raising student consciousness. In order to do so, I will focus on my practice as a lecturer at Northern Kentucky University (NKU).

NKU has identified critical thinking and analytical thinking as an ongoing goal. Exploring this process by which a learner moves toward critical consciousness will assist me as a higher education educator to expand best practices for the classroom in academe. I believe that this process is the core of liberatory education. Liberatory education avoids prescribed processes, empowers the agency of students, and encourages taking care of the world around us. It means breaking through prevailing understandings to reach new levels of awareness—in particular, awareness of oppression, and identifying inequities in the world through readings, dialogue, and written work to aid in becoming part of the ever changing world.

In this chapter I discuss the student demographics and general education requirements at NKU and provide a needs assessment for this project. I will detail my first person action research study.

Northern Kentucky University

By looking at the specifics of Northern Kentucky University (NKU) as an institution and its student population, we gain a better understanding of the cultural dynamic that students experience on campus as it relates to race and gender. It is important to note that students who choose my courses (name them here) are often Black and female. Therefore, the institution and its student population, (namely, the lack of representation of Black females within the institution) yield a desire to find safety and value in others with the same lived experience.

NKU is a bachelors through doctoral degree granting public university, founded in 1968 in the greater Cincinnati metropolitan area. Today, NKU serves nearly 16,000 students with nearly 2,000 faculty and staff members. The campus is situated seven miles south of Cincinnati
Ohio in an almost totally white suburban community. The university offers over 70 bachelor degrees, 20 graduate degrees, three Juris Doctorates, a Doctor of Education, two Doctor of Philosophy degrees, and 30 certificates. The University prides itself in up-close and personal attention by keeping class sizes to around 24. While Blacks make up over 14% of university student bodies across the nation, NKU boasts a 15% Black population and a 58% retention rate (Office of Institutional Research, 2012).

Diversity Initiatives

Aiming at growing and supporting a diverse campus, NKU hired a new Provost, Dr. Sue Ott Rowland in 2014. She brings a global perspective to the Provost position having traveled to more than 30 countries – from Uganda, South Korea and Italy to China. In the United States, she has worked from New York City to Columbus, Ohio (Clifford, 2014). Rowland performed a one-woman show behind walls of a gated community in Saudi Arabia because live performances were not permitted there (Peale, 2013). She is ready to push the boundaries for the sake of liberation at NKU. She comes to us during an overhaul of head administrators. Our president, Jeffery Mearns who was named in April 2012 is aligned to a much needed change at NKU saying, “One of the most important responsibilities for the president, dean or provost of a university is to be able to relate to people from different backgrounds” (Lentz, 2013). Under Mearns’ leadership we have a new focus on diversity and a focus on a diversity initiative.

Mearns established an LGBTQ center with a new director, Bonnie Meyer, to add to the offices of Latino Affairs and African American Affairs. Bonnie Meyer writes that, “the office of LGBTQ Programs and Services offers support to our students, staff, and faculty who identify with the LGBTQ community. The office promotes an equitable and safe environment for student success regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity” (Meyer, 2013). The Latino
Affairs Director, Leo Calderon, boasts that the office is “one of the few in our area. It is dedicated to serve the growing Latino student population. [They] take great pride in providing the best academic, social and cultural activities” (Calderon, 2014). Mearn’s commitment to diversity will also help to strengthen the African American Student Affairs department. Under the direction of Daniel Moore, the African American Student Affairs office has gone through many changes in the last five years. African American Programs & Services’ (AAP&S) mission is to create a support system that advocates academic excellence and enriching African American cultural experiences at NKU. Meyer, Moore, and Calderon have brought several speakers to campus, supported student activities and offered safe spaces for vulnerable groups. Likewise, President Mearns demonstrated his commitment to a multicultural agenda that is diverse and inclusive when he announced the creation of the position of Senior Advisor to the President for Inclusive Excellence to fulfill a major recommendation of NKU’s diversity plan (WCPO, 2013). The new hires in the Inclusive Excellence department will see to it that the Diversity Initiative is successful. According to NKU’s diversity committee’s report to Kentucky’s Council on Post-Secondary Education. NKU has an extensive plan to ensure the efficaciousness of its diversity plan.

The Diversity Plan states that NKU is “committed to creating a diverse, multicultural community of scholars and learners” (Diversity Initiative, 2010). The plan includes an assessment of the issues, which include enrollment, retention, and graduation of diverse students as well as recruitment and retention of faculty, staff executive administration and managerial positions. To accomplish this, “the university must make diversity a priority and be more intentional about recruiting student employees who are bilingual in student administrative offices” (Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education, 2010).
General Education Program

One way that NKU hopes to meet its diversity initiatives is through its General Education program in which all students must participate. The general education program at NKU seeks to:

Guide students to become independent learners, innovative thinkers, and responsible citizens. The program gives students a foundation of values, knowledge, and skills that will empower them to discover their personal potential, communicate effectively, work in diverse communities, and solve problems in a global society. Courses in the program will invite students to expand the life-long practice of asking questions, seeking new points of view applying principles of reason adjusting ideas in relation to new situations, and taking reflective action” (General Education, 2009).

As part of this plan, NKU students must complete the general education program and thereby fulfill the following learning outcomes:

- “Reasoning and Inquiry”: the ability to gather, process and interpret information, evaluate its relevance; develop a plan to apply that information; and assess the appropriateness and relevance of its application
- “Fields and Disciplines”: demonstrate the ability to analyze and understand multiple historical and contemporary perspectives and identities.
- “Oral and Written Expressiveness”: demonstrate the ability to acquire meaning through reading, reflection, and integration, and demonstrate rhetorical ability in written and spoken from appropriate to variety of target audiences. This communication will demonstrate precision and clarity, and will include meaningful visual presentation of
data and other forms of information.

- “Natural and Manufactured World”: demonstrate an understanding of the scientific method. (Northern Kentucky University, 2015)

NKU’s commitment to diversity and student learning through the general education program has led me to focus this study on two of the general education courses that I teach regularly, Introduction to Contemporary Women’s and Gender Studies (WGS-150) and Introduction to Black Studies (BLS-100). Both are aligned to NKU goals for its graduates. WGS-150 seeks students with an interest in women, gender, feminism, sexuality; especially as those categories intersect with each other and with race, class, nation, ability, etc. The course is rich with readings, discussion, and personal reflection. The field of Women’s Studies is interdisciplinary, and critical thinking is crucial to what we do. We pay special attention to questions of how knowledge is produced and by whom and under what circumstances. We look at issues such as women and the military, women’s health, women and work, from complex, intersectional perspectives. The course allows students the time to research and analyze something of personal interest related to Contemporary Women’s issues (Shockley-Smith, 2012).

WGS-150 has the following learning outcomes that are directly connected to the University’s student learning outcomes for its general education program and are consistent through the Women’s Studies department.

- Students identify and analyze the effects of imperialism and colonialism with reference to linguistic or cultural diversity (Student Learning Outcome (SLO) B1).

- Students compare historical perspectives of gender on the development of various cultures (SLO B2)
- Students identify the connections between and differences among local, national, and global communities (SLO B3).

- Students identify the influence of cultural and socioeconomic background in shaping gendered attitudes and opinions (in themselves and others) (SLO E2). Shockley-Smith, 2015).

Likewise, my Introduction to Black studies course is designed to meet university standards and goals. This course explores the seven core areas of Black Studies: Black History, Black Sociology, Black Religion, Black Economics, Black Politics, Black Psychology, and the Humanities (Black Literature, Art, and Music). It is designed to address cultural pluralism by engaging students in the study of Black studies as a process of investigating the multiple cultural identities that comprise the category African American. Students will better understand the similarities, differences and common interests among the black immigrants who become African Americans and those with a “negro slave” heritage.

The student learning outcomes for this course are as follows:

- Students will understand the historical foundations and effects of economic, political, and social legacies of imperialism and colonialism, with reference to linguistic or cultural diversity, for societies, groups, and individuals.

- Students will compare historical perspectives on the development of various cultures and perspectives through interpretation and analysis.

- Students will identify connections between and differences among local, national
and global communities looking at problems and looking at or thinking critically thinking about possible solutions.

- Students will develop an understanding of the influence of cultural and socioeconomic background in shaping attitudes and opinions in themselves and others.

- Students will present both oral and written materials to the course to assist in acquiring meaning in their research, reflection and integration of self, others and the greater community.

NKU’s Dreamers Welcome (2012) documents that, “We want our students to be able to think critically, communicate effectively, frame philosophically ad express artistically.” This is in keeping with my pedagogy and its underpinnings. However, whether or not students are being prepared to reason and inquire, analyze or think critically is of concern to me. Students who take the pretest in my course, which asks specifically about their knowledge of the aforementioned skills, show there is deficit which we will revisit in the coming chapters of this study. WGS and BLS and other studies of marginalized groups are a process of analysis and critical thinking, expressed both orally, and written and by nature are in keeping with the universities goals.

The NKU advising website describes the value of education by likening it to a buffet. “Gaining a college degree is like going to a buffet of knowledge - you get to sample many different areas of study. These are your general education requirements and the courses you take will form a ‘Foundation of Knowledge’ for your future” (Northern Kentucky University, 2015). That being said, if required general education courses are an entrée, then both Black Studies and
Women’s and Gender Studies are side dishes. This analogy illuminates the heightened competition as there are much fewer entrées than side dishes. My courses are not required. Students take them by choice. Sometimes that choice is the desire to learn more about the subject; sometimes it’s the only open seat at the time slot they have available. No matter what gets that student in my course, the knowledge they gain will ideally have an effect on the racism and misogyny on students.

**Race Issues**

**National Race Issues**

Discrimination in the United States has been a major issue since the beginning of European settlement in North America. Racism had been legally enforced for most of our history and even when legislation against it exists, racism still plagues our society. From the beginning, European Americans (particularly Anglo Americans) benefitted from privilege in matters of law, literacy, immigration, voting rights, citizenship, land acquisition, and criminal procedure. A look at poverty reveals a long history rooted in oppression. This behavior, aimed at liberation “by any means necessary,” has showcased a people both powerful and relentless, demonized, and ignored (for example, Malcolm X). Police-community relations have been strained since Black’s were forbidden to “eyeball” officers. To this day the members of the Black community tell stories of racism by the police departments, from shared stories of racial profiling, unequal sentencing, and long emergency response times in neighborhoods with a concentration of poor Black people.

Many whites thought, incorrectly, that the Civil Rights Movement had ended when they legislated against racism in the Civil Rights laws of the 1960s. In fact, racial politics remains a major and defining part of our culture half a century later. Racism continues to be reflected in
disproportionate employment opportunity and salaries, housing options, educational
achievement, lending practices, and matters of government and criminal procedures. We loath to
read statistics such as those that follow, yet their numbers reveal a continuing racial inequality in
America that weighs on Black Americans every day. According to the *Economic Policy
Institute’s State of Working America* report, black households had a median net wealth of just
$4,900 in 2010, compared with $97,000 for white households. A third of black households had
zero or negative wealth (Economic Indicators, 2012).

Black women have additional obstacles to overcome. Wage earnings for Black women
fall below those of white women and Asian women. On average “African American women
earn ($606/week), Asian women earn ($819/week), Hispanic women earn ($541/week) while

**Regional Race Issues**

Cincinnati, Ohio is just seven miles north of NKU. NKU is situated across the Ohio River
in Kentucky. The Ohio River represents the pre-Civil War boundary between slavery in
Kentucky and freedom in Ohio. To this day, race relations are impacted by this boundary.

Today, the state of Kentucky has a very small African-American community — the U.S.
Census Bureau the U.S. Census Bureau puts the figure at 7.5 percent of the population. Ohio’s
African American population is 11.3%. Northern Kentucky has a black population of 1% and
Cincinnati 14.9% (U.S. Census, 2014). Similarly, my observations of NKU mirror these
statistics in that it, too, has a small population of African Americans students and faculty.

**NKU Race Issues**

How have these issues carried over to the university experience? In November
2013 *The Northerner*, NKU’s student newspaper, interviewed The Black United Students about
being a part of a 6.3% Black student population among an 89.6% white student population on campus. Various newspaper outlets including NKU’s student newspaper *the Northerner*, “There’s no sense of familiarity,” says, Brandi Estrada. “Nothing looks like us.” She is referring to both the student population and faculty. While the numbers of African American students make of up a small percentage, NKU’s efforts are paying off. The underrepresented minority population has increased more than 46% in the past four years. NKU exceeded its target to maintain a higher-than-average representation for African American and Latino undergraduate students, with 10.6% of the undergraduate students who were underrepresented minorities, which exceeded the 7.5% representation in the eight-county service region (Northern Kentucky University, 2014). From 1980 to December 2008, NKU was under a desegregation plan after it was ruled out of compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Kentucky Council on Post-Secondary Education, 2010). Since that time there has been an adoption of a Diversity Plan, but a plan does not automatically create an inclusive campus. In fact, though African American students report being supported by the African American Student Affairs Office, the relationship between black students and black administration and administration are warped. There has been much turnover in the African American Affairs office which has been quite challenging, the results of which cast light on the consequences that Black student retention reflects. NKU has since hired a new African American Affairs director, Daniel Moore, to whom students report feeling connected. Also African American student recruitment has increased, but retention is still an area of concern.

Black Studies courses were part of the old general education requirements before the university switched its programs in Fall 2010, Professor Michael Washington said (Cunningham, 2010). The university newspaper reports, “The black studies courses are important because all
people need to be aware of these issues and have training to deal with these issues in black culture” (Schultz, 2013).

I would add, both Black Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies courses assist students in understanding their position in the world and how they affect it. Particularly, the process of accurately assessing the problem, gathering data, developing a plan and implementing solutions. Multicultural education gives the power to the student to encourage liberation.

Black Studies value and growth are important to the university. Black Studies courses can reflect the African American student population and the endless possibilities of all of our graduates, but especially those who are a part of a marginalized group. These courses also give opportunities to correct myths and to open conversations that are essential for change at a university level, regional level, and even a national level. Courses in Black Studies can assist “give students a foundation of values, knowledge, and skills that will empower them to discover their potential, communicate effectively, work in diverse communities, and solve in a global society” (Black Studies, 2010).

My Observations in the Classroom

Since my start as a lecturer at NKU in August of 2008 I have seen racism and sexism play out in my classroom. For example, seating in my classes is a matter of student choice, yet I consistently find that students sit with people of the same race. Students have anonymously shared that they have never interacted with a black person before and that they are surprised to find that they had a black professor. Some students have reported that they fear they will offend a classmate, or worse yet, might offend me (the instructor). Some students make a broad range of assumptions about women in power related to subjects from women’s ability to balance menstruation and mood swings to carrying and nurturing children. In some cases these
assumptions include a presumption that we are living in a *post-racial* society because we have a black president and Oprah Winfrey is a powerful influential billionaire.

I have also observed that black students are more likely to participate in Black Studies (BLS) classes. Similarly, women are more likely to participate in Women’s and Gender Studies WGS courses. They were more likely to sit in the front and visit me in my office respectively. Similar to my own experience, some students report feeling duped in high school because their courses did not provide them with information about *their* history and culture. Some students report both yearning for more information while at the same time feeling guilt about wanting to learn more.

These courses can leave black students feeling privileged in the space of Black Studies and other students worrying about being offensive and the effects of unknowingly being offensive. It creates a challenge to get students beyond their fear dynamics and their engrained, and often baseless, current knowledge so they can engage in the course work with analytical thought and trust that they are welcome to disagree with the majority, as long as it is academically backed. This is similar in a WGS class. The need to really grapple with the topic requires students to be open and honest, as well as respectful and thoughtful.

I witness student apprehension to get into topics such as over-incarceration, under-education, glass ceilings, racist and sexist governmental policies and practices. After the conversation becomes comfortable and familiar, the conversation often remains dualistic with students still using terms like “us” and “them.” The next hurdle is seeing self as part of the collective. Everyone has a role to play. Getting to understand that role they play is a difficult, yet instrumental, process. To do so, I plan to engage students with materials to read or watch, and
spend time discussing their thoughts and their position in it. As well, we will discuss the greater community and the importance of all those interactions.

The Crux

To strengthen my practice, I am exploring, through first person action research, how critical pedagogy, Afrocentric theory, Black feminist thought, cultural deficit, and cultural difference theories can be employed to structure a general education course and in what ways it impacts critical consciousness in the classroom. This is important in order to positively impact students in achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the exposure to and analysis of social and political inequities, and in turn, to be able to communicate that inequity and take action against the oppressive elements in one's life that are illuminated by that understanding.

To analyze this, I will, in the following chapters, provide a discussion of the power structure in my classrooms as well as in our society; explaining it through critical pedagogy and Afrocentric Theory. This will be followed by a look at my practice in the classroom using three best practices that I will implement to examine the relationship between teacher and learner, text and learner, and learner and society. In addition, this study seeks to better understand how to strengthen students’ value of others and individual awareness, and quell concerns of engaging in conversations across differences in such topics as race, class, and gender. Specifically, this will be done through an examination of my practice as a Women’s and Gender Studies professor focusing on and including African American Studies.

Unfortunately, teachers do not always value the use of theory in the classroom, “Teachers have assumed their access to education theories depended on a group external to themselves, and that theory has little practical value in the classroom” (Vialle et al., 1997, p. 130). While I agree
that teachers should not be receptacles for a researcher's findings or just a delivery agent of formulaic ideas, I assert that there is a need for both theoretical understandings and formulaic approaches in the classroom. A review of one’s own practice is necessary, so that teachers work toward improvements in teaching, becoming “active participants in stretching the boundaries and enhancing the profession” (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). To that end, I will collect data from my classroom using the lens of McIntosh’s Phase Theory of Consciousness (1990) and education as a form of social justice.

