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Critically Compassionate Intellectualism in Teacher Education: Making Meaning of a Practitioner and Participatory Action Research Inquiry

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Critically Compassionate Intellectualism in Teacher Education:
Making Meaning of a Practitioner and Participatory Action Research Inquiry

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Abstract

This dissertation is an analysis of four semesters/cycles of practitioner and participatory action research inquiry on my use of critically compassionate intellectualism (CCI)—a framework of critical pedagogy, authentic caring, and a social-justice curriculum and purpose—to humanize an educational foundations course for pre-service teachers in a large urban, Midwestern university. A critical interpretation of social justice teacher education requires an uncompromising commitment to challenge the structural and cultural conventions that continue to marginalize certain students while privileging others. This is most likely to be accomplished by foregrounding consciousness-raising, anti-oppressive, and humane principles not only as educational aims, but, importantly, as keys to educational practice. With critical pedagogical theory and relational–cultural theory as frames, I examine how my implementation of CCI influenced my policies, practices, and pedagogy, and what this meant for students’ learning and other experiences in the course. Additionally, I explore how CCI guided my methodological choices in the original four cycles of inquiry, as well as this fifth cycle of critical qualitative analysis. Findings from the study show that students valued the respect and care they experienced through this framework and were able to envision affording their own students the same relational support, which many began enacting immediately in their accompanying field experiences. Most felt empowered to take charge of their own learning and goals, to become critically reflective practitioners, and wanted to act as advocates and change agents for their diverse students. However, certain structural and personal limitations hindered our ability to enact more physically engaged and proactive interventions that would have strengthened their CCI experience. In the final analysis, it was both in spite of and because of these imperfections that I was able to realize my own moral vision of socially just teacher preparation, where
reflexivity, critical consciousness, and compassion became assets to both their learning and my own continuing growth as a teacher educator.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Enacting socially just practices in both the education of our future teachers and in how we study our work within teacher education should be a logical aim of any movement for social justice in education as a whole. Aligning my means with my ends has been an imperative underlying my work as a graduate student, and has long been gaining traction among other scholars (Conklin, 2008; Conklin & Hughes, 2016; Hytten, 2015; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998b; Picower, 2012; Rosenthal, 2000; Taylor, 2015). I write to challenge the assumption that what we are teaching about social justice can possibly be taught in any traditional way. Such conventionally non-critical, hierarchical, “banking” pedagogy (Freire, 1970/1993) is counter-intuitive to addressing marginalization in its many forms.

Over the course of two years, I have conducted practitioner and participatory action research on my use of critically compassionate intellectualism (CCI) (Cammarota & Romero, 2006a) in instructing pre-service teachers in an educational foundations class. The CCI framework originated in work with disenfranchised Latinx students where it was shown to have a profound influence on these students’ critical consciousness and academic achievement, so I believed it would have worthwhile implications for my students as well. These students are part of one of many teacher education programs that explicitly place education for social justice as central to their missions (Hytten & Bettez, 2011; UC School of Education, 2017). Admittedly, actions within the program may not always align with this stated mission, which only strengthens my personal resolve and professional rationale for modeling an emancipatory and socially just pedagogy for my students’ consideration as they prepare to teach in their own classrooms (Palmer, 2007).
In a broader sense, students as a general population have habitually been silenced and marginalized by the policies and procedures that affect them most, while simultaneously denied the capacity to critique or change those policies and procedures. Cook-Sather (2010) notes how student voices have remained largely absent from educational dialogue and reform, prompting her to study how integrating student consultants into faculty development through participatory action research could facilitate the larger goals of transformative learning for all participants and on multiple levels (2006; 2010; 2011). Bringing the focus to my own practice, I use the CCI framework as a way to interrogate how as a teacher educator I work to emancipate my students, and what the implications of this are for them as future educators.

This work is significant in the current education climate of top-down reforms that threaten the autonomy, professional integrity, and ethical stance of educators in the U.S. (Fraser-Burgess & Rodgers, 2015; McKnight, 2008). High-stakes accountability and testing measures, privatization of educational public goods, and an accompanying push toward the broad standardization of curriculum and pedagogy have driven much of the current debate around the purposes and direction of public education (Au, 2009; Cornbleth, 2013; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009a; Giroux, 2005; Kincheloe, 1999; McLaren, 2003; Monahan, 2009; Saltman, 2012). While proponents forward these policies as equalizers to combat ubiquitous inequalities along race and class lines (Hirsch, 2010), critics maintain that they instead tend to exacerbate these inequalities (Aronowitz, 2004; Au, 2009; Au, 2011; Ben-Porath, 2013; Donnor, 2013; Saltman, 2012; Stovall, 2013), while simultaneously provoking further questions about educational democracy and the not-so-subtle influences of dominant groups (Beane & Apple, 2007; Biesta, 2007; Giroux, 2012; Goodlad, 2004; Gutmann, 2012; Heilman, 2006; Higgins & Knight Abowitz, 2011; Hoover, 2013; Kahne & Middaugh, 2009; Kincheloe, 1999; Knight Abowitz,
2011; Levine, 2007; Nikolakaki, 2012). In short, actions in our education system increasingly confirm that “the purpose of schools in the dystopian world that confronts us is to train, well-regulated and passive students to accept what is” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 4, emphasis original). CCI is a means to resist this trend.

I did not set out using CCI in the first educational foundations course I taught as a graduate student—I had not even heard of it at the time. When I discovered it shortly thereafter, I quickly recognized how perfectly it described what I was already doing intuitively, and what seemed to really be engaging my students in important ways. My pedagogy and specific practices originally represented the culmination of all my learning and experiences as a student, teacher, mentor, volunteer, and parent. I came to teaching with a background in philosophy and in the foundations of education and educational research, along with all my experiences in educational settings, however, I was never formally taught “how to be a teacher.” Because of my critical scholarly stance, I had instead established that my task as an educator was to innovate, to do things in ways that both work and that respect the diversity in my students and their future students—while avoiding those humanity-denying practices that are, for whatever reason, perpetuated by many well-meaning instructors at every level, as well as condoned and rewarded in the current educational system at large. Because I was teaching future teachers, it was doubly important to consider the implications of my own teaching, so I became intrigued to better understand CCI’s potential and limitations. I decided to systematically study my CCI practice in order to generate this understanding, and proceeded to conduct four cycles of action research over the course of four semesters teaching Introduction to Education to undergraduates in our teacher education program. While within and across the cycles I utilized data to make changes
and improvements to my practice, this dissertation is a fifth cycle of action research, an analysis of those four cycles aimed at making broader meaning of the abundance of data I collected.

On a cautionary note, Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2016) found that teacher preparation research tends to assume “that school factors, including teachers and teacher preparation, rather than social factors, such as poverty and institutionalized racism, were both the problem and the solution to failing schools” (p. 11). Here I want to clearly state that I do not hold the misguided belief that critically compassionate teachers alone can “save” disenfranchised students. I do believe that our teachers must be better prepared to confront the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) owed these students in its myriad relational, cultural, and structural forms. Given CCI’s original focus on ethnic minority students, and because most student oppression stems from characteristically “white” ideologies we fail to name as such—that is, white privilege and supremacy couched in paternalistic, middle-class, cisgender, meritocratic, and associated norms and ideals—I also draw explicit attention to the roles of race and whiteness throughout this dissertation (Castagno, 2014; Leonardo, 2004; Leonardo, 2013; Matias, 2016).

In this chapter, I discuss the aims and promises of teaching educational foundations classes to pre-service teachers using a CCI approach, as well as the limitations. First, I will give a brief overview of the specific literature on CCI, after which I will review relevant social justice frameworks discussed in the literature that can help us understand CCI’s place within teacher education. Then, I will consider the philosophical, ethical, and practical arguments around social justice education. Next, I will look at the kinds of work students and teachers have done or might do to meet the goals of social justice education and the role foundations courses can play in this work. Finally, I will discuss gaps in the literature and implications for further research.
Critically Compassionate Intellectualism

Critically compassionate intellectualism is an approach cultivated by Julio Cammarota and Augustine Romero through several programs they implemented for Latinx youth in Arizona high schools: the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP), the Critically Compassionate Intellectualism Model of Transformative Education (CCI), and CCI’s Third Dimension (Romero, Arce, & Cammarota, 2009). These social justice oriented programs were meant to counter racial injustices that Latinx and other minority students face in our education system, particularly exemplified in the low-tracked, vocation-focused, and generally non-critical educational experiences provided to the majority of these youth (Cammarota & Romero, 2006a; Cammarota & Romero, 2006b; Romero et al., 2009). “Most of their education experiences tend to be anchored in a banking pedagogy where teachers constantly tell them what to do, what to learn, what to think, seldom seeking their input, suggestions, comments, feedback, or thoughts about their education” (Cammarota & Romero, 2006b, p. 307-308). Importantly, the students enrolled in the first cohort of the SJEP program were able to co-construct and help define the model for CCI (Romero et al., 2009). This type of participant-created action is a key element of any social-justice project.