**Conclusion**

There are limitations to the literature on conversations across difference. This is especially challenging given that much of the research is done in the urban core, and often limited to the K-12 classroom. In this dissertation I seek to expand our understandings of the practice of conversations across difference at the university level, and in a suburban environment. Although, the student population in my classroom is not necessarily representative of that of the institution, students are coming into the age of being able to fully participate in our democracy. This makes the application of having successful conversations across difference timely, and important with regard to social equality and justice in our society. It is through this lens of critical gender and race consciousness that McIntosh offers that I will analyze my teaching practice. The main themes of this dissertation include the following:


2. I focus on the need to quell fear, enhance individual awareness, and illuminate intricate relationships between text, self and the greater community in the classroom.
3. I explain the purpose using Phase Theory of Consciousness as a lens to assess student’s state of consciousness.

4. After discussing the parameters of my institution, student population and the limitations of my study, I offer five essential reflections for raising critical consciousness of students in academia.
CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: LITERATURE REVIEW

Students’ active engagement in classroom discussions of racism and sexism demands an increased level of consciousness in order to expand students’ horizons and eliminate the stigma associated with these controversial subjects. To encourage an informed and open discussion in the classroom, four main theories have been selected to form the foundation of my pedagogy: Critical Pedagogy, Afrocentric theory, Black Feminist theory, and Equity theory. These theories will form the foundation of my course structure aimed at encouraging student learning and personal engagement.

These four theories were selected as basis for my practice because Critical Pedagogy, Afrocentric theory, Black Feminist theory, and Equity theory connect to the subject matter that I teach, and they are well-respected theories in the field. Likewise, the content of my courses is positioned mostly at the intersection of Black-ness and Women-ness. These theories offer not only important evidence of the relevance of studying these marginalized groups, but they also offer solution for liberation. I approach my teaching with non-traditional practices rooted in Critical Pedagogy. Learning to value everyone as a teacher and a learner requires grounding in understanding Equity theory as a means for finding space and value for various cultures.

Theoretical Foundations of this Dissertation

This chapter lays out the theory behind my pedagogy and a discussion of my desired impact to improve the critical consciousness of students. As a lecturer teaching in both the Women’s and Gender Studies program and in the Black Studies program, this yearning for understanding will impact my skills as a teacher and, in turn, student success in reaching Northern Kentucky University’s (NKU’s) general education goals of graduating critical thinkers,
effective communicators and students who can effectively express themselves orally and in writing.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy represents an approach to democratic transformation in education according to many theorists, including Mandel, Rodriquez, and Drummond. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was a foundational text to this practice. It was written for the poor and oppressed, “Brazilian peasants and workers who are excluded from the political process and cultural development” (tx.cpusa.org, n.d.). This teaching method is rooted in Freire’s own experience helping Brazilian adults to read and write. It has since expanded. His pedagogy can be used as a model for liberation through education anywhere. He has written many texts that have served as the foundation for concepts that have reached many and remain relevant in many contexts, including education. This can be seen in numerous articles that reference the works and even conferences focused on critical pedagogy and consciousness.

Freire’s work is rooted in Marx’s principles. Specifically, his work explores, “the idea that ‘economic science’ as a special science completely separate from sociology, history, anthropology etc. cannot exist, underlies most of his economic analysis” (Mandel, 1973/2002, p. 34). This text discusses class in an analytical way to illuminate how the status quo benefits the minority. He also offers marginalized group liberation through education. He highlights the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and identifies and explores structural oppression based on religious, political, and economical influence of the elite minority. Burboles & Berk explains that critical pedagogy acknowledges the, “deficien[cies] in the abilities that could allow [minorities] to discern … inaccuracies, distortions, and even falsehoods. They [are] concerned with how these inaccuracies, distortions, and falsehoods limit freedom [and looks at]
Freire offers that students are capable of co-constructing knowledge. In other words, they are not empty receptacles to be filled with knowledge, but rather they are participatory beings with the ability to grapple with concepts in order to create knowledge. They can participate in this as both a teacher and a learner (Freire, 1970/2001). Likewise, the teacher is just as much a learner as the student. The learning and the teaching are grounded in that dialogue. The conversation dynamics depends on the particular interests and needs of the group and therefore will be unique to each group. Furthermore, this democratic approach takes into consideration each student’s unique history, culture, and language. The idea here is that this process of dialectical communication grows into knowledge. According to Freire, “education as a practice of freedom must begin by breaking the conventional roles of the student and the teacher. This can be achieved through dialogue which has the potential to make the student/teacher relationship reciprocal” (Freire, 1970/2001, p 237).

In turn, the underpinnings of my teaching lie in Critical Pedagogy embraced by many scholars, including Cochran-Smith (2000), Dewey (1938), and Freire (1970/2001) who teach the notion of education as a means to social justice and equity through the conscious raising of awareness. I share the belief that education is linked to upward mobility as argued by many scholars, including Berlowitz and Jackson (2005), Cohen (2006), and Giourx and McLaren (1996). The goal of critical pedagogy is to create self-thinkers and democratic co-constructors of knowledge. Self-thinkers research a topic and find information that supports their opinion. They look beyond what they are told. Instead, they co-construct knowledge with classmates, teachers, and the greater community. This unique knowledge is appropriate for the unique time and place in which the community functions.
This epistemological assumption that people can create knowledge is best exemplified by Socrates who said, “words were not reality – they represented realities – and, for ideas to be deeply understood, there needed to be conversation, debate, disagreement, clarification, elaboration” (Skillen, 2011, p.21). With this empowerment, one can become unveiled or they can develop what Freire calls, a “critically conscious” (Friere, 1970/2001, p.5). The idea that individuals can be both a teacher and a learner applies directly to critical pedagogy in that it allows people to have authority or power by co-constructing knowledge and understanding rather than assuming that there are specific knowledgeable leaders within a power dynamic handing down knowledge to the masses. Critical consciousness focuses on attaining a more comprehensive analysis of the world, allowing one to grapple with the interworking of social and political critical pedagogy. It examines how individual voices, power, and examination actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, as well as classrooms and communities. Power dynamics are important to acknowledge, “Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power” (McLaren, 2002, p.20). Critical consciousness is not limited to co-constructing knowledge; it also requires that one take action against oppression illuminated by that knowledge (Mustakova-Possardt, 2003).

Critical consciousness does not just occur instantly, “It grows out of critical education” (Arno & Lypson, 2009) thereby illuminating the importance of students coming to the realization that they are to create and perpetuate culture and have the power to transform the world they live in, through gaining and wrestling with knowledge. In essence the student becomes the focus in gaining and shaping knowledge. As these levels can expand in the individuals as well as in the group, the learner is no longer an object to be directed, but rather a subjective person utilizing
agency. The ultimate goal of critical education is the creation of a democratic society (Freire, 1970/2001).

Understanding history is important to positioning the present reality. To understand one’s positioning, the student must better understand how to question her/his position in society in order to foster higher levels of learning. In order to foster that elevated learning, it is essential to practice reflecting on the process and taking action based on what was assessed, or what is also known as achieving a critical consciousness. This process increases student’s awareness of the necessity to constantly seek to unveil that which hides injustice. The educator must hold in tension that they too are a learner and must be willing to examine what they “know.” They must be willing to learn through the interaction with the students, and others, as well as commit to continued reading and researching. There must be a commitment to lifelong learning. In sum, the educator should be deeply intertwined with the intricacies of the learning process, and continue to question the status quo (Zeller, 2014).

Questioning is not enough. Freire asserts that all pedagogy is a call to act and is motivated by inequality. The concept is that students become a part of the process for change, for liberation, simply by engaging in the process. This can only be achieved by creating awareness of social and political inequities. Therefore, education cannot be neutral in any form (Southerland & Nadelson, 2012).

Systems of power and privilege manifest both within individuals and in the larger society. This highlights the need to move toward a more egalitarian education by centering white, male, heteronormative discourse, and changing a teacher’s psychological and sociological consciousness about systems of power and privilege as they are manifested both within individuals and within society. Hence, as an educator, my goal is to explore the reality and
challenges of teaching and learning about difficult topics such as race, class, and gender in order to assist students in becoming well-informed members of society, willing to challenge the status quo. However, there are barriers to implementation of these democratic ideals. For instance, students have to learn a new way of engaging in the classroom by becoming both a teacher and a learner, given it is not common place in the K-12 experience or in the undergraduate college classroom. The effort is further complicated by the students’ fear that African American Studies focuses on bashing and blaming Whites in order to place African Americans in positions of power and control. In reality, studying marginalized groups is actually not about replacing one power with another or invoking shame for past atrocities. Instead, it is about seeking acknowledgment of a more full and accurate history, and offering a more accurate and encompassing reality of people’s history and culture aimed at equality and empowerment for everyone as a means to improve the lives of everyone in society.

Implementing critical pedagogy pushes students to be “committed to progress social and political change in the interests of a fairer and more egalitarian society” (Choules, 2007, p.164). It holds that the power is located within the ruling class; therefore, oppression is perpetuated by economic and cultural structures and the ideologies supporting them. To support the awakening of the critical consciousness, popular education should work toward the transformation of society and oppressive systems by the people. This includes the longstanding system of education that has traditionally given power to the teacher, thereby subordinating the learner as solely receiving knowledge, which serves to diminish his or her analytical thought and empowerment. Though this concept is not traditional, “teachers must reject the commonly accepted modes of instruction and instead critically reflect on their teaching and embrace a philosophy that consciously works towards creating a classroom climate that encourages social and cultural criticism” (Niesz, 2006,
In teaching practice, awareness of and positive use of one’s power as a teacher is essential because, “regardless of race, the students who most strongly identify with academics or found it central to self, had higher GPAs, lower levels of absenteeism, and fewer behavioral issues... Likewise students who engage in topics or find some connection to it, are more likely to engage in the topic with a more analytical or participatory approach” (Osbourne & Walker, 2006, p.565). This concept illuminates the importance of providing a supportive environment that creates space to explore differing ideas and expand understanding while minimizing the socially constructed fear of polarizing topics. Additionally, it underscores the primacy of carefully unpacking dense texts for all students. To do so we ask ourselves, how am I connected? How can I better understand how others are participating in the world and how my actions, others’ action, and even systematic actions are impacting the world around us? In so doing, one can create a more democratic learning environment to foster student growth.

However, I am aware that my knowledge of the subject, degrees, race, gender, and title puts me in a power position as a Women’s and Gender Studies and Black Studies lecturer. Due in part to the traditional paradigms of K-12 education, I find that students come into the classroom accustomed to looking to me for the answer and they are in class to simply memorize the content and repeat it back to me when prompted to do so. While some parts of their assumptions are true, since I have studied the subject longer and in more depth, students have knowledge that can shape me as both a teacher and a learner as well. Also, the power dynamic can be fear that their grade is in my hands and something they do or say can affect their grade. Being aware of this helps me to reassure students that in learning there is space for not having the “right answer,” space to “not know,” space to respectfully “push back,” and question or to
listen rather than talk. Balancing these ideas and fears does not mean that coming to class unprepared will be tolerated. And choosing not to participate in the discussion is never an option. My awareness of this is my motivation for applying proven and at times experimental practices to assist students in grappling with course materials, the conversation happening in our classroom, online discussions, and in their assignments.

**Afrocentric Theory**

Molefi Asante (1991) is credited with catapulting an intellectual thrust toward African’s collective cognitive will. He defines Afrocentrism as a set of principles that place continental Africa at the heart of African-American’s culture and it opposes the notion that all value and relevance is centered in Western World (Ginwright, 2004). This is only one of the many definitions scholars have created over the years. This particular definition is useful because it combines many of the definitions of African-centered scholars. Afrocentric education theorists connect to a long history of continental Africans and Africans in the diaspora that is often omitted in education. Today Eurocentric education continues to distort, misappropriate, and misinterpret many Africans and Africans in the diaspora’s lives and experiences. While there are many negative aspects of historical and present day Black plight, that reality will not be my focus, rather I’ll explore what Afrocentric theory offers to overcoming it. The goal of Afrocentric theory has two major elements. First, to establish a setting of opportunities within which it is possible for others to come to understand and express their agency and better understand the value magnitude of agency and the need to ignite African people’s agency to become actors playing conscious roles (Asante, 1988). For example this theory acknowledges the pressure that students of African descent experience when being expected to represent for their culture, accept a raceless or a monolithic racial identity, or need to assimilate to the
dominate culture. Acknowledging these realities and developing a better understanding empowers the learner to exert their agency (Faltz & Leake, 2004). Second, the concept of Afrocentricity does not call for the supplanting of other cultural centers. Rather, its intrinsic non-hegemonic nature leaves plenty of room for the presence and dignity of all cultures (Asante, 1991). In fact, this theory is a significant part of the heart of multicultural education. Multicultural education values all cultures and pivots each culture into the conversation with equally value. Afrocentric theory advocates for learning about the entire world and not just 1/8 of its population which Europeans represent.

The theory of Afrocentricity began in 1750. Its origins are rooted in Black Nationalism. The first major movement, started in Black Nationalism in 1815, was started by freed African slaves going to Sierra Leone (Garvey, 1986). The Black Nationalist movement continued well into the 1900s when others, including Martin Delaney, argued that freed slaves should leave the United States to seek a more encompassing liberation and specifically a territory of their own (Ginwright, 2004). Important voices of the Black community, such as W. E. B. Dubois and Marcus Garvey, called for action among the African people. There was a thrust toward Black pride and a push to increase Black socio-economic plight and political involvement. Black Nationalists suggest that the way to do this is to flee the United States. This call to move, according to scholars like Cruse, have their roots in Marcus Garvey’s ideas (Cruse, 1987).

More recently in history, the black church was a prominent place to gather and plan for the Black liberation movement., in part because of the fact that most Black Americans attended church, and the churches they attended are likely to have entirely Black audiences. It was a unique space where Black people were in power and unconcerned about White presence (Pleasant, 2008). It was a place to have conversation without the presence of the oppressor.
They were able to support each other through their suffering and seek refuge in their faith. This is true for Christian churches, but it also applies to the Nation of Islam, a sect of Islam that believed in Black Nationalism. Malcolm X, a Nation of Islam member, called for Blacks to utilize their agency by bolstering their economic status, formal and informal education, and transforming the image of Blacks into progressive one. It was at this time that famous sayings such as, “Black is Beautiful” and, “Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud” became popular. (Ginwright, 2004, p. 11). This was an important aspect of empowering Black people and sparking agency.

In 1966 a noticeable shift from the Black Nationalist movement ideology to the Black Power movement transpired. The new Black Power Movement focused on solidarity and the assertion of authority of Black peoples. This concept rather than a “back to Africa” ideology concentrated on Black plight in the United States (Garvey, 1986). It called for blacks to focus on the cultural and political consciousness of Black Americans. The combination of the Black Power ideology and the Black Nationalist movement became the first nexus where family united and religious concepts became cultural ideals; African-Americans began to refer to each other as “brother” and “sister,” and Soul Food restaurants and Black history became a source of pride. Malcolm X was upheld as a commanding presence and respected for his understanding of issues of race and racial oppression, and eventually helped elevate racial oppression over class oppression (X & Haley, 1964, p. 11).

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ushered in the desegregation of public schools, Black students were forced into White schools where they were subjugated and excluded (Fultz, 2004 Edwards & Collinson, 1996 & McAllister & Irvine, 2002). In response to this and many other political injustices the Civil Rights movement of 1960s and 1970s brought about several
historical ideologies. The notion of integration and equal education drove students to seek a multicultural education, particularly in college. Injustices and Jim Crow laws contributed to the beginning of the study of people of African descent on college campuses. It was a response to the demand for a more inclusive curriculum, faculty, and students. The call for a multicultural and inclusive education was led by many student groups, including Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Students for a Democratic Society. One response was to implement and develop the discipline of Black Studies. This push for inclusion and equality from many African Americans greats such as Dr. Martin L. King Jr., W.E.B. DuBois, and Dr. Angela Davis proved to be effective. The combination of many Afrocentric thinkers, “inclusionist” and “back to Africa essentialists” catapulted the multicultural ideals in higher education to provide an essential and equal voice for African and those in the African diaspora (Pleasants, 2008). Afrocentric education has four main ideals:

First, slavery disrupted the cultural continuity of African-Americans, and therefore black students are disconnected from their roots, which are necessary for cultural survival and success in school. Second, cultural incongruence between the curriculum and the students causes failure in schools. Third, African (especially ancient Egyptian) culture and worldview are promising avenues for the transformation of Black students, socially and spiritually. Fourth, discussing the African and African-American contributions to society and culture will lead to greater academic performance among black students by reducing the gap between the culture of the curriculum and of the students (Pleasant, 2008).

Afrocentrism is action; Afrocentric scholarship is itself praxis. Anderson (2012), a theorist of Afrocentrism in the classroom argues, “Afrocentricity as paradigm has introductory
value because a myriad of assumptions and basic propositions employed by African American Studies can be examined.” (p. 2). The value is importance in a classroom of studying, “such scholarship as praxis reduces the tendency for individuals to make random, non-connected comments, even though these comments might be informative…this is the value” (Asante, 2003, p. 175). That value gives space to challenge Euro-Centricity which is the notion that all value and relevance is centered in Europe and the European people. Consequently, the histories of other peoples are marginal at best, and at worst irrelevant. This is illustrated as the dominant thought process in the teachings of history in schools, hiring practices, living location, and so on for much of our history.

For example, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Black people are earning, on average, 82% as much as their White counterpart. Of the 15% of the population who live in poverty 27.4% are Black. It is obvious that these Euro-centric ideas cannot be combated sufficiently by a singular course in Black Studies. Fanon (2008/1952) states that the purpose of Afro-centricity was not to combat Eurocentric ideology directly. But rather, by unveiling to the Black community and others the significance of the Black experience in a way that both provides agency and empowers individuals, Afro-centric study can and will have a positive impact on the entire educational system by drawing attention to the oppressive nature of the foundational ideas in our society (Fannon, 2005). By implementing this theory in the classroom we empower not only Black students, we also educate and empower all cultures. This agency promotes empowerment that propels individuals to participate in liberation from systematic oppression through resistance.

The efficacy of many African American Studies departments throughout the country has had a positive impact on the African American community with regard to increased agency (the
In pursuit of raising student consciousness

First goal of Afrocentric theory) and self-efficacy. In the 1960s, the number of African Americans on campus went up with the adoption of Black Studies, scholarships, retention, and diversity initiatives and so on. The early African American student population and supporters of equality (functioning to create inclusivity, the second goal of Afrocentricity) helped to create change in areas like student exclusion, treatment on campus, and production of a consciousness around concerns for African Americans. Today, Black Studies departments on many campuses are shrinking and therefore struggling to be the hub for this activism. This is why I seek to analyze the ability of my practice to engage in raising the conscious mind and to support NKU’s diversity initiative.

In order to move the current issues of Black Studies forward in a way that assists all marginalized groups in academia, we must look at the two goals of Afrocentricity, bearing in mind the intrinsic value of the intelligencia. DuBois writes, “hold fast to his notion of being one who would not sell out but instead remain focused on the importance of the intelligencia’s role in the liberation of African Americans” and I would add all oppressed groups (DuBois, 1996, p.83). We do not want to take away from the significance of the masses; instead, the purpose is to celebrate one of the strengths of the community and the value of academia, African American Studies, and the Black intelligencia. African American Studies is not something to be feared, instead it is important in gaining a multicultural education and therefore correct and valid one. With this understanding of power in the classroom and burden on the intelligencia comes great responsibility for the teacher and the learner. Irvine (2002) writes, the curriculum is rendered hollow unless teachers are trained in pedagogical skills and taught to incorporate these elements into their classroom practice (Oran, 2009). Afrocentric theory is an important balance of
inclusiveness. It must be mindful of the sensitive nature of a race conversation and at the same time facilitate an open and honest conversation about Black plight and liberation.

Afrocentric theory is not without its critics. Pellebon (2007) writes that Afrocentric theory lacks rigor to be accepted as an empirically based theory for practice” (p.173). Instead he offers that it be understood as an ideology rather than a theory. And Stelly argues that the theory “wastes time chasing the wild goose that is racism” (Stelly, 1997, p1.) Instead of really giving empowering information about Blacks, it spends more time bashing the white man. These critiques are addresses in the theory itself, in that it discusses the challenge of whites to engage this theory without assuming it seeks to evoke guilt and supplant African American culture as the center.

The fear that Afrocentricity is a threat to white privilege, and perhaps even a blaming of white individuals in the classroom for black plight, is a major barrier. It is true that the study of the plight of Blacks in this country and particularly the way that whites have treated them can evoke uncomfortable emotions including guilt, anger, rejection, and/or confusion. Stirring up these emotions can lead to a better understanding of inclusivity—everyone and everything should be valued.

The application of Afrocentric theory in the classroom, requires that both teachers and learners consider the political, ideological, social, and cultural beliefs and motivations of all participants. It encourages analytical analysis of texts and other conversations, especially in the inclusive classroom (Black-Hawkins 2012; Shockley and Frederick 2010). For example, Afrocentric theory empowers the teacher and the learner to exercise critical thinking that raises questions about the relationships between the oppressed and the oppressor.
As it relates to the classroom, this theory examines the margins and centers of power and is concerned with how to provide a way of reading history as part of a larger context of reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, class, and gender in a particular society (Nakata et al. 2012; Shockley 2007). These paradigms allow us to see African peoples’ understanding and development of “meaning, and functioning of the universe and the natural context of their own existence . . . (as well as) . . . values, principles, and standards of ethics and morality” (Banks 1993, p.22). These theorists also posit that developing pedagogy that include these ideas and values can help instill a sense of pride in the collective, as well as self-worth and self-esteem among both teachers and learners. This also allows Black students to identify with and connect to school in a more personal way (Ramose, 2003). This is why I have adopted Afrocentric theory in my classroom.

**Black Feminist Theory**

Black Feminist Theory is built around the assumption that race, class, and gender are inextricably linked and that black women are living at a unique intersection. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s illuminates a connection between black women and black men that is unique and binding. In the 1970s, following the Civil Rights Movement the Women’s Movement shed light on the connection between White women and Black women. The women’s movement was catapulted by the text, *The Feminine Mystique*, by Betty Friedan. This is a text written from a Eurocentric perspective and focused on White woman’s desire to work outside of the home and their frustrations with being housewives. It also gave voice to their sexual suppression. The text pushed the agenda of gaining power in the bedroom. These problems were not the same ones facing Black women of the period. Black women had been working outside of the home for all of their history in the United States and Black women have
been sexualized for centuries.

Black Feminist Theory focuses instead on creating a more accurate and holistic view of black women-ness. Because black women suffer from additional barriers to freedom when compared to black men or white women, the true measurement of black liberation is black women’s freedom. Sojourner Truth wrote, “if black women are free then all are free” (Truth, 1851/1992, p.5). The argument that the Black Feminist Movement divides the Black struggle is a fallacy that leads to the creation of a hierarchy within agenda setting. Blackness and Woman-ness have equal value.

The major premise of Black Feminist theory is to provide resistance against the interlocking oppression of the “isms” racism, sexism, and classism (hooks, 2012). Central tenets include: Black women are valuable, have a need for liberation, have a need for autonomy and individuality, and they have the right to make personal decisions (Smith, 2000). Black feminists also seek comfort and solidarity in allies. “Real liberation requires the destruction of political economic systems of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy” (Davis, 2011, p.34). It is in this intersection that Black Feminist theorists reside.

The intersectionality—the notion that all of one’s oppressions impact them at the same time—creates difficulty in separating those oppressions. The intersection is complex because it is the space where the all of the “isms” people experience intersect. Black women are often asked to choose a cause to fight be it Blackness, Woman-ness, queer-ness, low economic status, and so on. Given that Black women are affected by those identities and barriers simultaneously, we should not have to prioritize the list of oppressions based on someone else’s sense of importance. Thus Black Feminism provides a space for Black women to create an agenda for the uniqueness of their unique plight. There was a need to include racism and the lesbian agenda in
their struggle for liberation. In so doing, Black feminists stand in solidarity for the expansion of feminism and the belief that the personal is political (Lorde, 1984/2012). In other words, Feminism fights oppression on many fronts, and Black Feminist theorists give voice to the intersection that uniquely affects Blacks including race, class gender, and sexuality.

Two important texts began a barrage of responses that ignited Black Feminist theory. The first was written in 1970 by Toni Cade Bambara (1970), *The Black Woman*. It was an anthology that approached the issues that Black women face through poetry, prose, and essays. The second was written by Michelle Wallace (1979), titled *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. This text sought to address issues of sexism within the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement, and racism within the Women’s Movement. The response to these pivotal texts began with Bell Hooks (1981), *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. In that text she critiqued Wallace for not discussing, “the social status of black women without first engaging in a lengthy diatribe about black men and white women” (Hooks, 1981). Barbara Smith (1983) put together an anthology, *Home Girls*. In that text Linda C. Powell writes an article in direct response to Wallace that argues Wallace is, “too willing to rewrite history to fit her own theory” (Smith, 1983, p.54). Many other Black Feminist scholars continue to create knowledge to build Black Feminist theory. Angela Davis wrote a well-respected text, “Women, Race and Class” which brought class to the forefront of the conversation. It was followed by a classic text, *In Search of Mother’s Garden* by Alice Walker which allowed Black Women a language to legitimize their place. In this text she coins the phrase *Womanist* which defines a unique space within Feminism as, “Feminist… to purple [and] Womanist… to lavender”. The term Womanist clarified a unity of Black Women to the Women’s Movement and provided space for Black Women’s differences. One of the major differences in the Black Women’s Movement was the push to
include Lesbians in an already complex oppressive intersection. Audre Lorde was at the forefront of that conversation for the Black Feminists and for the Women’s Movement in general. Many other relevant and prominent voices continue that conversation in Black Feminist theory such as Patricia Hill-Collins who wrote a much used classroom text, *Black Feminist Thought* (1999) and Beverly Guy-Sheftall’s (1995) *Words on Fire*. These surges of text are central to what we know today to be Black Feminist theory that argues for the liberation of Black Women.

As Black Feminist theory gains a foothold in colleges and universities organizations of Black Woman—such as the Combahee River Collective, Black Women’s Alliance, and the National Black Feminist Organization—it empowered Black women to share their voice and educate themselves with the vast knowledge that was being compiled. Black Feminist gave voice to not only academics, but also to non-academics. Black Feminists believe that the everyday voice of Black women tells a rich story that has immense value. Since the 1970s and the rise of the Black Feminist voice in academia, Black women have added conferences, journals and even college programs.

As with any theory and particularly one that goes against the status quo Black Feminist theory is not without its critics. As far back as W.E.B. Dubois, many mainly black men argued that the Black Feminist Movement was divisive and a detriment to the liberation of blacks. Many even felt attacked. They felt that there was a negative depiction of them being presented to the world that already viewed them negatively (Moffett-Bateau, 2014). In addition, Women’s Studies in general is critiqued as too subjective with excessively abstract language. It is said to be non-academic by conservative thinkers, “Women’s Studies has eclipsed Middle Eastern Studies as the largest threat to higher education” wrote Horowitz, (2006, p.72). He is not alone in his thinking. There is also the belief that it is not essential to an arête education by colleges
and universities that do not require diversity credits, for example.

Black Feminist theory endures the burden of being the *intelligence* and the voice of Black women both academic and non-academic. With that burden comes great responsibility for the teacher and the learner. This liberatory theory does not seek to replace liberation of one oppressed group with another. Instead, it allows space for developing a better understanding of Black Women and strives to overcome their oppression.

Weaving Black Feminist theory in teaching can have a positive impact on liberation of Black women by offering academically sound course work, creating a safe space for examining the course materials, and centering the marginalized voices and experiences of Black women in a classroom setting.

**Equity Theory**

One way to understand an equitable relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor is to study the theory that underlies equity. One of the most explicit and rigorously developed models explaining how individuals evaluate social exchange relationships is John Stacey Adam’s “Equity Theory” (1965) (see also, Cosier & Dalton, 1983). Adam’s “Equity Theory” describes what equity is in relation to a system with both inputs and outputs. The inputs are factors that a person has accomplished (i.e., past experience, education, and work) that hold the potential of added value to one’s experience or life. In other words, the activity, behavior, or experience is selected by the individual because it has the potential to benefit the person in the future. The outputs are the actual returns to the individual’s work investment (Cosier & Dalton). While the theory originated as a business theory, it has since expanded to include relationship analysis. The theory acknowledges that fair treatment is based on individual interpretation. It also holds that no matter the individual understanding of fair treatment, people do value it. People put time and
effort into their relationships (output) with the expectation of a certain (input) for this effort. If the desired response does not happen, distress is the result. Distress can show up as anger and controlling behavior in relationships. For example, Blacks contributed greatly to this country and the oppressors did not give a return on the investment. Therefore, the relationship between the Blacks and Whites became distressed and led to anger and a battle for control and equity. Since Aristotle, equity has provided Western societies with the basis for judging what is fair and equitable (Powell, 2005). To decide what is fair, equity examines each person’s benefits (what they gain from being in the relationship) and contributions (what they are contributing to the relationship); if the ratios of the partners’ benefits to contributions are equal, it can be concluded that the relationship is fair (Hatfield, Traupmann- Pillemre, & O’Brien, 1990; and Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Forms of inequity include “underbenefitedness (i.e., one’s outcome/input ratio is lower than the partner’s) and overbenefitedness (i.e., one’s outcome/input ratio is higher than the partner’s)” (Yum & Canary, 2009). Both underbenefitedness and overbenefitedness can induce feelings of injustice and distress, although feeling underbenefited is more distressing (Sprecher, 1988, 321). Other forms of fairness include equality, which refers to identical outcomes for both partners regardless of who contributes, and need, which holds that benefits should be given to people with greater need (Deutsch & Mackesy, 1985). This is different than the notion of equality because it takes into account that there are individuals and groups of people who need additional support in fairness and illustrated below.
Research in the United States has largely supported equity-theory–based predictions regarding relational maintenance strategies (Canary & Stafford, 1992, 1993, 2001; and Stafford & Canary, 2006). For example, when there is strife or perceived strife in a relationship that is seen as inequitable, the parties report the greatest use of maintenance behaviors; husband’s assessments of equity predict the husband’s use of maintenance strategies (Canary & Stafford, 1992; and Stafford & Canary, 2006). Maintenance is the act of rectifying the relationship. In over-benefitedness and under-benefitedness researchers have found that “both forms of inequity work against maintenance behaviors, although the effects due to under-benefitedness are stronger” (Canary & Stafford, 1993, 2002). The reasons why under-benefited people engage in less relational maintenance toward the goal of equity efforts appear straightforward. First, when
compared with other people, the under-benefited party has the lowest relationship quality, least contentment, and lowest relational stability (e.g., Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978; and Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Maintaining low-quality, unfair relationships appear self-defeating. Second, underbenefited party feels angry, sad, and/or depressed regarding their relational state (Sprecher, 1988). Such emotions likely dissuade people from maintaining the source of such feelings. Third, equity theory holds that under-benefited partners do make attempts to restore equity in the relationship (Adams, 1965).

In other words, this theory explains how a relationship interaction seeks a balance of fairness by analyzing benefits to contributions. It is not just those who are experiencing less benefit that act; those who feel that they have an excess of benefits will also experience emotional distress or what is better known as guilt. In an attempt to restore fairness both parties will make changes in an effort to restore balance.

Engaging in behaviors to maintain an under-benefiting relationship contradicts the proposition that unfairly treated people try to restore equity. The finding that over-benefitedness leads to fewer maintenance efforts is perhaps counterintuitive and requires some explanation. First, and despite their relative enjoyment of outcomes, over-benefited people are less content and satisfied than their equitably treated counterparts (Utne, Hatfield, Traupmann, & Greenberger, 1984; and Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Because maintenance strategies and relational satisfaction are strongly and positively correlated (e.g., Stafford & Canary, 2006), lower satisfaction would be associated with fewer maintenance behaviors. Second, over-benefited people enjoy their relational outcomes at a cost—feeling guilt (e.g., Sprecher, 1988).

Over-benefited people appear to be aware that they enjoy greater relative benefits and therefore feel undeserving of those rewards (Utne et al., 1984). This feeling of unfairness
produces other negative emotions, such as depression, and fosters interpersonal inaction (e.g., Tangney & Fischer, 1995). Third, over-benefited partners likely reciprocate maintenance strategies in ways that reflect their partner’s dissatisfaction. This theory proposes that parties who feel neglected or feel that the contributions outweigh the benefits will act to restore balance in the relationship. Being the neglected party causes animosity and anger which makes finding an equilibrium challenging. The theory also makes clear that partners do not have to make equal contributions or receive equal benefits; it should however be similar. The effort to find equity requires communication on what equity looks like in specific relationships.

Dyadic analyses show that people reciprocate communication behavior (e.g., Burggraf & Sillars, 1987), including relational maintenance communication (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 2007). Because over-benefited people tend to have under-benefited partners (Canary & Stafford, 1992, 2007), over-benefited people likely reciprocate their under-benefited partners’ weak relational maintenance efforts. Both theory and research indicate that relational maintenance strategy use occurs more in equitable than in under-benefited and over-benefited relationships. With those indices the solution must include a fundamental shift that includes a better understanding of each party and in this case, Black plight, and our struggle for liberation by correcting the myths and replacing it with reality. According to equity theory, what keeps relationships going is the process of keeping the balance of contributions and benefits. A good relationship must have all parties attuned to that balance and willing to make behavioral changes to restore harmony.

Perception and understanding are essential in relationship building. Ignorance and false understanding of one or more parties makes finding equilibrium very challenging. For example, cultural deficit studies illuminates how often society blames children's social, cultural, or economic environments as being unable to produce what is needed to academically succeed.
Engelmann and Bereiter further emphasized how theories supported the idea that social and emotional deficiencies affected student performance within the academic system. Until dealt with, these differences would make it "impossible for" culturally deprived students "to progress in academic areas" (Hess & Shipman, 1965, p.880). Oppositely, the Cultural Deficit Theorists viewed cultures and environments outside of the mainstream Euro-American as inferior. These views catered to highly ethnocentric perspectives and practices including tracking in education. This demonstrates the magnitude of how the belief that one culture is the standard (i.e. superior to other cultures), which subjugates other cultures. In short, human beings strive to achieve equity in our relationships, whether we feel that we are contributing more and receiving less from the other party or if we are giving less and receiving more. In order to achieve equity we must learn to understand the parties involved, and value their contribution. As well, we must hold in tension the input and output of each party to find balance which drives the majority of us, as everyone strives for harmony.

The notion of fairness as it connects to social justice was examined by Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid (1978). Their research was particularly useful because it can be applied across all cultures at any historical period. Its usefulness is bolstered by the notion that equity and fairness are universal. Equity is instinctual in that it is related to survival. (Hatfield, Rapson, & Aumer-Ryan, 2008; and Tooby & Cosmides, 1996). However, this does not mean fairness is a neatly defined term. In fact, cultures have had very different visions as to what constitutes fairness, social justice, and equity based on the benefit to contribution analysis.

For centuries it has been said that the first law of human nature is self-preservation. However, we hold intention self-preservation with contributing to others as behaving equitably is essential to healthy relationships. Generally, individuals in a society will be rewarded if they
participate in equitable treatment of others. When people feel they are getting what they deserve from others they are most comfortable. As aforementioned people feel over-benefited, they may experience pity, guilt, and shame. On the other hand, if they feel under-benefited, they may experience anger, sadness, and resent. Given that, people in inequitable relationships will attempt to reduce their distress through a variety of techniques. I have chosen this theory to explore in order to help students better understand the complexity of the relationship between the oppressed (Blacks and Women and their oppressor).

Equity theory applied to education is concerned with educational policies, pedagogy and practices. It serves the interest of teachers and learners in an effort to find social justice and equity (Shield, Lorque, Oberg, 2002). In the classroom there are various relationships happening; teacher and learner, the relationship between different races, classes, genders and orientations. In equity theory each of these relationships are important. Beyers, (2001) writes that understanding this dynamic creates a safer space for engaging in educational discussion and analytical thinking. To facilitate this, it is important for teachers to retool their teaching to address issues of power and privilege and to weave social justice into the fabric of traditional teaching. Acknowledging under-benefittedness and over-benefittedness in various relationships and giving space to examine and seek balance will help create a more equitable classroom dynamic.