The original CCI framework centers on critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/1993), authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999), and a social justice curriculum and purpose (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Critical pedagogy is essentially a type of pedagogy and teacher practice that emphasizes a democratic classroom where students and teachers co-create and re-create knowledge around critical issues relevant to students’ lived experiences, through examination of the historical, economic, political, sociological, and other forces that have contributed to current contexts (McLaren, 2003). “Many Latino youth need opportunities to unlearn the passivity of a
banking education, in order to become more confident and capable of expressing their own opinions and engaging in critical dialogue” (Cammarota & Romero, 2006b, p. 308). Critical pedagogy emphasizes deconstructing the patterns that have led to either human flourishing or suffering, and that perpetuate the subordination of certain populations (Freire, 1970/1993). It is therefore linked to the social justice curriculum in which students who “struggle with issues of identity, racism, sexism, police brutality, and poverty” are given the tools and resources to discuss these forces (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 82). The compassion component of CCI is based on Valenzuela’s (1999) differentiation between what she terms authentic caring and aesthetic caring. While teachers traditionally have displayed aesthetic caring for their students, which is basically the requisite form of care teachers have for students’ development of academic skills, authentic caring is reciprocal, “that is, the teacher establishes an emotional, human connection with his or her students and demonstrates a real interest in the students’ overall well being” (Cammarota & Romero, 2006b, p. 309). Finally, a social justice curriculum aligns these components through the study of difficult and important issues from multiple perspectives, particularly aligning content, pedagogy, and purpose with students’ histories and lived experiences.

The three combined components of CCI consequently fostered in students higher academic achievement, but more importantly, were able to bring out deeper competencies that helped them better comprehend and address their experiences of oppression.

According to our students this foundation has helped them develop a strong social, cultural and historical identity that has allowed many of them to develop for the first time an academic identity, which also has helped the students develop a strong sense of academic proficiency…For many of our students…their experiences within the SJEP and
with the CCI help develop the belief that education was something that could be theirs. Additionally, we have discovered that the students in our SJEP who experience the CCI pass our state’s high stakes exit exam at a higher rate than all other similarly situated non-SJEP/CCI students at the four sites where we have the SJEP and use the CCI. Also, over the last four graduating classes our SJEP/CCI students graduate at a higher rate than similarly situated non SJEP/CCI Anglo students at our four sites. (Romero et al., 2009, p. 219)

Undoubtedly, the effects of a CCI model of transformative education are broad for these students, making this a useful framework for understanding how to better lead other marginalized student populations toward higher critical consciousness and academic success. Given the current situation in which students of color, as well as other disenfranchised student populations, are still ill-served by an educational system that “looks on in amused contempt and pity,” as DuBois (1902) would say, CCI is a powerful step toward equity for these students.

Whenever I discuss my use of CCI in teacher preparation, I feel it is crucial that I also point out and am able to justify using a framework first created on behalf of marginalized students with the students in teacher education classrooms who have generally been advantaged by race, class, ability, and other privileged statuses in our culture. I began using CCI because it was the only framework I found that so perfectly explained the things I was already trying to do in my classes. However, I am very conscious that some white teachers and teacher educators co-opt and redefine theories first conceptualized by scholars of color who were resisting the hegemonic oppression of Whiteness; in using their white ocular to filter out the most radical parts of these theories.
to fit within white color-blind comforts, the essence of their conception is lost. (Matias, 2015, p. 8)

This has been the case with many of today’s educational “buzz” concepts, such as diversity and multiculturalism initiatives that only superficially attempt to address issues that are rooted in deep racial and structural injustices (Castagno, 2014); culturally responsive pedagogy that has infiltrated teacher education in place of the much differently oriented culturally relevant pedagogy from which it originated (Ladson-Billings, 1995); or the general use of codewords like “urban” to refer to racially segregated students and schools without explicitly using the word “race,” and ignoring the significance of this depoliticizing action (Matias, 2015).

Acknowledging the risk of being labeled yet another co-opter, I struggled as a white educator with my decision to apply CCI to my work with mostly white pre-service teachers. This is probably the largest personal tension I confronted in this project, especially since over the course of the study my understandings of critical race and critical whiteness frameworks evolved. While certain of my own positionalities—spouse of a Mexican immigrant, parent of bi-ethnic children, working-class background, my family’s history of civil disobedience—align my goals with those of the Latinx students originally served by CCI, I nonetheless function on the surface from a privileged position as a white teacher educator. 1 Particularly, I know that my surface whiteness influences the ways my students receive CCI compared with how they might receive the same pedagogy and curriculum from an educator of color. While I believe that my use of CCI has been unfiltered by the “white ocular,” and indeed, the most radical parts of the framework, particularly its emphasis on race and oppression, are what I have tried most to exemplify for my students, I know I must simultaneously acknowledge my inescapable privilege

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1 Based on Milner’s (2007) racial and cultural positionality framework, in chapter three I “research the self” more extensively.
and its potential for harm. I believe my reasons for utilizing CCI in my work with future teachers have been justified partly because I have remained true to the framework and have not altered it to suit dominant white sensibilities.

I also believe my use of CCI has been justified because it offers my students an unambiguous model from which to draw ideas about how they might enact their own more humanizing pedagogies. My students are mainly college freshmen, with little beyond their typically privileged pK–12 experiences from which to fashion their ideas about what education should be. Most of the topics we explore and what I do are so very unfamiliar compared to the types of knowledge and pedagogy to which my students have grown accustomed, fundamentally challenging their ideas about what “education” means, and what defines “good” students and “effective” educators.

In essence, nearly all students in the average school have experienced the blanket of disrespect for their humanity embodied in current policies and practices, in part because their humanity is mapped onto and/or measured by the norms of white supremacy (Leonardo, 2004; Rector-Aranda, 2016). Correspondingly, student voices and identities in all colors and forms have traditionally been disregarded in the educational discourse. While some have been more privileged than others they have still rarely experienced anything but different varieties of apolitical, banking pedagogy, where they have been treated as receptacles of knowledge rather than possessors or creators of knowledge, and particularly have been denied critical and transformative knowledge.

Finally, it is crucial that all future teachers are able to personally understand and name this phenomenon in order to proceed toward a more socially just practice in their own classrooms, and CCI offers a physical and visible example for these teachers to experience and
consider as they form their own teaching identities. In order for teacher education students to work towards liberation for their future students, it is necessary that they be given clear information about the ways the education system favors some while failing others, and then specific tools for resolving this in their own practice. Modeling of CCI can provide this for them, thus hopefully helping to spread its practice into more of the classrooms that serve underprivileged and racially/ethnically diverse students. Moreover, by offering this example as a white educator myself, perhaps my students can more easily envision themselves enacting similarly transformative pedagogies, in which case my whiteness, as a “white ally” (Tatum, 1994), becomes more of a productive force than a liability in the struggle for racial/ethnic education equity at large.

The Most Socially Just Education is a Social Justice Education

“Social justice” has become one of those words or phrases that are so widely referenced that they begin to lose their power and meaning (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). As North (2006) points out, “Unfortunately, educators, educational researchers, and educational policymakers frequently employ this catchphrase without offering an explanation of its social, cultural, economic, and political significance” (p. 507). Bialystok (2014) discusses the problem of defining and defending social justice in education, given that it is inherently an emotionally and politically loaded phrase even before criteria are stipulated. Given that the key theoretical models of social justice range from maximizing the sum happiness in the world (Mill, 1864), to fair distribution of rights and goods for individuals (Rawls, 1971), to equitably enlarging people’s capabilities (Sen, 1992), “social justice” becomes a simple term for a rather complex issue. I tend to agree with North, who upon examining the interplay between diverse theories of social justice concludes that the only sure way to uphold a meaningful standard of socially just scholarship and practice is
to remain reflexive and open to the ways in which this goal is ever-changing as the political, institutional, and ideological conditions change (p. 528). Here I will consider the literature and research on notions of social justice education that coincide with CCI’s multiple facets, as well as some principles for their ethical and philosophical defense.

**The Function of Freedom is to Free Somebody Else**

As the plight for social justice is a timeless endeavor, the literature on social justice education is vast, and many frameworks have been provided and studied for understanding and configuring socially just classroom purposes and practices. I now focus my attention on a selection of frameworks in the literature that are most closely related to the critical, cultural, political, and relational responsiveness CCI entails, and how they have been studied or are otherwise connected to teacher education.

**Compassionate, Critical, Justice-Oriented Teacher Education**

Conklin (2008) articulates the need for compassionate pedagogy in teaching pre-service teachers toward social justice, noting specifically how our experiences and the literature denote a lack of compassion for the mostly white, middle-class, and otherwise privileged students in teacher education programs and how this leads to students’ resistance of social justice education. Based on this earlier work, Conklin and Hughes (2016) describe a cross-institutional, qualitative case study in which they examined their practices in secondary social studies teacher education with attention to many of the same ideals embodied in the CCI framework. They termed their resulting framework *compassionate, critical, justice-oriented* teacher education. Their findings supported certain practices they say facilitated socially just outcomes for their students, better equipping them to visualize more equitable as well as intellectually challenging learning for their future diverse students. These practices are: developing classroom relationships and community,
honoring students’ lived experiences and existing attitudes, and acquainting students with multiple perspectives for viewing the world (Conklin & Hughes, 2016). They assert that “to help preservice teachers understand and enact this vision, then, teacher educators must support it with concrete representations, decompositions, and approximations of practice” (p. 57). They offer this framework in hopes of beginning a conversation and prompting further research into how teacher educators can create the contexts necessary for their students to gain crucial social-justice minded aptitudes that translate into their own classrooms.