**Connecting the Theories to My Practice**

Unfortunately, it is often true that teachers do not value the use of theory in the classroom, “Teachers have assumed their access to education theories depended on a group external to themselves, and that theory has little practical value in the classroom” (Vialle et al., 1997, p.130). While I agree that teachers should not be just passive receptacles for a researcher's
findings or just a delivery agent of formulaic ideas, I assert that there is a need for both theoretical understandings and shared effective approaches in the classroom. Furthermore, a review of one’s own practice is necessary, so that teachers work toward improvements in teaching, becoming “active participants in stretching the boundaries and enhancing the profession,” (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). Chapter 3 will explore how I apply these theories in the classroom.

To that end, combining these four theories is aimed at raising critical consciousness in my classroom. Afrocentric theory recognizes the Eurocentric hegemony and power dynamic. This gives rise to a space where marginalized voices academic and non can be valued. It provides a framework for those voices and thinkers and empowers them to contribute to the body centered on Black liberation.

Black Feminist theory is much aligned to Afrocentric theory in that is acknowledges the Eurocentric society and jockeys to have the Black voice heard. More specifically, Black Feminist theory acknowledges that the Black women’s lived experience is unique and deserves its own framework for prominent Black women thinkers. It offers a space for academic and non-academic Black women’s voices, whose voices would otherwise be marginalized.

In order to empower these marginalized voices and analyze the works of academic and non-academic Black women, and Black people in general, I use the lens of equity theory. Equity theory seeks to find equity in relationships. It is concerned with what each party is contributing to the relationship. More importantly Equity theory’s goal is to restore fairness and equity. In the classroom there are numerous relationships that can be filtered through this theory. This theory helps to recognize various relationships (e.g. teacher-learner, student relationship with opposing identities including race, class, and gender). Examining these relationships can help to facilitate honest conversations about equity and who benefits in various relationships, how, and why.

The careful selection and implementation of these four theories is aimed at raising critical consciousness through their thoughtful integration in my teaching strategies and assignments. I argue that it is the integration of these theories that can provide a significant increase in student critical consciousness during a single semester-long course. There are several inherent characteristics of each theory that makes it integral to this process, 1) recognizing Eurocentric
rule and hegemony 2) providing a framework for Black and Black women prominent thinkers, modeling value of all people 3) offering a voice to academics and non-academics with a Black lived experience 4) analyze relationships and discover the level of benefit each party receives and then seek equity 5) use education as a means to social justice, fairness, and equity.

Implementing the combination of these four theories offers a space to model a level playing field in the classroom, as well as analyzing what that would look like in the greater community. It creates a learning environment that questions the status quo. In so doing, we revisit previous notions, examine historical truths, and analyze voices of marginalized groups. This combination also recognizes the vulnerability in engaging in these topics and desires to value each individual in the classroom and acknowledge that they have a contribution that is also important to the conversation. Combining these strategies is not linear but rather a process of action, analysis, and application of analytical results. It is being engaged. It is a willingness to engage in regular assessment. It is a commitment to retooling and researching to find equity and fairness in the classroom and to create space to teach, learn, and analyze about the inequities in our world. It is a journey to liberation for all people starting with an effort to raise critical conscious in my classroom.
CHAPTER 3- PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION

In order to encourage students to grapple critically with uncomfortable topics in Black Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies, I utilize three established practices that are promoted as “best practices” from many sources, including Facing History and Ourselves Facing History, (2012) and the Ohio Department of Education: Anticipation guides, attribute linking, and text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world application (Facing History, 2012). Anticipation Guides allow students to prepare for specific topics, and even more specifically make predictions about text, film, and various other media that we engage, by allowing ample time for preparation and space for questions before engaging in a classroom setting. Attribute linking is an effort to better understand the roles people play in the world, including the self. Text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-the world is a technique that aids students in developing their skills in making those connections. Focusing student’s analysis on the text and asking them to find connections is a strategy that helps them make meaning in their study.

In the text these established practices, I believe, allow students to expand their content knowledge while encouraging them to embrace theories of liberation and justice for all people. These theories came to my practice as a result of my research during my coursework in curriculum and instruction in the Educational Studies department at the University of Cincinnati. Facing History and Discussion Strategies are internet resources that offer pedagogical practices been hailed as best practices by many educator, intervention specialist, and scholars including, (Tompkins, 1998; Fischer & Frey, 2009; and Barry, 2002) for many years. It is in the balance of the theories found here and my implementation that I am studying the effects of my pedagogy. In order to do so, I will illustrate how I use literature, film, and social media as well as mini lectures and classroom discussions to better understand Afrocentric theory and Black feminist
theory. Setting a classroom culture that is grounded in Critical Pedagogy and approaches course content with cultural difference theory rather than cultural deficit theory offers students a space to engage in the materials as both a teacher and a learner.

To do this I use a combination of three practices that aid in promoting a safe space to pursue the raising of student consciousness that includes quelling fear of studying race, class, and gender. Additionally, my pedagogy offers, established practices that help in analyzing those topics with respective to self and the world around us. This chapter will navigate through an explanation of and give the theory behind, three established teaching practices by providing an explanation of why I use them in the classroom and specific examples and lesson plans explaining how I use them. Subsequently, I will illuminate how my pedagogy connects to NKU’s student learning outcomes (SLOs). This chapter concludes with a discussion my assessment of student learning after implementing these established practices as a way to measure the value added to their learning experience.

Currently Existing Practice #1

Before entering a unit of study or reading a text, teachers can pique students’ curiosity and set the stage for learning by using Best Practice #1 – anticipation guides. Specifically, “Anticipation guides ask students to express an opinion about ideas before they encounter them in a text or unit of study. Completing anticipation guides prepares students to recognize and connect to these themes as they surface in their learning” (Facing History, 2012). Furthermore, reviewing anticipation guides at the end of a lesson or unit is one way to help students reflect on how learning new material may have influenced their opinion. Further in this chapter, I will give tangible examples of how I use anticipation guides and the next two best practices and how they connect to student learning outcomes (SLOs) set forth by NKU.
Implementing—Currently Existing Practice #1—Anticipation Guides

There are several ways to construct an anticipation guides. Most include the following steps (Duffelmeyer, 1994):

1. Identity the major ideas presented in the reading [or in the course in general]

2. Consider what beliefs your students are likely to have about the topic

3. Write general statements with either a positive or negative response

4. Require students to respond to the statements with either a positive or negative response.

The initial introduction to any of my courses is the syllabus which I interpret as an anticipation guide because I use the syllabus to provide clear expectations for the course by showing students the readings, assignments, and grading rubrics. In addition, I try to quell fears by using clauses that help students know that there is a culture in our classroom of safety and honesty and that anything of the contrary will not be tolerated. For example, my syllabus reads: “Some of the issues we discuss in this class are controversial, and people will disagree with each other. No matter how intense your disagreement, it is essential that you treat your classmates, professor and guests with respect – and you can expect that you will be treated with respect. Critical thinking is challenging enough without adding insult” (Smith, 2008).

In an attempt to allay fears and assure students that I want to see them succeed in my courses, I make myself available by phone, email, and Skype. There is specific language that is clear about my expectations and at the same time reassuring: “The pace of these assignments is pretty brisk, so you’ll want to stay on top of the deadlines and not get behind. You may always
turn your work in early. As always my goal is for everyone to do well. Therefore if there is something I can do to help you please do not hesitate to contact me.” This is a form of an anticipation guide that allows students to understand the expectation of the course. It allows students to understand the goal of our classroom culture and foreshadows my empathy for students and passion for the subject matter, so they begin to understand me as an instructor. This is the start of building trust and classroom culture in an effort to quell fear so that we can approach these challenging topics in a safe space.

On the first day of class, I use the syllabus as an anticipation guide by asking students to respond to things that give them pause, concern, or things they are looking forward to discussing. Those results impact preparation for class. A specific portion of the syllabus that I draw student’s attention to assure transparency is: “You may not wish to take this course if you take issue with the study of stark depiction of human life or frank language.” Because my courses are not mandatory, but do fulfill several elective requirements, students are often there because they choose to be. I find that they appreciate a clear conversation and general consensus about classroom norms set in the syllabus aimed at quelling fears, foreshadowing topics, and arousing interest and engagement.

At the week’s end, there is a conversation about the following topic week’s topic in order to help students prepare and quell anxieties about potentially challenging discussions. During these conversations, I ask for questions, concerns, or special interest pertaining to the topic (there is also an option to share via email) so that I might consider it in preparation for class, lecture, discussion, or activity. Understanding the students and sharing my thoughts and perspective with them is important not only to aid in relaxing their minds over fear around a
topic or about the course in general, but also to assist them in better understanding themselves. Individual awareness is important if students are to gain a better understanding of others.

Currently Existing Practice #2

Attribute linking assists in developing individual awareness, which in turn develops the ability to gain a better understanding of others. Rooted in critical pedagogy is the notion that if students are not aware of oppression and inequity (and more specifically, their individual role in it), then combating oppression and inequity becomes nearly impossible. Revealing these realities is linked to the fulfillment of what Paulo Freire defines as our "vocation" - to be truly humanized social agents in the world (Freire, 1970, p. 19). As social agents, we take responsibility for ourselves and the way we behave. However, “Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity any more than a man ceases to be socially influenced by being so many feet or miles removed from others” (Dewey, 1938, 236). Therefore, a major function of critical pedagogy is to critique and expose the method with which schools (not limited to traditional schools but rather any vehicle by which students learn) affect the political and cultural life of individuals.

Similarly, students must learn to recognize the influence of teachers, texts, and other students on their learning and understanding of the world. This is crucial in receiving information with an analytical understanding and, therefore, more powerful positioning in the political and cultural world. With this perspective, they can use the experience of sitting in a circle to think critically about location and hence become more socially-active individuals. Enter, Best Practice 2 Attribute Linking, which centers on teachers’ and students’ awareness of their own assumptions. It includes students’ ability to better understand how education functions and how, “in the same way that others may have different points of view because of differences in
their life experiences, you likely have been shaped by your power, gender, race, social class, education, generation, geography, and a multitude of other cultural influences” (Facing History, 2012). Increasing one’s awareness of the ways in which they are a product of their socialization and the socially constructed historical context in which they live can help them avoid assuming that others see the world in the same way. A more productive connection can be made if one learns to better understand both the way the education system is influencing one’s own understanding of the world and the way all lived experiences dictate specific standpoints. Without this awareness, individuals remain ignorant of how the "self" affects the collective. The link between self and others transforms communities by allowing individuals to see more clearly the injustices and discrimination that produces human suffering. All of this can be achieved through the lens of Afrocentric theory and Black Feminist theory with the goal to assist students in seeing their position and agency in the BLS and WGS courses.

To effectively utilize attribute-linking it is important to be able to assist students in seeing individual roles in various situations. In particular, they should be able to recognize their roles as well as the roles others play in society. Specifically, “Attribute-linking can help students to define, clarify, and personalize the roles of victim, perpetrator, and bystander” (www.ohsu.edu, 2012). This begins with having students look for attributes they share among classmates across race, class, and gender divides. This is done before students discuss emotionally-charged controversial issues. The exercise emphasizes commonality over differences and helps students recognize the value of negotiating differences. Moreover, in my experience, this exercise builds trust and contributes to a climate of openness in the classroom. In exploring the negotiation of difference beyond the classroom and expanding that analytical perspective to the world, the roles of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders provides a lens
through which students can examine the role others play. This increases the student's critical awareness, which ultimately raises individual consciousness. This can inculcate in the classroom by first taking a less controversial concept and then, finding some similarities in student thought (agreeable often translates into an attribute). The instructor then assists students in elevating the thought to a more esoteric level using critical analysis. This process establishes a more positive and efficacious foundation for debating controversial issues.

**Implementing Currently Existing Practice #2—Attribute Linking**

Moving students from the familiar to unfamiliar is one way to effectively implement attribute linking in the classroom. Specifically, “Attribute-linking can help students to define, clarify, and personalize the roles of victim, perpetrator, and bystander” (Discussion Strategies, 2012). An example would be to present a scenario where the victim to a crime is the store owner, the perpetrator is the robber, and the bystander is the person who walks right by the store and chooses not to get involved. Using critical thinking, one can take these roles and apply them at the societal level with the Black community as the victim, any number of overarching institutions (e.g. education system, prison system, government) as the perpetrator, and those who are not active around oppression or even those who are actively doing what they know is not working as the bystander. The student response to this could be a prompt that ask students to choose one of the institution. Select a text that discusses and answers the following questions with a substantive response. To implement this practice I would choose or allow them to choose a related academic work that we all read. After grappling with that source, the substantive response prompt might be:

> Who in the text, film, or media story that you selected is labeled the victim, perpetrator, and the bystander. Why? How else might they be understood? How can the victim be
liberated? How or should the perpetrator change or be punished? How can the bystander contribute to liberating the victim? Is there an obligation to do so?

Student responses will obviously have a range of answers. After students post their substantive responses they are required to read and respond to at least three of their classmates’ posts. These responses are informal conversations with their classmates. It is here where students are able to see other’s perspectives and find similarities and differences in their classmates’ beliefs. It also gives space to explore ideas across specific difference. For example, do the males in the class, the Blacks in the class, or older students think similarly? These concepts help students to expand their idea of the notion of what the right answer is, explore varying thoughts and beliefs, as well as examine their own.

Considering and applying the values of others demands critical thought. “By having students look for common attributes using this best practice before they discuss issues on which they may differ, helps emphasize commonality over differences” (www.ohsu.edu, 2012). This is why using an analogy first that students are likely in agreement over can bring a connectedness that allows space for disagreement with less intolerance. Additionally, this exercise builds trust and contributes to a climate of openness. By creating a classroom climate that fosters openness and trust, teachers are able to push students’ thinking and yield richer discussions. In so doing, we create a space to have discussion that dispels myths and tears down stereotypes such as that Black people are inherently less smart and that is the cause of their under-performance in education or that Blacks are living disproportionately in poverty because they choose not to work. Instead, we can foster conversations about Cultural Deficit theory and Cultural Difference Theories with students who can better articulate their individual awareness and that of the others around them.
Currently Existing Practice #3—Text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world

The grounding of my implementation of the established practice, text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world is also in critical pedagogy as it awakens the critical consciousness by focusing on achieving a deeper understanding of the world and their place within the world. The practice centers on making connections while reading. In this best practice, “Students are trained to make three types of connections to a text: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world. This practice allows the reading to come alive… and [students] to make connections beyond the text itself” (Discussion Strategies, 2012”). This is a skill that can be practiced and learned readily through modeling. For example, during and after reading, students ask themselves three essential questions: (a) How does this text remind me of something from my life? (b) How does this text remind me of something from another text I’ve read? [This can also apply to any text including outside reading.] (c) How does this text remind me of something from the world around me? This process helps students see how the theoretical framework can apply in their day-to-day life, or can be seen in media, aids in improving their comprehension of the text. Participating in making connections between the reading and their lives, between the reading and other texts, between the reading and the larger world promotes skill development. This is a practice that allows for readers to self-monitor their comprehension and actively evaluate the contents of the text.

Implementing Currently Existing Practice #3—Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World

Text-to-text text-to-self, text-to-world is aimed at quelling fears of students around the marginalized topics of racism and sexism. In order to gauge students’ fear and anxieties about the coursework and discussions of controversial topics in the classes, I pass out notecards on the first day of class that ask simple questions, including: name, race, reason for taking this class and
expectations. I also ask how they feel about having a race conversation with someone not of their race. Students come to the course for several reasons. Students often report that they have racist backgrounds such as racist parents or grandparents who do not tolerate non-whites and so on. They also often report that they have reservations about having a race conversation and that they are really just looking for an “A.”

The goal is to calm students’ uncertainties around grades and engaging in race conversations, and to give information that is often challenging to their upbringing, all the while keeping their interest, while bearing in mind that this is but one course in the grand scheme of their academic careers and their lives outside of the university.

The initial introduction to any of my courses is the syllabus. I use the syllabus to provide clear expectations for the course by showing students the readings, assignments, and grading rubrics. In addition, I try to quell fears by using clauses that help students know that there is a culture in our classroom of safety and honesty and that anything of the contrary will not be tolerated. For example, my syllabus reads: “Some of the issues we discuss in this class are controversial, and people will disagree with each other. No matter how intense your disagreement, it is essential that you treat your classmates, professor, and guests with respect – and you can expect that you will be treated with respect. Critical thinking is challenging enough without adding insult.”

In an attempt to quell fears and assure students that I want to see them succeed in my courses, I make myself available by phone, email, and Skype. There is specific language that is clear about my expectations and at the same time reassuring: “The pace of these assignments is pretty brisk, so you’ll want to stay on top of the deadlines and not get behind. You may always turn your work in early. As always my goal is for everyone to do well. Therefore if there is
something I can do to help you please do not hesitate to contact me”.

On the first day of class, I give the students an out by asking for their understanding of this portion of the syllabus before we delve in deep: “You may not wish to take this course if the above information is concerning, or you have objection to it.” Because my courses are not mandatory, but do fulfill several requirements, students are often there because they choose to be. My effort is to obtain buy in by asking for verbal agreement on the syllabus, and have students’ feel safer in hearing others are in agreement with the classroom norms set in the syllabus. At the week’s end, there is a conversation about the following week’s topic in order to help students prepare and quell anxieties about potentially challenging discussions. During these conversations, I ask for questions, concerns, or special interest pertaining to the topic (there is also an option to share via email) so that I might consider it in preparation for class, lecture, discussion, or activity, quelling fears, foreshadowing topics, and arousing interest and engagement.

To demonstrate the concept, I will use a Marxist Theory example. Marx & Engels (1948) posited the law of the unity of opposites, which holds that no constituent of the universe exists without an opposing or contrasting force giving it its essence. The existence of these opposing forces is necessary to maintain the balance and order of the universe (Marx & Engels).

In order to better explain this concept I will step away from the theoretical language to see this dialectic explained clearly. Imagine a person playing alone on a teeter-totter; the purpose of the teeter-totter cannot be fulfilled without the “opposing force” of another person occupying the other end. Taken even further, the material with which the teeter-totter is made, from the wood to the metal, down to its atomic and sub-atomic particles, cannot themselves exist without an equal and opposing force to hold its essence together. So within the philosophical
realm where Marx and Engels use this law, ideals, thoughts and concepts do not exist autonomously; they cannot be held without an opposition to another ideal, thought or concept.

A more political example, and applicable to my course, could look at violence in the urban core and use the justice system as an example: the resistance of both contributes to one another’s existence. In order to create change in this arena, the criminal justice system must be refashioned to evoke a different response; as is the case in other oppressive structures. This can be taken to the individual level: from speeding and illegally parking on campus, to ordering water and filling your cup with cola. Ultimately, my goal is explore with learners Marxist Theory or Afrocentric Theory, and to apply these concepts to the present using analytical thought. It is this process that allows students to read and understand theoretical frameworks and then use them to create solutions to problems. To better understand the effects of the intervention of the above practices I collected data both quantitative and qualitative. In order to assess student growth I use Peggy McIntosh’s Phase Theory. I will detail the data collected and Phase Theory as framework to assess that data in following chapter.
CHAPTER 4 – DATA COLLECTION

Over the years scholars and researchers have accepted that lasting effective change requires more than a committee of city planners observing from a distance. It requires an in depth understanding of the culture, lifestyle, and thought processes of those deemed in need of the improvement (Banhardt, 1981). Often, well-intended would-be change agents have attributed the recipients of their unsuccessful planning with its failure, labeling them as oblivious to their need for improvement, ignorant of the help and money spent to improve their lot, ungrateful and not worthy of further thought. This perspective, used for many years, and still today in some systems, has failed.

In this study I will assume that all people have worth, intelligence, and a desire to grow and improve. When people are treated with respect, given dignity and appreciation for who they are and what they have accomplished despite limited resources, positive change can occur. I took all of this into careful consideration when choosing action research and more specifically first person action research to analyze my classroom successes and areas of opportunity as it relates to raising student’s critical consciousness.

Data Collection Method: First Person Action Research

Action research may be defined as an emergent inquiry process where applied behavioral science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems (Coghlan & Coghlan, 2006). A key component of action research is the use of theory to stimulate inquiry into practice and the assimilation of the research findings into pedagogy (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle 2001). Therefore, the sources and types of knowledge that are drawn together are complex and perhaps challenge traditional thinking about the
compartmentalization of theoretical and practical knowledge. In an effort to positively impact students’ critical consciousness by enhancing their research skills, analysis, application and problem solving skills I will utilize action research. The commitment to problematizing social practices including that of action research itself in the interest of individuals and social transformation (McTaggart, 1994).

First person action research involves the idea that “our own beliefs, values, assumptions, ways of thinking and behaving are afforded explicit attention as we experience ourselves in inquiry and in action… [it the process] through which we can uncover and learn about our own theories-in-use” (Coghlan, 2013, p.334). Therefore, it makes sense that I would use first person action research to “form morally committed action” to my students that will hopefully yield a more effective classroom for aiding in raising student critical consciousness. (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996, p3).

Most action research agendas are cyclical and need to include fundamentals that allow the researcher to look, think, and act upon the inquiry (Stringer, 2007). As a first person action researcher it is important that I reflect on my nature and how I observe and interpret the data by recognizing my subjectivity as a researcher and the ethical consciousness that follows (Brydon-Miller & Maquire, 2007). I recognize my own subjectivity as research and the ethical consciousness that follows (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Nonetheless, it is important that the diverse voices are heard. Therefore, I will process student writing and field notes from class discussion, and I will compile the data from two anonymous surveys given to students at the beginning and end of the semester. This process allows for increased competence and self-demonstration while also giving respect to people’s knowledge and experience (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maquire 2003).
Action Research methodology is used by many sociologists, psychologists, and educators to initiate effective change. The process is similar, but Kurt Lewin, one of action research’s first voices, has a process this is well respected by many scholars including Ajzen (1985), Joy, (2007), and Carr and Kemmis (2003). Therefore, I will use Lewin’s process as an exemplar. It begins with his term Unfreezing. Basically this relates to the organization becoming aware of their problems and the need to make changes. The second step is Changing the situation. The group agrees to work together to diagnose what is happening and search for new methods that will lead to their desired goal. The third step called Refreezing, has the group apply the new behavior on which they have decided. From here the process is reexamined to see if the adopted changes are yielding the desired effect.

Figure 4.1 Smith, M.K. (2001) “Lewin’s Action-Research Model”
The action-research model shown in Figure 4.1 is an illustration of how Lewin's describes the cyclical process of observation and planning, implementing the action, assessing the results, amending the plan, and repeating the adjusted process. The process of action research is simply an action oriented problem solving process. After data are collected it is not a report that may be evaluated by a few administrative personal, but must include all of the players in an ongoing process toward behavioral change leading to the desired successful outcome. It does include the scientific method in the form of data gathering.

Though this method began as a business model it has evolved to include the education sector. Stephen Corey along with other teachers at Columbia University’s Teachers’ College in 1949 are credited with coining the phrase “action research.” Corey (1949) defined action research as the process through which educators study their own practice to solve their personal practical problems. Action research he said is deliberate, solution-oriented investigation that is group or personally owned and conducted. The basic idea was to get teachers to become involved in asking relevant questions and using systematic school-based research (Elliot, 1993; Sagor, 2000) to improve instruction. This process of research involves framing key questions, reviewing the literature, collecting and analyzing data, and communicating and using the findings.

The way this contributes to improved instruction is that it provides a systematic method to evaluate the total classroom environment. Decisions can be made according to the data discovered and all of those involved in the delivery of the change are part of the process giving them ownership and the motivation to make it succeed.
The specific approach that I take in collecting data using Action Research is borrowed from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2014) which suggests that there are seven steps that must be present:

1. **Selecting a focus:**
   What element(s) of our practice or what aspect of student learning does the researcher wish to investigate?

2. **Clarifying theories**
   Identify the values, beliefs, and theoretical perspectives the researchers hold relating to their focus.

3. **Identifying research questions**
   Generate a set of personally meaningful research questions to guide the inquiry.

4. **Collecting data:**
   To be sure the data is the best possible, educators should do the following:
   - Make sure the data is valid and reliable.
   - Be confident that the lessons drawn from the data align with any unique characteristics of their classroom or school.
   - Avoid relying on any single source of data. Use the process of triangulation, using multiple independent sources of data to answer one's questions. The researcher needs to be effective and efficient by
IN PURSUIT OF RAISING STUDENT CONSCIOUSNESS

collecting information in the classroom, test results, classroom discussions as well as information from universities and other scholars.

5. **Analyzing data:**

Teacher researchers need to methodically sort, sift, rank, and examine their data to answer two generic questions:

What is the story told by these data?

Why did the story play itself out this way?

The purpose of answering these questions is to clarify any uncertainties, clarify any discrepancies or confusion among the researchers and make sure they are identifying what needs to be improved and what process will lead to success.

6. **Reporting Results:**

ASCD states that because action research is presented to a group of fellow educations in their own familiar environments, it frees them from the sense of isolation many teachers feel.

7. **Taking Informed Action:**

What makes action planning particularly satisfying for the teacher researcher is that with each piece of data uncovered (about teaching or student learning) the educator will feel greater confidence in the wisdom of the next steps and each refinement of practice, action researchers gain valid and reliable data (Calhoun, 1992).
This approach allows me to engage as an individual teacher and leaves space to work with a collaborative group of colleagues who may share a common concern or even an entire school faculty (Coghlan, 2013). Using this framework, I collected data that will be detailed in Chapter 5.

**Performance Measures**

In order to assess the impact my pedagogy has on student learning, I use Peggy McIntosh’s (1990) Phase Theory of consciousness. McIntosh's theory is the lens for viewing student work that allows measurement specifically for approaching a critical gender and race-consciousness in my practice. The theory of curricular and personal revision layers five phases of consciousness with regard to one’s identity and experience (McIntosh, 1983) (See Figure 4.2).

This theory came from McIntosh’s early work when she was focused on bringing Women’s Studies into the mainstream arena. Some of the challenges she faced in doing so directly connected to those I face. She experienced resistance due to: (a) fear of change and society’s inability and/or lack of desire to have challenging conversation. As Gordon (1997) asserts, epistemological paradigms emerging from the experiences of people of color and women offer a challenge to the mainstream perspectives. (b) The ability of individuals to value others. Ladson-Billings (1995) defines multiculturalism as the study of others and their multiple cultures and practices. The resistance of the education system to offer multiculturalism is witness to the challenge educators’ face in trying to offer it to students often in isolation from other courses, subject matter, and support including their institutions. (c) The capability of individuals to connect text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-community.

If they are not reading it, they are unable to compare it to others texts, self, or the greater community; let alone instruct students on the practice. These struggles that educators face on a micro-scale in the classroom echo that of the greater community in such things as racism,
sexism, and so on. This link is what leads me to use this lens for researching how the three best practices described above, affect student learning, engagement, and impact critical consciousness.

In describing these challenges McIntosh drew on her own experiences reflecting on the subtle, even unconscious ways systematic, deliberate, institutionalized sexism and racism have damaged individual psyches. She also explained that institutions have produced and continue to reproduce social inequity through marginalization or omission of Black History in curricula, the lack of multicultural education in general, and more specifically the lack of feminist perspective. McIntosh’s initial writings were focused on moving school curricula towards a vision of equity that seeks to change the status quo. Her Phase Theory of consciousness has also been applied to teacher training and evaluation, and has been used in various analyses outside of education (McIntosh, 2009).

Similar to critical pedagogy, McIntosh's theory posits that the Eurocentric hegemonic masculine nature of our society is the bases for the marginalization and even invisibility of feminist, African American, and other oppressed group inclusive learning. This is a feminist theory that seeks a “more inclusive body of knowledge, a more active process of learning, and a greater ability to see the dominant modes of thought and behavior which we wish to challenge or change” (McIntosh, 1983, p. 2). This theory critiques the traditional hierarchal models for success that creates gatekeepers out of those who control knowledge and how knowledge is used and valued by society. Its five stages help those processing it to analyze, critique, and elevate critical consciousness both on an individual level and on a larger scale. In this case, I will use it to look at my practice and ascertain student understanding, engagement and apprehension in two courses: Introduction to Contemporary Women’s and Gender Issues and Introduction to Black
There are five phases to McIntosh's theory (see figure 4.). McIntosh uses the language phase to describe various types of consciousness, but it is important to note that these stages are not linear but instead fluid. That is to say that, individuals do not necessary move through these stages either wholly or in any specific order. However, there is a higher or more fully developed critical consciousness in phases four and five. McIntosh emphasizes the lateral or collaborative so as not to perpetuate the hierarchy of the pyramid and the notion that arriving at the top from the base is the goal. She also reiterates that individuals have unique ways of knowing and each is valid. Therefore, this is not about agenda setting in the hierarchical or political sense; instead it is about awareness and analysis of, and reflection on self, others, and the word.
Figure 4.2 History Redefined and Reconnected to Include Us All (Towery, 2009, p.66)

Before describing the phases of consciousness, it is important to outline the underlying assumptions, namely that “all individuals, including whites, are racially, ethnically, and culturally marked, and that these markers are informed both by personal experiences as well as by certain structural elements in society that serve to privilege or oppress” (Towery, 2009, p. 69).
McIntosh also argues that an education for critical consciousness with regard to race and racism must lead to a pluralized awareness that considers these issues in relation to other important aspects of equity (e.g. sexism, classism, ageism, etc.) (McIntosh, 1990). In addition, she makes it clear that these theories are not to pigeon-hole students, but rather to aid in their understanding for the sake of liberation and personal growth.

In Phase One, consciousness is described by McIntosh as one that, “involves identification with the publicly powerful white western males.” In this phase “whites’ neither study persons of color or noticed” that they have studied them (McIntosh, 1990, 6). The issue here is that all individuals in this phase see whiteness as the standard and compare all things to this ideal. In Phase two, individuals may or may not acknowledge the contributions of persons of color. If they do, they consider these people the exception. There is no critical thought about the way in which society is fashioned or about how or why students see members of minority groups as exceptions. Instead, there is a disconnect between those individuals being studied and members of the greater community. It is between these two phases that I often find my students - they are aware of Blacks and even of some of their contributions, but they are unable to make connections to texts, self, world, or greater community.

Phase Three of McIntosh’s (1990) Phase Theory uses the underlying assumptions to explain why people are able to analyze the oppressed groups in a critical way. It examines why individuals might assume that race is a sole factor in non-white’s lives. In other words, at this phase, individuals can see (a) the “race issues” (p. 7). Consequently, this phase “identifies ‘race’ monoculturally, ascribing race only to people of color, and therefore ignoring whites. (b) It also sees people of color only in the category of “problem,” making it nearly impossible to acknowledge their contributions and power; because it identifies whole groups of people chiefly
as oppressed rather than with human life experienced fully” (McIntosh, 1990, pp. 6-7). Subsequently, this phase also positions non-whites as powerless and inferior. Given that in this phase we are focused on analysis, specifics go unnamed and tangible actions against the status quo go undiscussed, making engaging long term challenging. While there is no examination or application in Phase Three, Phase Four offers us just that.

In an effort not to perpetuate the Eurocentric hegemonic patriarchy, Phase Four and five begin to approach the, “lateral, connected, and diverse functions of psyche and society… and multiple forms of power as they are held by various individuals” (Towery, 2009, 70). In other words, Phase Four begins to examine the effects of individuals operating on levels one through three.

For example, posit that an individual believes that women are oppressed, the analysis of their level of critical consciousness lies in their analysis of not just their belief but in their ability to examine their beliefs and the effects of their beliefs. In keeping with the same example of the belief that women are oppressed, can you explain specifically what that means or how it impacts them i.e. employment, pay rate, professional, and intimate relationships and so on? It is important to understand how one belief or thought pattern can have a broad impact. This phase elevates the student to a level where there is a conversation about restructuring the power to be more egalitarian and looks at how it is affecting the oppressed groups, but McIntosh warns that this phase can be “sentimental” or can draw emotion (McIntosh, 2009, 6). This is where agenda setting can be a challenge. It is important to elevate consciousness, but it is not necessarily going to cause a change in belief or behavior; the impact is limited by the level of elevation, lack of named action, the limitations of the literature (e.g. as in the lack of details on Phase Five of McIntosh’s theory). Here I look at student work to see if the student is able to analyze course
material in a critical way and how they explain the outcomes or impact of a particular topic.

Phase Four acknowledges various types of power and various kinds of individuals that hold power. In this phase, McIntosh gives credence to individual’s unique way of knowing. This way of knowing is important to note in that it exists within the power structure. This linkage is “each person’s way of knowing is inextricably linked to systems of power and domination, and that each person’s culture and politics cultural perspectives” are different and must be understood and critiqued (McIntosh, 1990, 7). In education, we perpetuate the hegemonic power structure when we “look to formula rather than analysis and reflection” (Vialle et al., 1997, 130). Without examination of the hegemonic power we acknowledge, often without knowing, the status quo’s relevance. This framework of the self and others is used to discover the restructuring of the power hierarchy to be more egalitarian and inclusive. This language seeks to create a rubric for examining the level of consciousness of a particular writing or analysis. However, obviously this has not yet come to fruition.

McIntosh does not explain the fifth phase because she says we have not begun to behave within this realm as a society. That is to say, this is the phase where the restructuring of what was analyzed regarding the connection of the psyche and society begins to take shape. As an educator, my goal is to explore the reality and challenges of teaching and learning about difficult topics such as race, class and gender; such that I examine what affect my pedagogy, and more specifically the implementation of the three best practices discussed, impact student critical consciousness utilizing McIntosh’s pyramid of consciousness.

I aim to explore students’ consciousness and growth in consciousness through two different courses: Introduction to Contemporary Women’s and Gender Issues, and Introduction to Black Studies. To do so I will look specifically at how students understand issues concerning
race, class, and gender. Particularly, examine their intersections of the oppressed groups based on specific language given by McIntosh (see figure 4). Using the above theories and data analysis concepts, I analyze data collected in four semesters of two classes. The next chapter details the data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER 5 – METHOD: MIXED METHODS DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION

Quantitative Project Evaluation

In this chapter, I address my study design and findings, with suggestions for further work on engagement in the enhancement of student consciousness. I use Peggy McIntosh’s (1983) phases of understanding as a template for tracking student self-awareness and growth in understanding. I aim to lay the groundwork for a unified program of inquiry that will encourage students to foster first, a tolerance of, and eventually a deeper, intersectional understanding of others through the use of Anticipation Guides, regular analysis of student fears and understandings, and other means. I discuss how my students’ survey data and responses to open-ended writing prompts exemplify deepening awareness through and because of engagement in difficult conversations about race, class, and gender.

In my role as an instructor in both Women’s and Gender Studies and Black Studies departments, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data from my students at three points over the course of a 16-week semester to track their understanding of race, class, and gender politics and how the inclusion of critical pedagogy in our course structure allowed those understandings to evolve. By measuring their quantifiable responses to survey questions as well as open-ended qualitative writings, I was able to analyze the effects of my pedagogy and our collective work as a learning community on the attitudes expressed in their responses. I also tracked and analyzed student ability to create text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text connections.
Study Participants

The study participants were undergraduate students in my *Hip Hop Feminism* and *Introduction to Women’s and Gender Issues* courses at Northern Kentucky University [in semester(s) and year(s)]. *Hip Hop Feminism* is offered as a 300-level course most often offered to junior and senior students, and *Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies* is a 100-level course most often taken by freshman and sophomore students, but there are no pre-requisites to take either. Both courses were offered online. *Introduction to Women’s and Gender Issues* is offered out of the Women’s and Gender Studies program and *Hip Hop Feminism* is cross-listed in Black Studies and the History department. Typically, juniors and seniors take the upper-division *Hip Hop Feminism* course and first year students enroll in the *Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies* course. I selected these particular courses in order to show the need for applying the theories and feminist pedagogy outlined in previous chapters. Survey results would show that both incoming first year students enrolled in the general education course in Women’s and Gender Studies and the more advanced students in the *Hip Hop Feminism* course would increase their level of consciousness regarding race and gender from the methods I have laid out.