**Culturally Relevant, Responsive, and Sustaining Pedagogies**

Asset pedagogies are important considerations for this topic given that socially just education is meant to account for the perpetual injustices mainly suffered by those whose cultures hold secondary status to dominant white, middle-class norms. Asset pedagogies have evolved over the past few decades to counter the deficit approaches to teaching and learning that “view the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome if they are to learn the dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of being demanded in schools” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 87). Asset pedagogies are known by terms such as *culturally responsive teaching*, *culturally relevant pedagogy*, and most recently, *culturally sustaining pedagogy*.

Considering how we might train teachers to be more effective educators of their culturally diverse students, Villegas and Lucas (2002) offer six guidelines that should direct the actions of the *culturally responsive teacher*: sociocultural consciousness, an affirming attitude toward students of diverse backgrounds, commitment and skills to act as agents of change, constructivist views of learning, knowing about students’ lives, and culturally responsive teaching practices that build on students’ existing knowledge while introducing unfamiliar
knowledge. Cholewa, Amatea, West-Olatunji, and Wright (2012) note that the relational components of successful teaching of culturally diverse students have not been well-studied, prompting their grounded-theory analysis of one culturally responsive teacher’s relational processes, and how these contributed to the unusual progress of her students. They found that emotional connectedness was key, and specifically, that the teacher’s interactions with individual students, with the class as a whole, and also her willingness to be transparent and playful were all impactful on the successful relationships that in turn contributed to student success. While not specifically related to teacher education, this serves as an important example of why we must model these practices with pre-service teachers.

As previously mentioned, however, scholars of color originally introduced culturally relevant pedagogy as engaging students in a critical understanding of the explicit role of race in education and beyond (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Matias, 2015). Matias (2015) notes an important difference in teacher education’s alternative adoption of culturally responsive teaching, which is that it too often removes this emphasis on race. She reminds that culturally responsive teaching will forever be about a struggle against the whiten-ing of education. Emotionally invoking as it may seem, all of these scholars—consciously or subconsciously—were responding to a pre-existing loveless condition of the largely White teaching force providing instruction to students of color. Despite self-proclaiming love for students of color, the ocular of whiteness filtered out the context of racism and white supremacy such that the ninety percent White teaching force needed to be reminded that what they considered “loving” was, in fact, not loving. (Matias, 2013, p. 71)
Matias (2013) uses counterstories\textsuperscript{2} to explore the complications inherent in a mainly white teaching force uncritically using culturally responsive pedagogy with students of color without first interrogating the ways “whiteness operates as invisible to a majority of White teachers while visible to many students of color” (p. 68).

Atasay (2015) similarly problematizes the current emphasis on \textit{multicultural} education, asserting that it has been commodified to meet neoliberalism’s shallow calls for social justice based solely in a competitive market mentality. This kind of justice only occasions creating educational equality for the ends of raising the earning capacities of students. Here, multiculturalism exists as a means for students to compete in a global marketplace rather than to respect difference and alternative visions of the good life that may not rest upon economic goals. This is unsurprising given the current neoliberal influence on education, where social justice is viewed in functional rather than transformative terms (Sadovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 2013).

Returning the focus to education primarily meant to alleviate racial and cultural oppression, Paris and Alim (2014) have most recently “lovingly” critiqued previous asset frameworks, offering Paris’s (2012) alternative framework of \textit{culturally sustaining pedagogy}, which builds upon existing work while drawing attention to and better accounting for the dynamic nature of culture in a pluralistic society. They posit that youth are constantly re-creating their cultures based in but also beyond their more static heritage cultures, which have been the main focus of previous frameworks. They posit the need for pedagogies to “sustain the cultural and linguistic practices of communities of color for a pluralist present and future and to do so in ways that reflect our increasingly fluid understanding of the evolving relations between

\textsuperscript{2} Solórzano and Yosso (2002) propose counterstory-telling as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32).
language, culture, race, and ethnicity” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 92). They further position culturally sustaining pedagogy as a way to critically understand the counterhegemonic potential of youth culture and identity, as well as the ways this culture can sometimes perpetuate systems of inequity.

Overall, it is important to be aware of our purposes for using asset pedagogies and selective in how we enact these efforts, and studies of what successful teachers of racially/ethnically diverse students actually do work more consciously to address the deeper and more critical aims of social justice education. Because it is an asset-based approach to teaching Latinx students, CCI can help them and other students define their own visions of the good life, and question the assumptions of the current neoliberal state of education that continues to marginalize and instrumentalize them. Introducing the methods of CCI to our teacher candidates becomes not only an important tool for helping them become culturally sustaining educators, but a way to deconstruct the purposes behind why we do what we do.

**Nonviolent Social Justice Education**

A less frequently considered component of social justice education lies in what Wang (2013) terms a *nonviolent* approach. Nonviolence transcends the group-level divides implied in critical theory and the unknowable individual “other” in poststructural conceptions of social justice to instead focus on the interrelatedness of life and our mutual embeddedness within it. Nonviolence

is about reexamining the relational dynamics and reorienting the relational changes to promote the mutual contribution of all to the whole which in turn supports nonviolent and creative individuality and communality. Relationship here becomes organic because it is based upon internal connections across differences and the whole is not an addition of
separate equal entities but achieves its integrity by an intricate interweaving of all parts in various shapes. (H. Wang, 2013, p. 495)

Wang describes examples in teacher education of how nonviolent pedagogy encompasses relational dynamics of connectedness, compassion and love; inner peace through reconciling one’s inner conflicts in order to reconcile outer conflicts; and nonviolent means through relational, emotional, and experiential understanding. Wang further applies nonviolent pedagogy to mean integrating the inner and outer work in order to navigate difficult knowledge in ways that avoid blame and instead emphasize students’ and teachers’ emotional growth, and shifting attention from the struggle of opposites to the interdependence of differences. It also means improvising and using nonviolent teaching strategies to “infuse the interconnected energy into learning, not to force change by conversion, but to engage students in a heartfelt process of experiencing, understanding, and acting upon the world differently” (p. 500). Nonviolent education for social justice, therefore, is a highly relational process that aligns well with the compassionate aspect of CCI.

**Teacher Education for Dissent**

It is not enough to talk or teach about social justice without also paying sufficient attention to acting for social justice, which is where a call to embody social justice not only in content, but also in our conduct, methods, and policies in our teacher education courses becomes so important. By demonstrating compassionate, nonviolent, critical, and culturally sustaining concepts of social justice education as teacher educators, we are acting toward social justice as a whole. This will inevitably lead us to go against the grain in some ways, and when we must out rightly disregard or challenge dominant norms and policies, we become dissenters. Far from a new concept, the notion of teacher dissent and activism has its roots in the work of such early-
twentieth-century thinkers as George S. Counts (2013), who proposed that “teachers, if they could increase sufficiently their stock of courage, intelligence, and vision, might become a social force of some magnitude” (p. 45).

Stitzlein (2014) advocates for healthy dissenting in our modern democracy, noting particularly how teachers must model dissent for their students in spite of, and often because of, the climate of hostility and distrust teachers endure in the current era of sweeping anti-intellectualism and surveillance reform. In her study of teachers’ dissenting activities in online spaces—which now serve as catalysts for many of the most productive dissenting movements of our time—Stitzlein (2014) found troubling evidence that teachers were, in fact, not very effective dissenters. First, she found a lack of professional voice, as many teachers framed what they had to say apologetically or otherwise displayed a lack of confidence in their own knowledge and ideas. Further findings were that teachers tended to hide their dissenting identities; remained silent on the very topics over which they simultaneously called for policy-makers to better collaborate with teachers; were rendered apolitical by their own restrictive websites as well as larger cultural misconceptions that teachers must behave “professionally;” and generally, demonstrated “the conflicting spaces teachers inhabit and their difficulties in navigating them, especially in terms of their ability to voice dissent and effect change” (Stitzlein, 2014, p. 139). This shows the detrimental effect when we do not properly educate and support our future educators to critically examine both issues of social justice and their role in confronting those issues.

Picower (2012) writes how we should “practice what we teach,” and that as teacher educators, it becomes us to help our students “recognize that inequality exists, develop empathy for people who experience marginalization, and begin to fill in some of the gaps of their
historical knowledge of inequality” (p. 112) in order for them to become fully aware of the part they play in either upsetting or perpetuating the status quo. In the edited book, *Social Justice Education: Inviting Faculty to Transform Their Institutions* (Skubikowski, Wright, & Graf, 2010), Kuecker (2010), for example, describes academic activism, where instructors combine their political activism with their research, writing, and teaching as a vital part of the social justice movement. These and other appeals for teaching that facilitates the politicality of students support the CCI vision of critically engaging with our students about the world and their place in it, and require teacher educators to pay special attention to how we prepare our students for democratic dissent.