Survey Design and Procedure

The survey questions used in my study to measure students’ level of consciousness focus on issues of race and gender and were taken from a standard survey used by *Bridges for a Just Community* (Jeffers & Weaver, 2010), formally known as the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ). The NCCJ has been Cincinnati’s leading human rights organization since 1944. In keeping with the growing sense of inclusion in our society, Bridges launched in November 17, 2006 and it has promoted best practices for coordinating inclusion
and raising consciousness nationally. Their mission is to bring people together to achieve inclusion, justice, and equity for all. This is done through several programs that seek to raise consciousness by:

1. Creating conversations through programs such as Just Communities—a week long residential experience for 50 youth ages 15-17 who live, work, share and learn with peers from different backgrounds as a means to quell fears of the “other.”

2. Exposing students to activities that give them opportunities to explore their gifts and areas of opportunities in an effort to help them make connections to others that may not otherwise have been discovered.

3. Providing opportunities to confront tough issues and bridge the differences that divide people, teach about understanding and relationship building, and the value of learning about others (Jeffers & Weaver, 2010).

My work is closely aligned with the goals espoused by these two organizations and the best practices outlined above. It is for that reason that I used the survey created by Bridges to ascertain the degree to which students engage with the information and activities within my classes. I also wanted to gauge students’ growth over a 16 week period.

I administered surveys to students at three crucial points during the semester—on the first day, at midterm, and during the final week of classes. The survey had both simple, quantifiable yes/no questions as well as open-ended qualitative questions to ascertain the level of student consciousness surrounding issues taught in the course. My goal was to measure the changes in consciousness levels to see if the content of the course and the method by which it was delivered added value to students’ sensitivity levels and their overall learning in the course.
I chose the survey questions listed below because they were already being used by a large nonprofit organization and were formulated by a team of highly qualified researchers. Their mission is very much allied with my pedagogical goals in that they seek to discover, initially, if students are comfortable with engaging in conversations about oppression. That is why I asked question such as, “I am fearful of having a race, class or gender conversation?” After some work the questions assess whether participants understand the subject matter. This aids in assessing whether or not their response may be due to a lack of understanding. Additionally, I thought it important to determine if students are participating fully, which is the background of questions like “do you read the required materials?” Lastly, the final survey has several repeat questions of the first survey to see if a student’s concern about race, class and gender oppression has changed. It also tells whether or not their willingness to engage in conversations about the plight of Blacks and women has increased during that 16 week period.

**Survey 1 questions**—Emailed to students on the first day of class. They had a week to respond.

- a. I am willing to spend time with classmates outside of class
- b. I have a relationship with persons who do not look like me on a regular basis
- c. I am concerned about the plight of Black people
- d. I am concerned about the plight of women
- e. I feel comfortable sharing my personal views and opinions
- f. I am fearful of having a race, class and/or gender conversation
- g. I typically do not share my personal views and opinion in classroom discussions

**Survey 2 questions**—Emailed to students during the third week of class.

- a. I understand my role in race, class and gender oppression
b. I understand others’ role in race, class, and gender oppression

c. I am willing to engage in conflict to defend what I believe in, in class

d. I read the required texts

e. I understand the text required of me

Survey 3 questions—Emailed to students during the eighth week of class which is the midpoint of the semester.

a. I am willing to engage in conflict to defend what I believe in class

b. I understand my role in race, class, and gender oppression

c. I understand others’ role in race, class, and gender oppression

d. I can articulate the roles people play in oppression

e. I have grown in my understanding of race, class, and gender
CHAPTER 6 - RESULTS

Quantitative: Survey 1 Results

Survey 1 aimed at gaining a better understanding of students’ fears and desires to engage in the challenging conversations around race, class, and gender when they entered the class. Toward this end, students were asked what they feared about taking this course. The chart below illustrates that more than 91% of the students in Hip Hop Feminism (HHF) course are concerned about the plight of Black people while only 67% of the students in the Introduction to Contemporary Women’s and Gender Issues (ICWGI) course were concerned with that same issue. Significantly, 91% of the HHF students were also concerned with the plight of women, but the ICWGI students increased their concern for women over Blacks by 5%. Perhaps this is related to the subject matter in each course. What we do know from the graph below is that students concerned about the plight of those marginalized groups report a 53% willingness to engage in a conversation about race, class, and gender although 67% in ICWGI and 78% in HHF report engaging in ongoing relationships with people who don’t look like them. Significantly, 71% of students in the ICWGI and 74% in HHF reported feeling comfortable sharing their personal views and opinions. However, ICWGI students were much less likely to share these views in the classroom. Conversely, the HHF students are almost equally willing to share their opinions and views in general as they are to share them in class. These statistics are illustrated in the graph below.
In the open-ended question: What expectations, concerns do you have for this course? Students reported fears including “judgment,” “saying the wrong thing,” “not knowing the right answers,” “sharing personal stories of my racist family,” “a bad grade,”” being cussed out,” and “my teacher not liking me.” This revealed that students’ fears are not simply based on the challenging nature of the conversation of race, class, and gender in general. They also involve the context of being in academia and the fear of traditional learning and expected rigor. Students often have a desire for a good grade, but lack the prior knowledge of this particular subject. They are also concerned about the demands of balancing honesty about their opinions or experiences with a desire for sensitivity toward their professor or other students with different perspectives. I address student willingness to make potentially controversial statements in a later section.

Creating an environment of inclusion is importance in order for students to feel safe in constructing knowledge accurately (Bolliger, 2004). Exploring the relationship between social
interaction and cognitive learning is beyond the scope of this project. It is relevant however in that the communication involved in assessing students’ needs, desires, and fear levels is important in being able to quell their fears and better their ability to gather new information and construct new knowledge (Van de Walle et. al., 2007). While working on subduing fear, it is necessary for the instructor to hold in tension putting structures in place to assist students in connecting self to their study. To take a glimpse into whether or not the current best practices employed are having any impact I distributed Survey 2 during the middle of the semester as illustrated below in the graph Survey 2 results.

**Quantitative: Survey 2 Results**

Survey 2 focused on students’ individual awareness about the oppression of race, class and gender. Significantly, 91% of students in HHF report reading the required text and 79% in ICWGI, and 92% of HHF students report that they understand their role, others’ roles and can articulate the roles of people in race, class and gender oppression. Only 42% of the ICWGSI course reported that they understood their role and even less, 40% understood others’ roles in the oppression of people on the basis of race, class and/or gender.
Self-Awareness is an important component to having conversations about race, class, and gender as Hershey emphasizes (2007), few studies focus on diversity in a broader sense; most look very specifically at racial/ethnic diversity and cross-racial interaction. Even fewer studies have looked yet at the relationship between self-awareness and student to student interaction. It dawned on me to include this because of the disconnection of students to the conversation in their writing and class conversation. In order for students to apply self to text they must develop their knowledge of self. One of the ways we do this is through Attribute Linking. This is the process of identifying the individual roles in a given situation. Then discovering and analyzing what role we as individuals play.

This often happens when students engage in conversations in class and I try to model the behavior as well. Kuh (1995) found that peer interaction was “the single most important influence” on multiple outcome measures, among a variety of potential influences, including
faculty contact, academic activities, and work (p. 146). Gurin et al.’s (2002) study seems to support this conclusion.

Quantitative: Survey 3 Results

This survey reveals the value added to student consciousness through my pedagogy by repeating the questions from survey 2. HHF students decrease from 92% to 82% who report understanding others’ roles in the race, class, and gender oppression, but stayed the same on understanding their own roles. The ICWGSI students’ understanding of their own role in oppression went from 42% to 76% and their understanding of others’ role in it went from 40% to 89%. That is a drastic increase. Their willingness to engage in the classroom discussion also increased from 53% to 72%. The HHF class stayed the same at 92%.

Survey 3 also shows that there was a general consensus among students from both courses that students felt as if they have grown in their understanding of race, class, and gender. Specifically, 95% in HHF and 91% in ICWGSI felt more consciously aware of the issues. They
also report an ability to articulate the roles that people play in oppression at a rate of 91% in ICWGSI and 79% in HHF. Students’ qualitative writings demonstrate what they actually internalized when compared to what they reported on survey. I cannot connect specific writings to surveys as the surveys were anonymous. Nonetheless, there is value in seeing examples of student work to create a more holistic view of the classroom to gauge whether their perceptions from the surveys aligned with their personal responses.

**Qualitative Project Evaluation**

**Open-ended question of Survey 1**

In students’ writing, which will be used to give a first-person perspective, they often report this same fear of being misunderstood and not having enough information about the subject matter noted in their survey responses. In the same vein, they also report a desire to learn and ask for patience, a sign that they desire a move to improved consciousness and clarity in these discussions. J. M. Keller supports this notion when he wrote, “We often underestimate both the fear of failure and desire to succeed in an audience because the former tempers the latter and this can make people appear more neutral than they really feel (Keller, 1987).”

The prompt students responded to was, “Please use any media you see fit to introduce yourself to the class. Please tell us your approach to online learning (e.g. fear, what you hope to get, or how we can help you get it).” In the following responses students expressed a desire to learn the content of the course. They expressed apprehension and fear, and often mentioned a hectic life that requires their attention. You will find excerpts of student work that aid in understanding their fear.

**Substantive Response Design and Procedure**
The second portion of this data set involves the use of required student writing in the course to assess their levels of comprehension of the course material. Students regularly post reflections on the Blackboard course delivery system in response to prompts created by me, or co-constructed with students, that are related to the readings and self/group assessment. There are a number of ways that educators and school-based professionals translate the systematic and pedagogical goals of having students learning to read, comprehend, and apply the reading into school practice. No curriculum or best practice can adequately and completely address the complex issues involved in having race, class, and gender conversation within an education context. However, much of the research suggests that there is a link between explicitly multicultural education and gearing the conscious mind toward tolerance of and eventually liberation of oppressed groups, as suggested by such well known scholars as Freire, Dewey, Davis, and West.

So to that end, I will look at the writing assignments, as does Bridges 2012, and see if the awareness or what I am calling “consciousness development” is mirrored in their writing. While there will not be a direct link in the writing samples to the survey, the correlation according to Bridges is telling, and the assessment beneficial to improving pedagogy. This is discussed below, specifically looking at how their answers relate to:

1. Was there initial fear in engaging in Black and/or feminist conversation, and was it quelled, and by what?
2. What, if anything, students learned about self?
3. Did students learn things about the “other” that they did not know? Has their behavior toward the “other” changed? If so, how?

**Substantive Response Part 1: Phase One Responses**
Students’ work as shown below suggests that they can indeed articulate the role of self and others as they relate to one or more acts of oppression. This can be seen in blame, lived experience and perpetuation of stereotypical thought. However, it can be difficult for students to connect this awareness to larger structural or course-related issues at this stage. Students’ writing also shows is disconnection from the “other” as they dehumanize others when they refer to them as “things” similar to the process used in Phase One of McIntosh’s phases of consciousness.

This is illustrated by a student’s substantive response to the following prompt:

What is your relationship with the word feminist? Are you a feminist? Why or why not? Should women be afraid of feminism? Is Hogeland right when she writes, the real issue is the fear of, ‘your own implications’ (i.e. likely consequences) in the hierarchy [of society] and/or your own accountability (i.e. need to act in the betterment)” [of] other women’s oppression (Hogeland, 1994)?

NOTE: No, you do not need to be a woman to be a feminist, so don’t let that be your guide, folks who do not identify as a woman. However feel free to discuss your identity in your answer.

One student stated, “Most feminists I know happen to be lesbians, so naturally when I hear the word feminist, that’s what comes to mind.” This response shows the lumping of feminists into a monolithic stereotype. It also illustrates the perpetuation of this understanding. When the student observes other parts of society, the media, she quickly makes the connection there as well, “Movies and TV shows often portray this connection.” She continues in this vein, writing, “I would not consider myself a feminist because I feel like I am afraid of the word just like the article talks about, when really there is nothing to be afraid of. After all it is just a word.” Although this student acknowledges that the fear is not reasonable, she still uses her lived experience as rationale for not identifying as a feminist. This student continues, “Women should absolutely not be afraid of feminism. But I do understand why.” There seems to be a fear of
complexity, fear of perceived judgment, a fear of ideas and, as McIntosh points out, a blame of outside influences for the disconnect with the subject matter.

This Phase One student’s response aligned with that of some of her peers when she discussed the stereotype of a feminist and how it influences her feelings toward being a feminist. She states, “Fear is a feeling that is easily had, but hard to overcome. The media’s portrayal of feminists is not always a good thing. Protesting is mainly when the media comes in to shine the light on feminists and that’s not at all fair. There is a whole other side to feminism than what I know and am used to. To me being a feminist meant being a lesbian or some obnoxious person who is always talking about women’s rights.” This feeling, however, is tempered by some capacity for knowledge when she states: “That’s so wrong though. Everything I’ve thought over the years is wrong and I’m so glad that this article was able to shine some light on the positive aspect of feminism.” It is this space of desire to learn that I find hope that implementing the best practice of Anticipation Guides will help this student and others.

To further illustrate this phase, one student’s response as her lived experience that might continue to perpetuate negative and inaccurate stereotypes illuminates how self is disconnected from others. In fact, in this response and others like it, the student clearly lumps feminists into one category using language like “lesbians” and “obnoxious person who is always talking about women’s rights.” There is not a discussion about the individual’s specific view of feminism or the diversity within that group. After the claimed enlightenment from the reading there is still no articulation regarding either the diversity of the group or self as it applies to the group. Because education is Eurocentric and male-centric, it ignores fully the contributions, lived experiences, and perspectives of marginalized peoples in all subject areas. The first stage of McIntosh’s Phase Theory, illustrates the silencing of educational materials, readings, films, and
other teaching and learning tools. This stage is harmful both for students who identify with dominant culture and those from non-dominant groups. It has destructive outcomes for the students from the dominant culture because, according to Banks (1993), it:

- reinforces their false sense of superiority, gives them a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups, and denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives, and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups (p. 195).

The curriculum of the mainstream has negative outcomes for students from non-dominant groups, as well, failing to validate their identities, experiences, and perspectives. According to Banks (1993), it further alienates students who already struggle to survive in a school culture that differs so greatly from their home cultures.

My challenge here is to develop students on this level to a more integrative notion of the study of race, class and gender by integrating a diverse reading that celebrates the marginalized group we are studying. At the same time I must hold in tension that some students are on other phases and also need to be developed.

**Part 2: A Phase Two Substantive Response to the Same Prompt**

Several Phase Two students gave responses similar to this one in response to the same prompt:

The first thought that comes to mind when I think of the word feminist is a big group of women protesting. I think of extremists who will do whatever it takes to get what they want. I don't have a close relationship with the word feminist because I'm unsure if I've ever met an actual "extreme" feminist in real life or even a person who was that passionate about women's rights.
This response shows an increased awareness of the group made up of many parts, but she is still unable to articulate the differences within the group from a humanist perspective. However, all students expressed the desire to expand their understanding of the group and its parts. For instance, this Phase Two student wrote, “I took this class so I could be more familiar with the term "feminist" and just understand the different perspectives that people have on women.” Another student wrote: “After looking at the definition of feminism, I believe that I am a feminist to some degree. I do want legal, political, social, and economic rights as a woman. Hopefully everyone is a feminist to an extent. I'm lucky to live in a world where women are pretty much equal to men, unlike in the past.” In recognizing that women are equal to men, female students are beginning to see that men are the standard for our society and women are simply seen as the “other” with a desire to be like ideal men. This student continues to make sweeping generalizations without distinct separations of feminist. She states: “The actual definition of feminism is advocating for women's rights, no extremes mentioned. It's interesting how many women, including me, always think of that at first. Because of this, I believe that many women are actually scared of the term "feminism" when they really don't have to be. It's not feminism that should be scary, it should be the people that take it way too far, like bombing buildings, to get their point across.” McIntosh reminds us that people can move between phases with some fluidity as demonstrated by the quote above that suggests the student remains partially in Phase One as she perpetuates stereotypes—naming people who bomb buildings as feminists.

Thankfully, this student is engaging in the reading so I have every hope that her movement into Phase Three will be complete. She writes, “Hogeland mentions that women aren't afraid of feminism, they're afraid of politics. There are some women that are just afraid of being involved in the political world and that prevents them from standing up for their own rights
as a woman.” She also states that being a feminist can alienate oneself. The "pool of men" may be smaller when one starts advocating for women's rights. Having a fear of feminism is also having a fear of many other things: ideas, thinking, etc.

For the most part, student analysis of the readings echoes that of the authors but branches into broader generalization. Students often use language like “most” when describing what the author stated as “some.” In Phase One it is common to see individuals generalizing concepts as illustrated in the next excerpt. “For most women, they probably are afraid of being a so-called "feminist" because of the hierarchy of society. They are afraid that they will drop below their peers.”

In the Phase One example students may or may not acknowledge the contributions of persons of color or gender difference. If they do, they consider these people the exception. There is no critical thought about the way in which society is fashioned or about how or why they see them as exceptions. Instead, there is a disconnect between those individuals being studied, themselves, and the greater community. In the Phase Two example, the student shows a Phase Three consciousness by separating individuals in the group and seeing the application of outside influences on those individuals, while also articulating many of the characteristics of phase two. In this phase it is challenging to combat the reality that society and other departments are often presenting students with a Eurocentric and male-centered curriculum. As well, it is challenging to shift what students believe to be true without getting a shut-down response. Here it is important to tread lightly. I will expound further on what I have found to be the new best practices in the discussion of my transformed practice in chapter five.

While this phase presents its own unique set of challenges, Phase Three presents some as well. The above examples illustrate students in Phase One and two; I find most students between
phases two and three, aware of the conditions, contributions, and needs of Blacks and women but unclear on how to meaningfully engage with them. Some are able to articulate their plight and contribution to the world. However, these students are unable to make clear connections to texts, self, world or greater community.

**Part 3: Phase Two and Three Mixed Responses**

Phase two, described above, meets Phase Three which goal is to engage new course materials or current events, multiple perspectives, and voices with theoretical framework of the course to provide new levels of understanding from a more complete and accurate understanding of the marginalized group. I desire to continuously expand student knowledge base through the exploration of various sources, from various perspectives. To ascertain if students practice an ability to view events, concepts, and facts through various lenses, they write substantive responses. Here they struggle to name the specifics of oppression and can mislabel the roles within it. It is in those responses that I find they straddle between Phase Two and three.

Students who are in Phase Three hold the belief that race is a sole factor in non-whites’ lives. In other words, at this phase individuals can see the “race issues,” but they narrowly define the marginalized racial group as only people of color therefore ignoring whites’ roles. Students in this phase also see people of color only in the category of a “problem.” I find that students often use language with negative connotations such as “struggling,” “under-educated,” “over incarcerated,” “disadvantaged,” “oppressed,” “poor,” “under-paid,” etc., and see the label they ascribe to a person as the sum total of their analysis that is then used to generalize an entire group. Below are two examples of students who typify this straddling of both Phase Two and three. One student wrote:
Some of the stereotypical names they are given are “angry man-haters”, “lesbians.” In the past some have been described as “bra-burners,” or women who don’t respect stay-at-home moms. Some of the feminists that I’ve met during undergrad have always had opinions about politicians, and their stance on women’s rights.

This straddler’s writing acknowledges a clear distinction between stereotypical understandings of feminists as “angry man-haters, lesbians” and real individuals with differentiated opinions and causes. This student also writes in level three by discussing concepts of feminism by using tangible unnamed action needed, “Women will always have to struggle through things from defining feminism to proving they are not a feminist.”

Straddler number two takes the concept of race, not discussed in the article, and makes a comparison between gender and racial comparison writing:

In my opinion, white males probably have no idea of what oppression truly means because in the United States of America they have the most privilege. (Unless they are homosexual, but that is a different story, stay with me). Black men are more likely to be able to empathize with women in terms of being oppressed because of the lack privilege they have. The rate of incarcerated African American men is fluctuating more rapid than white males. There are more white male professionals than African American male professionals. If we look at Congress we see more white males in congress than African American males and females combined. Therefore, if white males don’t share the same vision of oppression and equality mean, then, there is flaw in this definition of feminism. This is crediting the author and going a step further than regurgitating to application.
These straddler examples illustrate typical student responses that represent both Phase Two and three characteristics. To their credit, the literature is dense with this analysis and heavy language and assumes the reader knows that the study of sections of a group is not necessarily generalizable to the whole. This illuminates the need for a variety of empowering readings in the study of marginalized groups and an intentional emphasis on the strengths of said groups. The consequences of identifying whole groups of people as oppressed rather than human with full experiences is positioning non-whites as powerless and inferior.

In Phase Three the specifics go unnamed and tangible actions against the status quo are not discussed. This makes engaging long term, while holding in tension people as whole and valuable, challenging. There is no specific examination or application in Phase Three. However, Phase Four offers us that. It is in higher phases that I will look at student responses to application of text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-community. In order to support raising critical consciousness, it is important to use the lens of the fourth and fifth phase where individuals engage in a pathological analysis of all lives regardless of race, and even further activism against the status quo as they work through challenging texts throughout the 16 week semester.

**Data-Intricate Relationships**

In both courses, 100% of students read the required texts and 91% say that they understand the texts. In an effort not to perpetuate the Eurocentric hegemonic patriarchy, Phase Four and five begin to approach the “lateral, connected, and diverse functions of psyche and society… and multiple forms of power as they are held by various individuals” (Towery, 2009, p.70). That is to say, students in phases four and five should begin to look at the effects
individuals operating on levels one through three have in our society. In other words, they are able to articulate the impact of individual’s operation in various phases.

Applying text to others, or the greater community, is a skill that can be learned with proper training. Specifically, connecting texts to a reader’s personal life and gaining a better understanding of the connections to others as well as the affects others have, are crucial in raising critical consciousness. In this next example, the higher thinking student is applying the silencing that the author experienced to the silencing that she experienced in her own life. This relationship is a micro level connection that is useful in practice for learning to connect theory on a macro level. The student’s substantive response illustrates the connection of text to self. It is seen quite clearly in this example because the application to self is immediately followed by the inspiring quote:

Silence, or fear to speak up for what you believe in, is a dangerous and lonely road that can only lead to self-destruction. “…you’re never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there’s always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don’t speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside” (Pg. 42). This is a quote by Audre Lorde’s daughter in the chapter titled Transformation of Silence. Lorde was diagnosed with a mass in her breast and had to undergo surgery (the mass was benign). During her three month journey, faced with the very real possibility of death, Lorde realized that silence was her biggest regret and as she re-assessed and re-organized her life, she found more and more that she was afraid to speak. I too have always been afraid to speak up, to tell others my thoughts and feelings.
My Grandmother always told me, it is better to keep your thoughts to yourself and let those around you think you are a fool, then to open your mouth and prove them right. While I was reading this message by Lorde, I was touched… she knew I was afraid to be judged, she knew I was afraid others wouldn't agree with me, she knew I was afraid. “…while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me strength” (p. 41).

In this student’s response, the higher thinking student tells of her own struggle with silence. She discusses the internal need to express herself. She connects the text to her grandmother’s suppression of her. This shows an ability to apply the text to self and others. These are intricate relationships that assist in improving comprehension of the readings and help develop critical analysis skills. The quote in context also illustrates how her internal struggle connects to the reading.

**Part 4: Phase Four**

Phase Four also includes a willingness to engage in conflict to defend a belief or idea. In this phase more often than not students show a seamless ability to use the framework provided to analyze a given situation. This is illustrated by the growth of students from survey 2, taken mid semester, and survey 3, taken at the end of the semester. This change endorses the best practices claim that being able to create connections text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to the greater world builds comprehension and critical analysis skills. This is illustrated in a student’s statement: “My grandmother was wrong. At thirty years old, I am just now coming to a place in my life where I don’t completely allow my fears to control me, do not get me wrong, I am by no means in a place where my fears, put into perspective, are giving me strength, but I feel it is important to make myself get to that point.” This student adds:
Audre Lorde encourages women to speak up, to not be afraid. We achieve and maintain the same fears in silence as we would if we were to speak about what we believe in, what we know in our hearts to be true. Her words are almost haunting to me, “And it is never without fear – of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death” (p. 43). She teaches us that it is not only our responsibility to ourselves, but to our children, our sister and our future to control our fears and turn them into strength, to speak up.

Initially, students reported in Survey 1 that they were 92% willing to engage in conflict in Hip Hop Feminism, which nearly doubled the other courses; 53% that reported being willing to engage in conflict to defend what they believe in, in class. However, by the time I administered Survey 3, students in Introduction to Contemporary Women’s and Gender Issues had a drastic increase to 80%. There are several possible influences, including cyber space privacy; practice of co-constructed question, which provides ownership; and simply the application of the best practices.

In the next example, a Phase Four student applies the text-to-self and the greater community by the end of the semester when the student writes about, “Black faculty (or lack thereof) in the universities.” This application shows the ability to connect the readings to self and the greater community, which is a clear demonstration of critical thought. Similarly, the student explains the concept of superiority and dominance in a way that the text does not clearly articulate. The advanced student writes:

I am absolutely in love with the way Andre Lorde stars the chapter Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving, She starts by defining
Racism, Sexism, Heterosexism and Homophobia. By doing this, she really makes you think about the issues at hand and about what you are about to read. All of the definitions, aside from homophobia, include the words superiority and dominance. Homophobia has two equally (if not even more dangerous) strong words, fear and hatred.

This advanced student’s writing illustrates the concept in Phase Two regarding a student’s ability to credit the literature and add analysis. In the next portion of this student’s response they are able to summarize the article, showcase their engagement with the required readings, and then elevate that with an analysis of one part of the whole. Significantly, this student writes:

This chapter mainly focuses on how we (as a people, however she mainly focuses on the Black community for a large part of this reading) are fighting ourselves, and instead of making forward or upward progress, instead she says, we are moving sideways… in other words, not really going anywhere. A great example she makes of this is when she is discussing how there is a “tug of war”, so to say, between the Black faculty (or lack thereof) in the universities. Black men feel that Black women are able to obtain jobs through the universities with greater ease, so they do not celebrate or focus their attention on promotion and such, but rather focus on the negative, she state, “energy is being wasted on fighting each other over the pitifully few crumbs allowed us rather than being used, in a joining of forces, to fight for a more realistic ratio of Black faculty” (Pg. 48).

In the next section the student displays an ability to find value and action, although not specific, which is in Phase Three. For example:
“This is key. Why, if we are all fighting and working toward the same goal, is it necessary to be nit-picky and so tunnel visioned on our own agenda, that we lose sight of what it is that we were working toward to begin with? Lorde states, “So instead of joining together to fight for more, we quarrel between ourselves for a larger slice of the one pie” (Pg. 51). If our goal is to end oppression, then although we have to recognize the oppressed and the fact that some have been, and are, “more” oppressed than others, shouldn't the main goal still be to end oppression?!?” … “I feel like too often, what starts as a solid, good and society changing movement, turns into a “pissing contest”… “We can focus our attentions against the real economic, political, and social forces at the heart of this society which are ripping us and our children and our worlds apart” (Pg. 46).”

This example typifies the advanced writing of many students by the end of the semester in which they demonstrate the ability to apply the texts to themselves. Most of the time students can also apply it to the greater community. However, students rarely apply it to other texts. To cultivate progress toward raising critical consciousness I must model and offer more opportunities to practice that skill.

**Conclusion**

The data shows that with a goal of raising student critical consciousness there is first a need to create awareness of the changes that need to made to societal structures and important social issues, including racism, sexism, and economic injustice: this is addressed explicitly as part of the curriculum. There is also a need to create space for voices, ideas, and perspectives of the students regarding these topics. In so doing I must bring to the fore of their learning experience a safe space to quell fears, an environment for development of connection to self, and
opportunity to see how self, course materials, and the greater world interact and impact the world we live in.

I have done some of these things well, but in many other I found great challenges. Between this data and my observation and field notes I also found other major factors to consider in my practice including, control, race of myself and students, gender identity, and personality type. To improve my practice, I will take these factors and discuss my transformation in my teaching and learning practice in chapter five.

My practice lies in the balance of Afrocentric theory, Black Feminist theory, Cultural Difference theory, and Critical Pedagogy. In studying the effectiveness of their implementation, I give specific attention to the way I employ three established practices: Anticipation Guide, Attribute linking, and text-to-text text-to-self, text-to-the world. That combination is implemented with several goals in mind: (a) effectively teaching and learning in my WGS and the BLS courses (b) pursuit of raising student consciousness and (c) adherence to NKUs student learning outcomes and commitment to diversity initiatives to produce graduates prepare for the world they will be entering.

I focus on student responses to two surveys and their writing assignments. I am looking to understand how they approach the class. I want to know what they expect from it and what barriers in my classroom exist to prevent them from critically engaging the course material and expressing their viewpoint to those who agree and disagree with them. I do this in an effort to create a classroom environment that is safe and allows students the space to be both a teacher and a learner. Because the intersection that I live in Black, woman, and queer is the same intersection that I teach, this work is deeply personal to me. I hope to give depth of understanding into a sample of my students at a suburban university, in an attempt to raise
critical consciousness. To that end, I have to examine my classroom with the following results and discussion.

**Limitations and Possible Future Research**

In this study I am unable to link the data from the surveys and student writings. It would have been a stronger analysis. Additionally, given that this data is spread over two years I taught the class both online and face-to-face. If I were to redo this study I would link student writings to their surveys for a more complex analysis. Also, as a means to expand the analysis I would ask questions on the surveys about student’s background, age, and school performance (e.g. grades, approach, desire, etc.). I might make it more longitudinal to analyze if students were more apt to take additional WGS and/or BLS courses, or detect if they were likely to continue to engage in race, class, and gender conversations outside of the classroom. This would help me also to determine the sustainability of these new practices discussed in chapter five. I would ask some open ended and more personal questions on the survey to ascertain willingness to communicate, specifically in regards to trust and growth, or lack thereof, through the semester. Lastly, I might also take time in class to have students write out their responses at a time when I am not in the room, but to be sure they have the time to engage the questions more fully.
CHAPTER 7 – DISCUSSION

Transformed Practice

In this chapter I discuss successes and challenges of implementing the combined theories of combine Afrocentric and Black Feminist theory as well as Critical Pedagogy, including the transformation in my practice while offering a pragmatic list of “to-dos” that can improve existing practices. This modification of existing practices can be adapted for use in any classroom to create a more diverse and inclusive curriculum that engages students and increases their critical thinking skills. Building on McIntosh’s assertions that significant change in thinking takes place between phases 3 and 4, my list of modifications will enhance students’ ability to move to phase 4 and giving voice to marginalized groups. McIntosh also points out that we move back and forth from phase to phase, rather than climb a ladder through the phases as we engage new material and ideas. Fluidly moving through these phases can be facilitated through thought-provoking questions aimed at reshaping beliefs and developing understanding of how marginalize groups relate to the world. In this effort to provide multi-cultural and gender-fair curricula, I combine Afrocentric and Black Feminist theory. Each theory alone, applied in the classroom, facilitates some growth and awareness. But I argue that when we combine these theories and apply them every week to discussions and course work, we see a dramatic improvement in students’ growth in just one semester.

Applying these theories at the same time allows students to dig through the history of oppression and exclusion, give visibility to these marginalized groups, and express the need to ignite agency in the people we are studying. In an effort to raise critical consciousness, and
expand the monocultural perspective-- a perspective that assumes, often unconsciously, that persons of all races are in the same cultural system together-- I use the theory combination as it recognizes the impact of race and gender on a Eurocentric, sexist, hegemonic society. This single-system form of seeing the world is blind to its own cultural specificity. In order to combat that, we begin to look at the self early in the semester. People who see persons of other races monoculturally cannot imagine the reality that those "others" think of themselves not in relation to the majority race, but in terms of their own culturally specific identities. As students begin to better understand the self, they can better link the similarities and differences. The interaction of these theories combined with teaching and learning provides an opportunity for seeing the differences and similarities as valuable. It gives students space to grapple with the contributions and hear the voice of the oppressed. This is a path to raising critical consciousness. When the theories are combined throughout the course, significant measurable progress can be made by students in only one semester.

While analyzing student work, discussions, and final projects using Phase Theory, I discovered the extreme value of knowing in which theory students lie. In order to raise critical consciousness with regard to race, class, and gender we must reassess school curricula in terms of heightened levels of consciousness concerning people in marginalized groups. In the context of my WGS and BLS courses, five phases are combatted:

**Phase One:** all-white history, which can be a reality no matter the identity of the student;

**Phase Two:** exceptional minority individuals in U.S. history, this is the phase that most students move from to Phase Three.

**Phase Three:** minority issues, or minority groups as problems, anomalies, absences, of
victims in U.S. history, this phase often has students who show empathy and even spark emotion around the plight of the effects of racism, classism, and sexism;

**Phase Four:** the lives and cultures of people of color everywhere as history; this is where I seek to expand my work as an educator helping students to apply text-to-the-world; and

**Phase Five:** history redefined and reconstructed to include all people, this being the ultimate goal.

The more we develop the critical consciousness and promote development of thinking in these stages the better prepared students will be for the world after graduation.

This study revealed that the use of Critical Pedagogy models a level playing field and vulnerability in sharing, creates a safe space for questioning the status quo, and values others’ perspective by allowing everyone to be a teacher and a learner. This creates a safer classroom environment as the semester progresses. Critical Pedagogy overlaps the theories and course content. This parallel promotes approaching course material, discussion, and class projects by questioning, sharing, and valuing others’ voice and perspective. The goal of Critical Pedagogy is to educate as a means of social justice and equity. That is also the goal of Afrocentric and Black Feminist theory as they both seek to recognize the impact of race, class, and gender; create and provide a framework of visibility and prominent thinking; and give voice to non-academic voices.

Engaging in transformational conversations across differences in the African American Studies’ and Women’s and Gender Studies’ classroom proves to be complex. We have to consider barriers, such as emotions and fear, related to studying stark depictions of human life, fear of vulnerability in participating in discussion on a polarizing topic, new classroom expectations, and lack of skills in analytical thought. These conversations are necessary,
however, and aid students in developing a regard for democratic virtues from a broader perspective. The analysis of my practice as an instructor at Northern Kentucky University, as seen through student performance, has illuminated areas of opportunity in raising critical consciousness.

Challenges Ahead

There is a fine line between indoctrination and inculcation of transformative ideas and practices. I struggle with instilling greater sensitivity to minority perspective and the value of social equality in my students while allowing students to utilize this information for their own purposes. As with many other instructors in this and other fields, Black Studies and Gender Studies instructors are passionate about the subject matter because the course content is often linked to their lived experience. Given my lived experience as a Black queer woman teaching in this field, I feel a burden to be certain that students grasp the magnitude of oppression and understand Afrocentric theory and Black Feminist theory. I want them to internalize the magnitude of what these theories hold to be true; however, if I press too hard in that direction, I run the risk of painting myself as a liberal-fascist indoctrination evangelist, turning out recruits for a world of equity (or worse, perhaps in the minds of many of my conservative students, a Socialist). The challenge I face is offering the information, giving space for grappling with it without feeling unsuccessful if some students attempt to lackadaisically navigate my class. Instead, I need to continually remind myself that my pedagogy is not a form of indoctrination. I find comfort in the fact that “even the most resistant student will read the material and perhaps learn something about the people, the struggle, the theory, or the field” that will have an impact on the self and society as a whole no matter how small (St. Claire Drake, 1997).