**Ignorance of Ignorance is the Death of Knowledge**

Hytten and Bettez (2011) remark on the backlash against social justice education because of its “controversial, ambiguous, and ideologically weighted nature,” which certain policy makers and pressure groups see as inappropriate in their accepted version of education that foregrounds only basic literacy and numeracy (p. 8). Indeed, social justice education is a hotly contested topic, given its multiple and often competing configurations and purposes. In the vision espoused by CCI, social justice education is unabashedly political and emancipatory, because it is believed that the right kinds of thought and knowledge are power, so to educate everyone equitably along these lines is a viable threat to hegemony. To put it more expressively,

Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth—more than ruin, more even than death. Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible; thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habits; thought is anarchic and lawless, indifferent to authority, careless of the well-tried wisdom of the ages. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid. It sees man, a feeble speck,
surrounded by unfathomable depths of silence; yet it bears itself proudly, as unmoved as if it were lord of the universe. Thought is great and swift and free, the light of the world, and the chief glory of man. (Russell, 1916/1997, p. 115)

Given the historical fear and the accompanying mainstream suppression of the kinds of thought that result in radical change, those who embark upon a program of social justice education must be sure their actions are defensible. Here I will discuss some of the philosophical considerations and defenses of teaching for social justice found in the literature.

**Philosophical Defensibility of Social Justice Education**

Answering common accusations that it is too political, too partisan, amounts to indoctrination of students to educators’ own ideologies, etc., Bialystok (2014) contends that social justice education is philosophically defensible within a liberal democracy based on five criteria. Views espoused and conveyed in social justice education must, according to this defense: have legislative backing in the form of laws, human rights codes, and policy; be compatible with reasonable pluralism; not impose or engage in partisan politics or political activism that students do not choose; be connected with developing skills for democratic engagement; and respect students’ freedom to abstain from activities that violate their own comprehensive doctrines (Bialystok, 2014). When social justice education is approached under the previous frameworks, it should have little problem falling in line with these criteria because they all require educators to be responsive to student needs, reflexive about their own actions, and to convey and foster diverse perspectives.

**Ethics in Social Justice Teaching**

Hytten (2015) relates that most of the scholarship around the ethics of teaching for social justice focuses on content and the broader purposes of schooling, and not enough on how
teachers ethically uphold their visions in their classroom interactions. She proposes that teachers’ ethical dispositions might fall into three categories—character, intellect, and care—and that specific ways teachers might perform each are through *reflective humility, open-mindedness* and *sympathetic attentiveness*. Taylor (2015) elaborates on Hytten’s pragmatic discussion, stating that virtue ethics are compatible with social justice education so long as they are seen as context-dependent and therefore “responsive to person and situation, as opposed to universal rule-based…systems of ethics or codes of professional conduct” (p. 2). Gunzenhauser (2015) applies Hytten’s ideas specifically to teacher education programs, and holds that Hytten’s dispositions imply and would be enhanced by further attention to the social and communal habits of *cultivating solidarity* and finding *comfort with discomfort*. The latter is an oft-cited component of most social justice education efforts, supposing that most students will at some point have to confront their own discomforts raised by ideas and knowledges that contradict or call to question their existing world views and/or personal privileges (McGough, 2006; Mintz, 2013). “The alleviation or eradication of suffering is a goal of social justice education while, simultaneously, students suffer in the process of learning about the suffering of others” (Mintz, 2013, p. 215), which can be partially mediated by compassionate relationships in which instructors make conscious efforts to support their students through this process. Being attentive to the overarching ends and means of a CCI social justice education framework enables teacher educators to remain conscious of and to apply these types of virtues and dispositions in their work with students.

**Good and Just Teaching**

Villegas (2007) defends assessing teacher candidates according to certain social justice dispositions, noting that criticisms of social justice education stem from “an all-out war to define
the goals of public education, the role of teachers, the nature of knowledge, and conceptions of learning” (p. 378). Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) discuss how what they term *good and just teaching* proved to be much more than the feel-good or indoctrinating pedagogy it is condemned to be, as teacher candidates were evidently able to express the ideals of their social justice preparation in many substantial ways. The study followed students throughout their preservice period and then two years into their actual teaching in order to address identified needs for more large-scale, outcomes-informed research on teacher dispositions for social justice. The results fell into four broad categories, which portrayed the depth and breadth of learning these students experienced in the social-justice minded program:

*Pupil learning.*—ideas about making sure pupils learn, preparing pupils, accommodating and differentiating instruction, promoting critical thinking, and holding pupils to high expectations;

*Relationships and respect.*—ideas about building relationships with pupils and their families, developing a culture of respect, and caring for pupils;

*Teacher as activist.*—ideas about advocating for pupils, engaging in community work, building coalitions, and participating in activism;

*Recognizing inequities.*—ideas about racial and economic inequities, connecting curriculum to issues of oppression, breaking down racial or class barriers, and seeing the job of the teacher as a change agent. (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p. 356)

Far from claims that the practices they identified in their study were perhaps “just good teaching,” the authors maintain that “to the contrary, teaching for social justice is defined in part by the moral and ethical values to which it is attached and by its strong commitments to improving the life chances of all students, ensuring that all students have rich learning
opportunities, and challenging aspects of the system that reinforce inequities” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p. 374).

Good and just teaching is equally important for teacher educators, and one example of how we can continually strive for it is Cook-Sather’s (2011) action research study on the implications of inviting undergraduate students to be pedagogical consultants to their faculty. She found that students gained a more informed critical perspective within and beyond classrooms through: multiplying their own angles of vision, discerning and analyzing professors’ pedagogical intentions, recognizing themselves and classmates as a community of learners, and revising their worldviews. They also found students describing that they had built greater confidence, capacity, and agency as learners and people through: taking more responsibility as learners, becoming active researchers of learning, and refining their communication skills (Cook-Sather, 2011). Besides the implications for students when they are treated as equally essential stakeholders in their own learning, Cook-Sather describes how as their instructor she was able to be “more aware and more intentional about structuring support for and addressing key emergent issues within student consultants’ experiences” (p. 55). Unmistakably, socially just practices in teacher education, such as this kind of democratic inclusion of multiple voices, not only provide rich and meaningful growth for students as they embark upon their own teaching careers, but can create equally significant learning opportunities for their faculty.

**CCI in the Educational Foundations Classroom**

Contemplating the specific ways an educational foundations course in a social-justice oriented teacher education program might work to meet the criteria of these various frameworks, here I give a brief overview of the content, activities, and pedagogical practices explored in the literature around teaching for social justice. Much of this literature specifically speaks to teacher
education, and all components are included in the *Introduction to Education* course I lead. I end with a discussion of current threats to foundations courses and the accompanying repercussions.

Relationships take center stage in much of the literature on social justice education, reinforcing their prominence in nearly all social justice frameworks previously explored, as well as the relational–cultural model explained later in my theoretical framework (Garrison, 2010; Giles, 2011; Latta & Field, 2005; Sanford, Hopper, & Starr, 2015; Trout, 2012). Another of the most frequently discussed components of teacher education courses for social justice is their connection to practice in field and service-learning settings, as these provide the opportunity for students to not only learn about how education affects underprivileged students, but also helps them witness this first-hand and perform what they’ve learned in real contexts (Baily, Stribling, & McGowan, 2014; Butin, 2007; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009; Kirkland, 2014; McDonald, Bowman, & Brayko, 2013; McGough, 2006; Pugh, 2014; Tinkler, hannah, Tinkler, & Miller, 2015). Discussions and other democratic and participatory activities also get a great deal of attention, which is to be expected considering the role that dialogue across difference as well as issues of voice and silence play in notions of socially just education and democratic living (Burbules & Rice, 2010; Haroutunian-Gordon, 2010; Parker, 2010; Schultz, 2009; Schultz, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014; Stillman, Anderson, & Struthers, 2014). The importance of both teacher and student reflection and reflexivity are further supported by social justice frameworks and in the literature (Knowles, 2014; LaBoskey, 2012; Stillman et al., 2014).

Readings and other curricular materials in the social justice classroom must, of course, introduce students to multiple perspectives and especially those that have traditionally been left out (Magill & Rodriguez, 2015; McDonald, 2008), although, it is worth noting that at least one author found
teachers’ actions and practices mattered more to students’ growth and deepening social consciousness than did the course content (Storms, 2012).

These pedagogical practices are important considerations for designing and implementing a social-justice oriented course in teacher education. CCI is amenable to all these components, and educational foundations is particularly one of the best courses in which to study its implementation and how goals for social justice education may be met, as I explain later. Unfortunately, foundations courses—and more generally, learning of educational theory not immediately connected to practice—have been increasingly depreciated in the current neoliberal schooling climate. The overwhelming call for practice-based learning, predominantly made by privatized alternative teacher education programs, is pressuring even traditional teacher education programs to de-emphasize foundational courses in favor of field learning (Stitzlein & West, 2014; Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2015). This leads to “preparation of teachers who can implement teaching scripts, but who have not developed the professional vision, cultural competence, and adaptive expertise they need to meet the changing learning needs of their students or to continue to learn in and from their practice” (Zeichner et al., 2015, p. 124). This uncritical glorification of practice (Zeichner et al., 2015) and narrow focus on teachers as technological conveyors of ideas and practices for which they lack foundational knowledge is alarming. It not only caters to the anti-intellectualism proliferating in society at large (Stitzlein, 2014), but essentially denies the historical, philosophical, cultural, political, social, relational, and economic realities that are primary concerns of a social justice education.

Research Implications

Studying CCI in teacher education addresses several gaps in the existing research and literature. The first gap is that while a fair amount of research has been conducted under each of
CCI’s theoretical umbrellas, practically none has been conducted on them simultaneously combined as a single praxis, especially in teacher education. Secondly, while other frameworks hold noble aims for more equitable pK–12 student learning, many neglect a more critical examination of the larger structural issues affecting underprivileged students that are beyond teachers’ control, which can only be addressed by empowering students ready to act toward meaningful social change. Thirdly, my study approaches the topic of social justice teacher education from a strength-seeking stance, in contrast to the more common deficit view of privileged students and their instructors in these programs. Furthermore, studying CCI in an educational foundations class provides insight into both an under-studied context and one that is in dire need of support in light of current policy trajectories. Next, while most of the literature is qualitative in nature, and often conducted by practitioners themselves, it is not action research and is rarely participatory, which distinguishes my study from these others in significant ways. Finally, educational research overall is still bound to a positivistic paradigm despite its inherent messiness and complexity. This study adds to the kind of radical and alternative approaches that are needed in order to provide evidence that context-specific, interpretive, and subjective research methods are equally rigorous and appropriate in educational research.

Existing Frameworks

While many social justice education frameworks exist and are quite comprehensive, few studies have actually focused on them in the practice of teacher education (Conklin, 2008; Vaandering, 2014; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; H. Wang, 2013). Additionally, most of these frameworks are not as theoretically multi-faceted as CCI. Compassionate, critical, justice-oriented teacher education (Conklin & Hughes, 2016) comes closest to investigating teacher education utilizing the type of layered framework exemplified in CCI. This framework would
have been a viable option for what I set out to do here, however, I had already been using CCI long before Conklin and Hughes’s (2016) study was released. While the two frameworks overlap in some ways, CCI also has a much stronger emphasis on critical pedagogy as a means to alleviate oppression and empower social actors, while Conklin and Hughes’s framework employs much less of this particular type of criticality. Like other perspectives that are more mainstream than radical, their stated aim is preparing teachers who can enact equitable, intellectually challenging learning, which includes outcomes such as democratic classrooms, culturally responsive and inclusive curricula, academic challenge and high expectations for all learners, a view of students’ strengths rather than deficits, and valuing and building on students’ existing knowledge, culture(s), and lived experiences. (Conklin & Hughes, 2016, p. 48)

These worthy aims still somewhat neglect the more transformational aims maintained in the CCI framework, perhaps because they are based in teacher education and on the experiences of teacher educators and their students, rather than on the very real experiences of oppression felt by marginalized pK–12 students from which CCI derives. I continue to focus on CCI because it is directly rooted in social justice pedagogy for marginalized youth, and I want to show how modeling such pedagogies is one way to help prepare teachers who can empower these youth beyond their academic learning with the capacity to challenge and overcome larger social and structural limitations.

While it does embody many of the purposes of my own work, both Conklin and Hughes’s (2016) study and Conklin’s (2008) earlier framework also troublingly join other literature and research on social justice teacher education that gives pronounced attention to the assumed resistance of advantaged white students and their accompanying lack of compassion and/or that
of their educators. That is, most of the literature appears to rest upon several deficit-minded premises about teacher education students and their instructors. The first premise is that we must help students from predominantly privileged backgrounds overcome their allegedly unsympathetic tendencies in order for them to become just educators. It is likewise expected that these students will resent or resist our attempts to illuminate the plight of the underprivileged. However, teacher education programs are slowly becoming more diverse, and, at least in my experience as a teacher educator, many students come from relatively humble backgrounds and cannot easily see themselves as privileged until they have had a chance to examine the many unseen forms of privilege. Whether they are unsympathetic is also debatable, and I believe that if we approach them with this assumption they are more likely to live up to that expectation. If the goal is to prevent deficit thinking about underprivileged students, it seems a counterproductive way of viewing our own students. And finally, there is the premise that as their instructors we lack compassion for our students because of these assumptions about their privileged positions, which, at least for me and I am sure for many others, is untrue.

My CCI project is not based on such a deficit model, but rather is minded only toward critical, difference-conscious compassion and equity for all students—privileged students included—as well as promoting the same opportunities for me as their instructor to realize relational connection and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/1993). Better understanding the implications of this specific aspect of compassion is an important opening in the existing research literature.

Educational Foundations

There is very little social justice research in teacher education that is specifically situated in the educational foundations classroom (Frederick, Cave, & Perencevich, 2010 is one
example). I propose that this is the ideal setting in which to set in motion pre-service teachers’ path to becoming educators for social justice because it is where they are first introduced to the contextual circumstances under which education takes place, and it is also one of the first courses students take in a teacher education program. Most education courses cannot adequately cover all this amidst their other topics of focus, therefore, when researchers study social justice education practices and student dispositions and aptitudes in other contexts these are somewhat removed from the concepts and theory that drive it all. Studying a social justice framework such as CCI specifically within the foundations classroom is an important addition to the existing literature, especially given the current devaluing of foundations courses and the need to substantiate their relevance to practice.

**Practitioner and Participatory Inquiry**

Something I expected to find missing in the literature on social justice teacher education was research done by practitioners in their own settings, however I was pleasantly surprised to find a good deal of work happening in this form. While this gap is less pronounced than I anticipated, the majority of this work is methodologically situated only as qualitative research rather than as practitioner action research or participatory action research that involved students in the research process. Action research sees relationships and their consideration as key elements of any humanizing research process, and its focus on the participants/practitioners as subjects rather than objects aligns well with a social justice stance.

Griffiths (2009), in considering particularly how action research can be approached for/as/mindful of social justice, posits action as a necessary component of social justice, however the action component is often missing from purely qualitative research. Action research does more than just add to the canon of academic knowledge—it is a paradigm that specifically
emphasizes immediate reflection, action, and movement toward positive social change for those directly involved in the research. Rather than separate out theorizing from action, action research, as its name implies, is unequivocally meant to link interpretation and theorizing to immediate action with and on behalf of the participants.

**The Culture of Evidence**

Peck and McDonald (2014) found that motivations underlying calls for evidence are crucially important to how they are enacted, therefore, if the underlying motivation is to create a more socially just education for teacher educators, teacher candidates, and their future students, research can actually be a positive force for change. Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) note one criticism of teacher education research that they tried to address is that it consists of too many small-scale, context-specific studies. Grossman and McDonald (2008) point out that research on teacher education has been troublingly orphaned from the larger fields of research on teaching and research on organizations and policy implementation, creating a disconnection between teacher education and the practices and contexts it is meant to serve. I believe these situations are symptoms of a larger problem in how we view, undertake, and act upon education research generally.

The currently dominant “culture of evidence” in education includes assumptions about what counts as evidence and why it should count that I would argue are counterproductive to a social justice mission (Peck & McDonald, 2014; Zeichner et al., 2015). These assumptions include an over-emphasis on large data as well as on methods and topics that are easily quantifiable and controllable—research that is, misguidedly, considered more objective, generalizable, and practical. This is a dated way of approaching research given the many contemporary arguments defending the inevitable complexity of any research that can truly be
considered ecologically sound (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014; Phillips, 2014; Rudolph, 2014; Wieman, 2014). In fact, Phillips (2014) makes the argument that education research, with its myriad of uncontrollable variables, is not a hard science—it is an extremely hard science.

Attempting to squeeze a naturally messy and complex system such as education into this hard-science model necessarily means that education itself must be constrained and reduced to its most basic conditions in order to fit that model, which explains the kinds of scripting and standardization that have been increasingly employed over the past few decades (Rudolph, 2014). Instead, I propose that we should continue moving in the opposite direction, particularly when studying social justice education, aligning our means with the intended ends. “Education, as an empirical phenomenon, is just the sort of context-sensitive, dynamically responsive complex system that…requires research methods that are locally applied, tolerant of uncertainty, and pragmatically adopted to meet particular social ends at a given point in time—methods that go well beyond randomized control trials” (Rudolph, 2014, p. 16-17). In short, I agree with Ayers (2008) who asks:

If we want to live in a fully human world, a world of mutual recognition, if we want to develop a richer and deeper vision of justice, and a pedagogy and inquiry of justice as well—a pedagogy and research of activism perhaps—something that tries to tell the truth, tries to stand against violence and war and exploitation and oppression, tries to act for love and fairness and balance and peace, how will we proceed? (p. xi)

The solution is not to change the questions, methods, and contexts to fit systemically flawed research preferences, but to force a shift toward research topics and paradigms that better suit the dynamic, nuanced settings in which this work actually occurs. It is my hope that this dissertation study will contribute to this cause.
Conclusion

Based on this exploration of the literature and existing social justice education frameworks, the core argument I put forth is that as teacher educators in justice-oriented programs, we must align our means with our ends by exemplifying humane, democratic pedagogies and foregrounding critical and alternative narratives—as accomplished through CCI—in order to offer students viable experiential knowledge to guide them toward adopting similar pedagogies. This is particularly significant for many urban teacher education programs, where students largely come from more privileged suburban and rural locales and have had minimal exposure to racially/ethnically diverse or less advantaged students.

Cammarota and Romero (2006a) describe how they utilized CCI as a specific means to empower Latinx youth with the capacity to comprehend systemic oppressions affecting them and their communities so that they could rise above these limitations and create better worlds for themselves and others. While the term has mainly appeared in these authors’ literature on educating Latinx high school students, it serves as an appropriate model for how culturally sustaining and emancipatory pedagogy and curriculum might be executed in other settings, especially those committed to a mission of educational justice for our most disadvantaged students at all levels.