Rojas suggests that Black Studies, “can be fruitfully viewed as a bureaucratic response to
a social movement” (Rojas, 2007). St. Clair Drake wrote that Black Studies had become institutionalized “in the sense that it had moved from the conflict phase into adjustment to the existing educational system, with some of its values accepted by that system…. A trade-off was involved.” That trade-off is where my challenge lies. One always runs the risk of having students internalize the course content on an intellectual level, but the material does not impact their behavior. This deradicalization of the course content does not contribute to social justice. Despite this risk, I must continue to offer students social equity knowledge and their active engagement with the material, but allow them to engage with it in a way that is right for them.

It is also important that I come to grips with the limitations of the courses I teach. There is only so much one can accomplish in the transformation of students in a sixteen-week course that only meets three hours a week. The very real issue of student abilities also enters the picture. Not every student entering a nearly “open door” institution of higher learning will be able to maximize their learning experience. It is helpful to remind myself of the goal of NKU and academe in general which is to offer an arête of course offerings to expand student knowledge and critical thinking (nku.edu, 2014).

Additionally, I feel a burden to represent the field in way that is respected by colleagues and does justice to the integrity of the Black Studies and Women’s Studies programs. I want to be confident enough to ask for the resources and support of the university to ensure that the department’s programs are valued and effective. I want to push the boundaries and bring radical groups on campus, and give students space and support to take action to topics that move them. However, I feel less significant than those that have a PhD, have been at the university longer, or have traveled to Africa. Instead, I should find power in being new to the field, bringing new ideas, having studied new literature, and bringing new pedagogy and skills for online learning
knowledge. I should dance in the circle of liberation and hope all will join me (Hooks, 2014).

Sustainability is also a concern. For the transformed students leaving my classroom, I wonder if their passion for equity and justice is sustainable. I tell myself that the impetus and burden of proof is on me to create, motivate, and sustain a social and political movement. The truth is there is a continued existence and development of the social movement. The real goal of my practice and the university is to create a classroom environment of learning and to allow students to use that knowledge to adapt to, and participate in our democracy and the world. In trying times I must remind myself of the words of Rojas (2007), “it is impossible to understand American life, or modernity itself, without a deep engagement with African-American history, music, literature, institutions, folklore, political movements, etc.” This reminds me of the importance of the study without knowing the impact it will have. That is the spirit that I will share my knowledge, receive others, show passion for subject matter, and express empathy for others in hopes that modeling social justice will have a positive impact on others.

That being said, I struggle with students, particularly white students, who resist the notion that Black plight is no different than White plight. Racism and sexism are plagues on our society and “The notion that Black studies is just some kind of reverse-racist victimology, rigged up to provide employment for ‘kill whitey’ demagogues, is the product of malice” (McLemee, 1996). In addition, “It also expresses a certain predictability of mind –not an inability to learn, but a refusal to do so. For some people, pride in knowing nothing about a subject will always suffice as proof that it must be worthless” (Steele, 2009). The students who reject the existence of racism and sexism in our society have established thick barriers to preserve their erroneous positions and create a very difficult teaching challenge. How can they be encouraged to break down their barriers and engage in a meaningful dialogue? Perhaps that is the next research
avenue to explore.

The students who have built impenetrable barriers around themselves can often be misinterpreted. Instructors often assume that these students fail to understand the course content because the material is too dense or challenging for the students’ abilities. Since many academically challenged students take entry-level courses, I often address this issue by tailoring lectures to break down complex ideas into simple ones. The consequences here include deterring from students wanting to engage in-depth, preventing students from making the effort they may otherwise have made, or allowing others to skate by with regurgitation. Fortunately, I can review the data and outcomes of this study and remember that in the combination of implementing Afrocentric theory and Black Feminist theory with a classroom culture grounded in Critical Pedagogy that engages the student as a teacher and a learner and empathizes with their plight, lies a richness in knowing both the struggle or the history of the path to social equity and the progress, and all of the success we have had along the way.

John Dewey once wrote “human nature is good and it is regulation and the desire to control people and their resistance where evil lurks” (Dewey, 1938, p. 111). In other words, instructors must remind themselves that all the wonderful theory and pedagogy in the world cannot transform those who are not open to change. Instead, we need to continue to do our best and assist as many students as we can. It’s this precise grouping of theories that produces students who can synthesize multiple materials, critically engage with the study of marginalized groups, and who better understand how to participate in the world we live in. Implementing these theories has its challenges but its benefits far outweigh them. As I continue through this I will present the challenges, my struggles, and the value and effectiveness of my pedagogical approach.
Solutions

Critical Pedagogy Focused Solutions

The goal of critical pedagogy is to create thinkers and co-constructors of knowledge. With this empowerment, one can become unveiled. Implementing the aforementioned techniques to student learning and prompting them to be co-constructors of knowledge is essential in their development as critically conscious participants in our democratic society. Facilitating this process for me yields several specific challenges including:

1. Giving consistent feedback both celebratory and critical
2. Allowing students to take ownership of their learning
3. Acknowledge when the student is a teacher to me
4. Centralizing Black and feminist theories and values without victimizing the oppressor(s)

To overcome these challenges, it is important to empower students to engage and share their thoughts regularly. Subsequently, students invest in the discussion or share in writing, and I need to be more specific in balancing compliment and critique appropriately rather than coddle students with too much praise. Similarly, this study has highlighted my need to allow students more control and ownership of their learning process. This study has also highlighted the importance of acknowledging the power structure in the classroom. I know that ultimately I do have the power to give a grade and that will have an effect on students’ academic success and future employment. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of finding a safe and trusting space to facilitate the opportunity for students and me to be both a teacher and a learner. The last challenge that was revealed was guiding students to a better understanding of the magnitude of
Afrocentric and Feminist theory and explaining its pertinence to offering a multicultural and therefore accurate and inclusive education. These come with several challenges of their own.

**Afrocentric Theory and Black Feminist Theory Focused Solutions**

Afrocentric and Black Feminist theory were both born out of historical oppression. They are centered on driving out invisibility and igniting agency. It requires recognition of racism, sexism and classism. It gives space for academic thinkers and non-academic voices. I find the following balance to be my biggest challenges in this arena. In order to do this I must overcome the following challenges:

1. Being vulnerable in my own identity
2. Expand learning from celebration, historical explanation structural violence to include individual and cultural responsibility without victim-blaming.

Applying my intended practice in addition to overcoming the barriers of studying marginalized groups, demands that I be vulnerable about myself and my identities. Because of the intersection that I live as Black, woman, and lesbian, I find that I often want to protect those identities. In fact this protection may go so far as to spend more time celebrating and analyzing marginalized communities and spend less time evaluating the negative aspects of the community. I find the following balance to be my biggest challenges in this arena. Knowing that the three theories are important to bring to the classroom in order to positively impact my end goal of raising student consciousness, I have made changes to my practice. These changes are a result of the data collected, my observation and the research from this study.
How Has This Changed My Practice?

This project has transformed my practice, my role as Black woman, as a lesbian, and as a community member. The process of first person action research allowed for reflection in those areas. During my reflections I am reminded of my students, who come to my courses for a wide variety of reasons. They never take the class as a requirement, but the vast majority is wholly unprepared for the “raw and real” discussions I will push them to engage in. They come trained to concern themselves with the concepts of “full credit” but not liberation, of “yes ma’am” but not of asking why. Fearful of offending their peers, or more commonly, of offending me, students’ resistance to fully engage is palpable in the first few meetings. Here I push myself every semester to model vulnerability. In creating connection I find that on day one I, too, am fearful. I, too, must be vulnerable in order to be both a teacher and a learner. I, too, need something from them, engagement in the literature, class participation, and good student evaluations. So I make a practice of opening class by calmly stating that as a “Black, lesbian woman,” As aforementioned, I teach at the same intersection at which I live my life – the intersection of race, orientation and gender. Despite my calm disposition, there is always that moment when the look in my students’ eyes seems to indicate that my proclamation has somehow sucked all the air out of the room. It is that space that I concentrate on, giving them my best by employing the best practices and developing new ones. This is modeling vulnerability.

I have learned that I guard my identities. I observe certain students as opposing forces. One might argue that that opposing force would be me – a non-Christian Black lesbian across from a Christian heterosexual male, for example, makes me feel the burden of proof. But, in my observation, I am not the opposing force that will ultimately push these students to fulfillment. They are individuals capable digesting knowledge and doing what they see fit.
For the purposes of this argument, I am considering fulfillment to be individual awareness en route to a raised critical consciousness. Instead of viewing myself as opposition, I need to allow the theories I identify as my underpinnings to be effective. In fact, I must at times remind myself that the collective is powerful and the distinction of the parts is valuable. For example, a white male Atheist can also be the teacher in the discussion. His atheism, in short, stems from growing up in and out of various foster homes, enduring a series of hardships throughout his childhood, which culminated his belief that there cannot possibly be a god given the suffering he endured. By listening to his plight, reading his substantive responses, and hearing the connections he makes to the readings, the Christian male may better receive the message of varying religious beliefs. The goal was never to change his believes but instead to have him hear someone else’s perspective with respect. Having students sharing their stories (i.e. being the teacher) forces others to consider varying realities by interacting across difference in a multicultural world. This world is also a reality. This reality is not limited to the Women’s and Gender Studies classroom or the Black Studies classroom. It can be effective across disciplines.

New Practices Developed From This Study: Background

Developing an inclusive pedagogy that highlights Afrocentric and Black Feminist theory and effectively implements Critical pedagogy can be a difficult task. Nevertheless, the educational stories and experiences demonstrated in this study highlight the successes in this unique approach. Both curricular offerings and pedagogic practices are important to consider when designing a classroom around inclusion and equity. Afrocentric knowledge not only is important for the intellectual and social growth of such students, but plays a part in the multi-centric education of all students. A curriculum which is inclusive in this broad sense will entail
transformation of educational structures (Sefa Dei & Kempf, 2006, 170).

Implementing these theories in combination with the existing practices requires me to reimagine my classes each semester. To use Anticipation Guides in the way they are described is to prepare students in a narrower way than works for Critical Pedagogy. In order to, “teach and not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge” I must be open to the reality that as students question and seek answers the direction of the discussion will be unique to that class (Freire, 1974, p. 30). This practice requires several checks and balances so that typical critiques and dismissal of this practice can be opposed.

My fundamental focus is on raising critical consciousness and preparing students to internalize social justice. In order to do that I discovered that the first barrier to engaging this topic is fear—the fear of being wrong, misunderstood, not heard, and multitude of other things. To placate feelings of fear, I take particular care to create a classroom environment that is safe and earns student trust. Beyond the use of Anticipation Guides I create a relationship with each of my students. I try to remember stories they share with me, share my stories with them, makes jokes, be candid, and respond with concern and care when they approach me. This unique approach promotes non-hegemonic ways of knowing and understanding the classroom. This begins to be a model for seeing the world. It gives students practice for engaging in our democracy. It models managing your fear, suspending judgment, questioning appropriately authority and peers, valuing others’ equally, acting with kindness in creating and participating in a safe space.

The second barrier was the lack of knowledge about the self and how self fits in the world. Specifically in my class, how the self fits into the race, class, and gender oppression
discussion. To assist students in this I engage them in activities that encourage them to observe the self and find language that describes them. This component of my pedagogy has an emotional consideration as well. Students often need to be pushed when analyzing themselves. They need to recognize that what they believe about themselves is what they hear from others. This can be good and bad. It can be a space to rewrite what is real or to reinforce that what they believe is true. In addition, it is a time for looking at our opportunities for growth. For example, I have students read *Body Rituals of the Nacirema,* by Horace Miner. This article describes rituals in a very anthropological way, “The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the body is ugly and the natural tendency is to debility and disease…every house a shrine devoted to this purpose (Miner, 2009, p. 3). The article goes on to discuss various others rituals of the Nacirema people and then we have a discussion about what we think of those people and their culture. The discussion goes right into talking how strange and ridiculous they are and I reveal that Nacirema is American spelled backwards. This way of attribute linking gives students an opportunity to see how quickly we judge, how language can cloud our understanding, and similarities and differences can be linked. Then we can answer questions about what we believe and practice in the article. We can question some of the things that we participate in and why. It is in this space that there is often time to give feedback and share my story of strengths, weakness, and areas of growth.

The third barrier is really centered on analytical thought. The lack of practice that many students have is often due to traditional education, “Historically the institution of higher education has operated by establishing beauracritized practices that may function to discourage critical pedagogy (Sweet, 1998). Challenging that requires trust and quelling fear, helping students recognize who they are and how they fit in the conversation, and developing critical
thinking. It is here that the crux of my work exists, text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-the world. Teaching students to read the materials given to them and synthesize it. Allowing them to question and make connections. I do this by modeling as well and giving examples. This has proven to be a promising way to engage students and to extend their reach from summarizing the text to better understanding what it means, and to answer the question “so what?.” In this practice I also consider the whole student. I use the information we gather from creating relationships and sharing ourselves with each other to find applications that would interest each specific class. For example, one semester I had a classroom full of athletes, so we spent ample time applying text to media on sports, the human body and capacity, stereotypes (e.g. athletes get favoritism, athletes aren’t smart, etc.), and talked about the human body and the connection to slavery. For instance, in my Introduction to BLS course one of the early readings is on slavery, in particular the middle passage; the discussion of the Willie Lynch Letter and the emphasis that the Black body is strong and the mind is weak; how we understand that.

One student shared that slavery in general was hard work. The conversation expanded to the strength of those who made it to the United States. They were able to withstand disease, starvation, beatings, separation from family, heat deprivation, and egregious treatment. It is those people who eventually procreated. Is that behind the physical strength, aesthetics, and even stereotypes of Black people? Students would then go and create a substantive response using that text and connect it to a different text, self, and the world. A different approach to the same conversation could be spending time analyzing Black body types in the media (etc. movie, magazines, etc.) rather than sports. This highlights the, “time, energy and creativity on the part of instructor” (Rumsey, 1998 p. 3). I would also add it takes caring about students such that you
take time to create relationships, share yourself, model inclusiveness, in addition to engaging in a rigorous study.

I recognize that the course students take with me is only one class in a semester and a very small part of their college career, which is why it is my hope that these things will connect with colleagues. I also recognize across disciplines it will require a focus on other subject matters. In these cases Afrocentric and Black Feminist theory should be used as a paradigm for using an intercultural inclusion curricular to consider the impact of race, class, and gender, and should give visibility to marginalized thinking in your perspective fields, and should value all voices. It is also my hope that colleagues will find this precise grouping of theoretical framework and newly developed practices in combination with emotional connection to be valuable. It is in that spirit that I offer these newly developed best practices.

**New Practices: A “To Do” List**

The newly developed practices that this study has generated have aided in helping students raise their critical consciousness. Higher critical consciousness is indicative of critical thinking, effective communication, and analytical and philosophical thought. These are three out of five of NKU’s general education goals. Below are the new best practices that were developed from the theoretical discussion in chapter two, the best practices outlined in chapter three, as well as the first person action research process of plan, act, observe, and reflect. In surveying the context of how Afrocentric theory, Black Feminist theory, and Critical pedagogical framework relates to the three existing practices discussed in chapter three as key moments of teaching practices, I have developed these new practices. I write them as a reference for myself, but hope that readers might engage in a similar approach.
1. **Create a safe space:** Create a level playing field. Begin by building a foundation of trust. Quell fears by creating a space of openness. Respect different ways of participating in class, as long as students meet the criteria expected. Create relationships in order to customize the course and to continue building trust. Be present and listen. Be vulnerable and share. Use Anticipation guides as a means to prepare students for what is coming up in the course and to trust the process that has been working.

2. **Establish the practice that everyone is a teacher and a learner:** Listen! Strive to utilize the safe space to engage in discussion and scholarly debate. It is in this type of conflict that analytical thought is fostered, utilizing opportunities for students to engage in both sides of the argument is important. Acknowledge when students are teaching and give feedback. Be sure to give voice to academic thinkers in the field and non-academic.

3. **Check-in regularly with each student:** It is important to trust your instincts. Strengthen your instincts by comparing your measure of how the class is going with what your students are saying. Survey students the first day of class to truly ascertain their level of fear, knowledge of the subject matter, skills, hobbies, and desire to engage in both the subject matter and the classroom general. Check-in by survey with students mid semester. Each semester is unique, the student dynamic changes. The advantage of knowing each student grouping and what specifically they know is beneficial. In addition, my final survey and the survey the university provides at the end of the semester helps cultivate an action plan for the future.

4. **Offer diverse course materials:** Develop a reading list rich with both the study of the oppression and empowering of marginalized groups. Consider the people in your class and make the course material resonate with them and lesson plans relate to them.
5. **Demand rigor:** I must suggest readings that connect and, even in the beginning of the semester, use the lecture, discussion, feedback, and course material to help guide them in making connections. Model analytical thought for students by giving example connections and asking open-ended questions for discussion to facilitate a deepening of their conversation.

Implementing these simplified actions will enhance the student’s learning environment. It offers value added for students in that these practices enhance critical thinking, communication, and analytical thought. Given the connection to NKU’s Student Learning Outcomes and the alignment with general education goals, there is significant benefit to educators using it in the academy. As the data reveals, these new best practices encourage generating new ideas, develop questioning and research skills, and cultivating connections between local and global relationships. It does this by using the literature and course work as a vehicle to motivate critical thinking and engage in dialogue, both orally and written. Including Critical Pedagogy, Afrocentric theory, Black Feminist theory, and Equity theory combined into Critical Consciousness raising theory into classroom pedagogy will have a positive impact on raising student critical consciousness and, in turn, aids in reaching the goal of social justice and equity. Let’s weave a wonderful tapestry together where we focus on raising critical consciousness that prepares students to participate in the democracy.
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