I argue that research we do in these settings must also align with the goals inherent in a social justice stance. Critical forms of action research have often been used specifically in work with marginalized groups and underrepresented research topics for this reason (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Cook-Sather, 2010; Griffiths, 2009; Rodríguez & Brown, 2009; Torre & Fine, 2008). Practitioner and participatory action research are more than
just research for the sake of testing theories and providing evidence—they can be a means to push back against hegemonic norms and work toward social justice.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The current reform movement in education increasingly favors mechanisms for students and teachers to meet someone else’s criteria regarding what constitute the “right” answers or actions, to the exclusion of understanding their complexities or why those answers or actions matter in the first place. CCI entails a reformulation of the typical classroom experience into one that better meets the needs of students to co-create their learning, and to learn with purpose, connecting knowledge and feeling to action.

In light of the ever-growing standardization and businessification of education (McLaren, 2003), future educators need to learn specifically how they can most humanely and equitably influence student achievement under these policies, and that they have the power to challenge and create change when these policies do not align with the democratic ideals of public education (Stitzlein, 2014; Stitzlein & Rector-Aranda, 2016). It would follow that teacher educators, then, must not only provide students the content knowledge that will facilitate their advancement toward these goals, but should model this pedagogy in their own classrooms as well. Given that the overall curricular requirements and student learning outcomes at all educational levels have been regionally mandated in most parts of the country, understanding the theoretical foundations of the CCI approach can illuminate ways teacher educators and future teachers may take a critical stance while still honoring their professional obligations.

In this chapter, I locate CCI within the larger frameworks of critical pedagogical theory and relational–cultural theory to inform how these can influence practices in teacher preparation courses that cultivate students’ sense of humanity, empowerment, and social purpose. Throughout, I will communicate why each of these are important in teacher education, and
finally, why they must go hand-in-hand in order to create a justice-centered teaching–learning experience.

**Confronting Power through Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is directly integrated into CCI’s framework, and for good reason. It would be nearly impossible to conceive of socially just education without understanding the ways injustice has been perpetuated by means of a purportedly innocent mainstream pedagogy (Brookfield, 1995). “Teaching innocently means thinking that we’re always understanding exactly what it is that we’re doing and what effect we’re having” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 1), which is what happens when we teach uncritically, accepting the state of things and the veracity of the content we are expected to teach as given, rather than questioning their historical, political, social, cultural, and philosophical underpinnings (Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2003; Shor, 1992). From the perspective of critical pedagogy, believing that teaching can be neutral, disconnected from structural and ideological influences, is naïve, and one way those in power preserve the dominance of their own ideology is by incorporating this belief and fostering a disposition to conform into the system they largely control (McLaren, 2003; McLaren, 2009). Critical pedagogy seeks to challenge this conformity.

Modern critical theories of education and pedagogy have evolved from multiple intellectual traditions, all of which “critically interrogate the pedagogical interrelationships between culture, economics, ideology, and power” (Darder et al., 2009a, p. 23; Freire, 1973; Freire, 1970/1993; hooks, 1994). Critical pedagogy and theory can be traced back to a variety of ideas and movements and the work of many activists and scholars. While the founding

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3 Detailing all this work is beyond the scope of this discussion. For a more detailed exploration, see Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009b). Some of the in-depth contributions to and foundational work in critical pedagogy can be seen in the following, among others: Bourdieu, 1986; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Dewey, 1916; DuBois, 1902;
perspectives are varied, they are threaded together by an overarching commitment to social justice, and in critical pedagogy specifically, to empowering students who have traditionally been culturally marginalized or economically disenfranchised (Darder et al., 2009b).

Here I will describe the theory and usefulness of critical pedagogy as a means for the socially just education CCI is meant to embody, particularly within teacher education. Critical pedagogy specifically draws our attention to the forms knowledge takes and the roles of class, culture, ideology, power, and social reproduction (McLaren, 2003). I will present these through the topics of dialecticism, knowledge production, power and resistance, and problem-posing education. I will also introduce some of the ways critical pedagogy and theorizing have been critiqued over the years and how these have been or are being addressed, and some precautions for avoiding common mistakes in the interpretation of this theory into practice.

**Domination, Reproduction, and Power, Oh My!**

Kincheloe (1999) articulates critical pedagogy and theorizing as:

especially concerned with how democracy is subverted, domination takes place, and human relations are shaped in the schools, in other cultural sites of pedagogy, and in everyday life. Critical theorists want to promote an individual’s consciousness of himself or herself as a social being. (p. 71)

They see education for its role in social reproduction, and would say that there is more at work in the perpetuation of a socioeconomic pecking order than a predetermined advantage through economic or social status, or even individual ability. They posit that social reproduction results from a hidden curriculum that reinforces the dominant neoliberal discourse to the advantage of

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some and the disadvantage of others, and that individualistic erosion of the communal and
democratic aims of education is deliberately employed toward this end (Au, 2009; Giroux, 2005;

Do we want to accommodate students to the existing capitalist division of labor by
making them merely functional within it or do we want to make students uncomfortable
in a society that exploits workers, that demonizes people of color, that abuses women,
that privileges the rich, that commits acts of imperialist aggression against other
countries, that colonizes the spirit and that wrings the national soul clean of a collective
social consciousness? Or do we want to create spaces of freedom in our classrooms and
invite students to become agents of transformation and hope? I trust that we do. (p. 184)

In critical pedagogy it is believed that schools can be enlightening and reflective spaces that
empower individuals and communities to strive for social justice and human flourishing, but that
they also often miss the mark, instead catering to hegemonic principles that would subvert these
aims—that would have us believe schools exist solely to instruct students toward employability
and “mechanical and functional” literacy (Giroux, 2001, p. 206), or toward creating individuals
who will conform and be “patriotic, industrious, and responsible citizens” (McLaren, 2003, p.
194). Suggesting that education is a tool to gain personal competence, responsibility, and social
mobility is actually quite ironic, considering the reality that schools have typically been a sorting
mechanism for the masses, assisting only certain students to thrive while others are conditioned
to accept their lower roles in society (Anyon, 1980; Aronowitz, 2004; Au, 2009). In summary,
the paradox is that “school functions simultaneously as a means of empowering students around
issues of social justice and as a means of sustaining, legitimizing, and reproducing dominant
class interests directed at creating obedient, docile, and low-paid future workers” (McLaren,
Recognizing, understanding, and challenging this dialectic is one of the main goals of critical pedagogy.

**Entering the Dialectic**

Critical pedagogy embraces a *dialectical* theory of knowledge, which is that knowledge exists in the relationships between individuals and their society, between the objective and the subjective, between free will and causation—between many aspects of existence that traditional theory has attempted to dichotomize into either/or relationships (McLaren, 2003). Contrary to these models, which try to force reality into objective separations in opposition with one another, a dialectical theory sees the inherent contradictions of any phenomenon as happening at the same time and being simultaneously relevant to their explanation. Critical pedagogues see that there are multiple sides to any problem, and that problems are attributable to the interactions of both individuals and societal structures (McLaren, 2003). Thus, they are able to see the incongruities in our lived experiences and how these privilege some while maltreating others.

Kemmis and Fitzclarence (1986) offer as an example the contradiction inherent in an education system that claims to want students to reach their “full potential,” while simultaneously oppressing the less able students in its care. In higher education, this is seen when the “full potential” is that which is defined by the instructor or the academy, regardless of what may make the student personally feel accomplished or learned, or what might actually be useful to the student. Furthermore, those students who may not be able to express themselves through the privileged modalities (such as in well-formed writing, verbal presentation, or test-taking) are deemed unable to learn and are barred from advancing, while those with these aptitudes receive enhanced opportunities for advancement. For example, we would rarely see the latter penalized for not being able to interpret their learning into art, but those who could do so
would lose out because they are unable to interpret it into written word, a double standard that certainly prevents some students from reaching their “full potential.” In teacher education, such a situation can reinforce an equally narrow vision of learning that students carry into their teaching professions. Alternatively, when future teachers are offered multiple ways of expressing their own knowledge and growth, they are more likely to imagine new ways to encourage their diverse students. It is through dialectical understanding that we are able to see the ways schools can be sites of both oppression and liberation, and as educators, can choose to aim for liberation.

**The Historicity of Knowledge Production**

A critical lens is indispensable in the face of overly objective, positivistic modes of inquiry and knowledge production that dominate the educational discourse, and in the process, remove its subjective, human factor. Giroux (2001) writes that “inherent in the very structure of positivist thought…are a number of assumptions that appear to preclude its ability to judge the complicated interaction of power, knowledge, and values and to reflect critically on the genesis and nature of its own ideological presuppositions” (p. 16). McLaren (2003) explains that the social construction of knowledge is a primary concept within critical pedagogy. He notes how mainstream educators emphasize technical knowledge that can be measured and quantified in order to “sort, regulate, and control students” (p. 197), or practical knowledge that helps individuals describe and understand situational events. However, what critical pedagogues aim for is emancipatory knowledge, which “attempts to reconcile and transcend the opposition between technical and practical knowledge” to understand how “social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege,” and how this might be overcome (p. 197).

Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998a) specifically define critical teaching as a “counter-positivist” paradigm, which they say involves five important theoretical differences in response
to the conventional, “authorized” methods and epistemologies in modernist positivism. First, counter-positivist educators seek to understand the parts only within the context of the whole, contrary to the norm in modernist positivism to focus too much on the parts (i.e. test scores) in attempts to eventually understand the whole. Second, it sees all structures as dynamic, as context-specific and constantly evolving according to society’s changing needs, rather than attempting to identify and adhere to a fixed and predictable standard or supposed facts, as in deciding in advance what students “should” know (Hirsch, 1987). Third, positivism claims knowledge is produced objectively and free of human values, such as in prescribed curriculum where knowledge is that which has already been “discovered” and laid out for us. The counter-positivist assertion is constructivist; it “celebrates human ways of knowing that are logical, but also intuitive, emotional, and empathetic” (p. 4) as we each actively invent and re-invent knowledge. Fourth, it views knowledge as a living system of interrelated parts; for example a subject is taught in light of larger philosophical, political, theological, and other influences and cannot be detached from them. In contrast, the dominant perspective assumes the parts can be scientifically separated into knowledge “blocks” that are built one upon the next. Finally, instead of regarding the knowledge we generate as truth, in this paradigm, “no ‘fact’ exists in a vacuum,” meaning all knowledge we produce is connected through so many possible relationships that we may only offer approximate explanations of things (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998a, p. 5).

One of the most interesting traits of critical pedagogy is that it would oblige students and practitioners to weigh, analyze, and critique the validity of their own assumptions as well as those of “authority” (Burbules & Berk, 1999). This is another instance where critical pedagogy differs from traditionally utilized modes of instruction, which all too often pick and choose what
is considered worthwhile based on narrow criteria of what learning really is and of whose version of knowledge is considered valid, and unquestioningly reject all others (Shor, 1992). Fine (2011) shows how the dismissal of students’ and other alternative perspectives permeates traditional academic calls for “evidence,” and asks “Whose evidence counts? What kinds of evidence are being privileged? What are we not seeing?” (p. 3). Paulo Freire, one of critical pedagogy’s most prominent progenitors, speaks of knowledge as a constantly evolving entity, stating:

It means that it is in the social experience of history that we as human beings have created knowledge. It’s because of that that we continue to recreate knowledge we created, and create new knowledge. If knowledge can be overcome, if the knowledge of yesterday necessarily does not make sense today and then I need another knowledge. It means that knowledge has historicity. That is, knowledge is never static. It’s always in the process. (as stated in Bell, Gaventa, & Peters, 1990, p. 194)

Freire (1970/1993) and others propose that the traditional banking system of education, in which students—who supposedly have no knowledge of their own and receive deposits of information from all-knowing teachers who “withdraw” it later in some form—reduces students’ ability to develop critical consciousness, and therefore their capacity to intervene in the processes that affect them. “Critical pedagogy poses a variety of important counterlogics to the positivistic, ahistorical, and depoliticized analysis employed by both liberal and conservative critics of schooling—an analysis all too readily visible in the training programs in our colleges of education” (McLaren, 2003, p. 185). The alternative is to open the floor for questioning and deconstructing what is put before us. In the teacher education classroom, this might be done through open, safe discussion space, reading a topic from several perspectives, and inviting
students to personally reflect on what they are learning and how it fits with their own lived experiences. Critical pedagogues employ these counterlogics to facilitate their students’ learning as a starting point to overcoming the false neutrality of a positivist system and nurturing more thoughtful educators.

**Schooling as a Function of Power and Resistance**

Critical pedagogy rests upon certain assumptions about living in a capitalist society that theorists contend influence the education of students within that society. Bowles and Gintis’s (1976) landmark text exposed ways in which the structures of the education system corresponded to the organization of labor in capitalist societies, preparing students for their places within the labor hierarchy. This idea, echoed by many critical pedagogy theorists, implicates schools in the reproduction of inequitable social roles in which students’ minds and skillsets are either cultivated to become part of the dominant or the subordinate class and culture of that society (Anyon, 1980; Anyon, 1981; Aronowitz, 2004; Freire, 1970/1993; Kozol, 2005; McLaren, 2003). It is very important here to recognize the impact this particularly has on people of color in our segregated culture, as critical race theorists draw our attention to the fact that it is they who still largely make up the oppressed poor and working classes in this society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Leonardo, 2012). McLaren (2003) describes the many factors involved in how schools can be maintained as sites of such social reproduction, but may equally become incubators of justice and human flourishing.

The dominant culture determines the “social practices and representations that affirm the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society” (McLaren, 2003, p. 201, emphasis original). Schooling in a capitalist society therefore exists to serve the needs of the dominant culture, employing a hidden curriculum.
These are the tacit and imbedded norms within schools that keep the subordinate class—typically comprised of the poor and working class, people of color, women, the disabled, and other marginalized populations—in unending subordination. The hidden curriculum is an instrument of *hegemony*, or the way dominance is maintained implicitly through social practices, structures, and symbols produced in such places as “the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family” (McLaren, 2003, p. 202, emphasis original), which produce the ideologies that we use to make sense and meaning of our world.

In the face of “laundered meanings” and dominating ideologies, many do resist, and schools can still be considered a place for such resistance.

The challenge for teachers is to recognize and attempt to transform those undemocratic and oppressive features of hegemonic control that often structure everyday classroom existence in ways not readily apparent. These oppressive features are rarely challenged since the dominant ideology is so all inclusive that individuals are taught to view it as natural, commonsensical, and inviolable. (McLaren, 2003, p. 204)

Teachers, in particular, can fight for the autonomy to make curricular and pedagogical choices that “break the cohesiveness of hegemony” (McLaren, 2003, p. 204), and in so doing, free themselves and their students in sometimes small, but just as often, huge ways. Under current reforms, this autonomy is being incrementally undermined, forcing teachers to make many difficult choices on behalf of their students’ best interests (Fraser-Burgess & Rodgers, 2015). One such choice in teacher education should be to prioritize truly empowering students with a desire to understand their worlds over watered-down forms of “achievement.” To do so, teachers will need to understand the dialectic they face and learn how to support their diverse learners in the face of these many influences. Teacher educators must therefore give their students the
opportunity to view educational policies and practices from multiple perspectives, especially those that challenge the dominant ideology, so they may best choose for themselves whether and how they will uphold the larger societal good through their own future practice.

**Banking on Conscientization**

Also often missing in the predominant reforms and missions of the current educational system is the fostering of students’ critical consciousness (Burbules & Berk, 1999; Freire, 1973; hooks, 1994; Rashba, 2013). “For most students school is endured rather than experienced as a series of exciting explorations of self and society” (Aronowitz, 2004, p. 13). Critical theorists maintain that the withholding of consciousness-raising education perpetuates imbalances of power that favor those in positions of control by preventing the majority of students from questioning the status quo, an observation supported in how “routinized, basic skills and highly regulated and assimilationist practices—delivered without critique—produce docile subjectivities” (Shor, 1992, p. 369). Freire called for an opposite action, charging the oppressed to become fully aware of the myths perpetuated by those in power and overcome their own passivity through “conscientization;” that is, to become fully human through critical consciousness (Fishman & McCarthy, 2007; Freire, 1970/1993).

Lipman (2009) points out that “despite a vocabulary of excellence that clothes school accountability, this is a discourse that produces mediocrity, conservatism, and narrowly instrumental conceptions of people, learning, and the purposes of education” (p. 367). The widespread practice of placing students on tracks ranging from gifted or college-bound to “high-needs” also results in the reproduction of socioeconomic imbalances by exponentially increasing what begins as only a slight difference in advantage or ability between students (Gladwell, 2008).
Ability tracking and vocational education tracks continue to introduce...differentiations...whereby students identified as having high abilities are provided more exercises in critical thinking, deliberation, and other aspects of learning to dissent, while low ability students are more likely to receive direct and passive instruction geared toward rote memorization of basic facts or manual skills. (Stitzlein, 2014, p. 97)

When consciousness-raising curriculum is only offered in elite or private schools, to college-tracked students, or when one finally enters the right classroom within the university, this essentially amounts to exclusion of less “accomplished” students from opportunities to increase their critical capacities. Critical pedagogues would argue that this is deliberate, for if made available to all students, conscientization might introduce a disruption to chronic imbalances of power and the policies that maintain them, having the potential for substantial educational and societal change (Cammarota & Romero, 2006a; McGinnis & Palos, 2011). Part of this conscientization also occurs when privileged students are made aware of their privilege—in just and humane ways that respect their varied and valid experiences and perceptions—as should be the aim of a social-justice oriented teacher education program. I propose that when pre-service teachers are able to see how the “myth of meritocracy” embodied in ability tracking perpetuates an unfair system in which they have been recipients of privilege, they may be more inclined to use their endowment to curb these types of injustice for their future students.

**Banking education.** As previously mentioned, the educations most of us have received relied on what Freire (1970/1993) has termed a “banking” model, with students as the empty bank accounts where teachers deposit their pre-digested knowledge, then later retrieve it through some form of assessment, which in this day and age usually entails filling in bubbles on a multiple choice exam. Students are not expected to bring their own knowledge and experience to
the table, only to “patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 72). “The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students” (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 71). The “bank” in this scenario holds only that canon of knowledge claimed to be universally relevant and neutral. Shor (1992) explains how information that is privileged in the “central bank is delivered to students as a common culture belonging to everyone, even though not everyone has had an equal right to add to it, take from it, critique it, or become part of it” (p. 32).

They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 72)

Banking education is conducted under a humanitarian guise, masking the efforts of the elite to create “automatons” who will accept what is, rather than fully realized humans who might question and seek change to a system that subdues their consciousness (Freire, 1970/1993).

I believe that most banking is likely done by unaware and well-meaning bankers, educators who have the best intentions as they educate using the methods to which they were subjected when they were students, accepting the bad with the good, “the way things have always been.” Since no one has ever expected them to question these methods, perhaps they never learned otherwise. It can then be an eye-opening experience for students when they
encounter an instructor who refuses to play banker, who defies these conventions as does a
critical pedagogue modeling an emancipatory pedagogy. In the teacher education classroom,
students may come in expecting to be told precisely what to know and how to know it, and to be
taught the methods to do the same in their future classrooms. In my experience as both a student
and an instructor, I have seen many students, accustomed to banking education, who at first resist
any attempts by the critical pedagogue to provoke their creativity or allow their input into the
climate and curriculum of the course, probably because they have rarely or never been treated
this way in all their years of formal education.

**Problem-posing education.** Freire hopes and proposes that knowledge in the banking
system, with its supposed truths, holds so many contradictions with students’ experiential reality
that eventually they will perceive this and seek liberation. He advances an alternative education
that is *problem-posing*, meaning the teacher is someone who proposes a problem and leads the
ensuing dialogue, drawing on and questioning all subject matter as historical products rather than
as universal wisdom (Shor, 1992).

In critical pedagogy the curriculum becomes a dynamic of negotiation where students and
teachers examine the forces that have shaped them and the society in which they live. In
this context the curriculum is ever changing and evolving, as it seeks to uncover how the
world operates and how egalitarian democratic principles can become a part of that
operation. (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 72–73)

In problem-posing education, students and teachers learn with and from one another through
dialogue, in which they become mutually responsible for “unveiling reality” (Freire, 1970/1993).
“Critical pedagogues believe that education should emphasize question posing or problem
posing, because truth is always subject to critique and these critiques are best mediated through
interaction and dialogue” (Adkins, 2014, p. 213). Part of the unveiling of reality, then, requires us to discover that emancipatory education is best understood as *praxis*, the combining of theoretically and historically-informed knowledge with our practice of living in the world, applying knowledge to create new knowledge.

In teacher education, students learn the theory, the history, the philosophy, but must at the same time be allowed to make connections to their past and present experiences in order to see whether the proposed truths match their own realities. They must be given opportunities to go into diverse settings, such as low-income schools, in order to understand the diverse realities experienced by their future students, particularly those that juxtapose their own. In this way, the problem of inequitable education is posed, and the students are being asked to understand the multiple facets of the problem in order to work through it. When they are able to experience the much deeper meaning this learning holds, they can fathom how they want their own students to feel toward the act of learning, and how this is accomplished through problem-posing rather than banking pedagogy.

**Democratic education.** Educating for democracy has been a foundational and long-standing goal in the United States (Goodlad, 2004; Stitzlein, 2014), but one that has fallen by the wayside in the modern era of commercialization, consumerism, and rampant individualism. Critical pedagogues believe that democracy of the type we claim to employ must be based in collective concern for the rights of individuals *and* the common good, through reflexivity, respect for ideas, critical analysis, shared problem-solving, and mutual respect between citizens as equal shareholders in the democracy (Beane & Apple, 2007). It is important to recognize that in this collective endeavor, the establishment of a public educational system means that system must uphold these same ideals. Furthermore, if we expect our citizens to be capable of these
types of democratic ends, we must provide the means, and as Dewey (1976a; 1976b) would say, we must consider those means at least as important as the ends. We cannot expect students who have had no opportunity to learn, and especially to experience, democracy, to be capable of nourishing and sustaining such a system. Practices in the classroom of a critical pedagogue are therefore closely intertwined with democratic preparation through democratic means, as the teacher actively seeks input from the students as to how best to facilitate their learning and growth, including them in the knowledge creation process, encouraging dialogue across diversity, and respecting their need to feel socially competent and important.

**Moving Forward with Caution**

Critical pedagogy, like any theory, is not perfect, however it shares traits with other imperfect theories and practices, all working side-by-side in spite of this with the same goal of justice and liberation. Fortunately, it has grown in its depth and breadth to account for many of the earlier charges against it, which have come from feminist and postmodern perspectives, among others (Cook-Sather, 2007; Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1992; Orner, 1992; Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999; Rosenthal, 2000). Some have complained that in attempting to liberate, we often unconsciously further subordinate our students, or that critical academics too often write from a privileged intellectual position (Darder et al., 2009b). Critical pedagogy has also historically been characterized by or based on the work of white men, however, the perspectives of female scholars are now also represented (Darder et al., 2009a; hooks, 1994; Luke & Gore, 1992; Sikes Scering, 1997), as well as racial minority and indigenous, especially in the related field of critical race theory (Buras, 2013; L. Parker & Stovall, 2004; Rabaka, 2013; Rains, 2003; Subedi, 2013). A myriad of other critical theories, such as critical disability studies (Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Weiss, 2015), have also developed, whether explicitly offshoots of critical theory or simply
cousins of sorts. Incorporating these intersectional perspectives into the dialogue can immensely improve the practice of critical pedagogy. Indeed, feminist theory, pedagogy, and ethics in particular have contributed greatly to large portions of my interpretation of the CCI framework. Finally, critical pedagogy has generally been criticized by mainstream conservative and liberal educators alike as being too political—which, they apparently fail to realize, is precisely a political stance to take against it, and only serves to prove the point that it is in their political interest to deny politicality, silence dissent, and thus maintain the status quo (Darder et al., 2009b).

I concede that critical theory tends to criticize without always offering solutions, can feel too negative or deterministic, almost reinforcing a victim mentality, and can seem idealistic or simplistic, presupposing a fixable dichotomy of power and oppression that overlooks the realistic spectrum of empowerment that might better help us to understand and address its complexity. It is true that many other theories better speculate upon the contextual nuances of power relations, and the idiosyncratic purposes and identities of stakeholders than critical pedagogy at large, thus I heed some of their concerns. According to Gore (1992), critical discourses tend to denote that there is an agent of empowerment, a notion of power as property, and some identifiable goal or end state, all of which can be problematic for truly empowering students. While these frameworks frequently propose ways in which the teacher necessarily endows the student with some sort of liberation, Gore (1992), Orner (1992), Cook-Sather (2007) and others have sought to problematize and deconstruct these concepts within the context of critical and feminist work.
Relational–Cultural Theory and Compassion in the Classroom

Relational–cultural theory (RCT) informs the “compassionate” component of CCI as a means to socially just education. Comstock and colleagues (2008) explain how RCT complements social justice efforts by identifying how contextual and sociocultural factors affect the creation of growth-fostering relationships, and by examining how relational competencies are developed throughout the lifespan. Emerging in opposition to the prior perspective that a primary goal for an individual’s learning and development is to achieve independence from others (Jordan, 1995), RCT proposes that the opposite is true, and that successful relational *connections*—interactions that are *mutually empathic* and *mutually empowering*—are vital to individual and shared learning, as well as emotional growth and health (Miller & Stiver, 1997). In this part of the chapter, I explain the foundations and tenets of RCT to demonstrate their role in educating teachers to be more compassionate supporters of their diverse students.

The Importance of Care and Compassion for Marginalized Students

The compassion component in CCI is originally based on Valenzuela’s (1999) study of how Latinx students in a large inner-city high school experienced their schooling as uncaring, and her deconstruction of the kinds of care that happen in the modern cultural and political contexts of our education system. Examining the paradox that teachers can care about their students while simultaneously uncritically maintaining the dominant culture and colonizing effects of curriculum, policy, and practice, she differentiates between what she terms *aesthetic* versus *authentic* care. While all teachers most likely care about students’ academic growth and achievement, in a climate of “subtractive schooling,” where students of color are denied connections with their culture and community, this aesthetic caring still serves as a falsely apolitical rejection of essential parts of students’ personhood. Other authors have similarly
written about the “disconnect between alleged educational ideals and students’ actual lived experiences of alienation and cultural irrelevance” (Castagno, 2014; Jay, 2003; Matias, 2015; McKnight, 2015; Rabaka, 2013; Rector-Aranda, 2016, p. 4). As Castagno (2014) contends, even with the proliferation of *multiculturalism, diversity,* and *equity* as educational buzzwords, a “culture of nice”—where these topics are approached from a position of rote affirmation and simulated neutrality that reifies white norms—prevents educators from engaging in the critical examinations needed to truly understand the racialized experiences of their diverse students.

“Whiteness maintains power and privilege by perpetuating and legitimating the status quo while simultaneously maintaining a veneer of neutrality, equality, and compassion” (Castagno, 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, teachers’ implicit biases toward students of color continue to impact their treatment of students despite these larger agendas (Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby-Senghor, 2016).

Instead, Valenzuela’s (1999) concept of authentic caring means fostering deeper relationships with students, embracing and affirming their racial, cultural, and community identities, and otherwise reaching beyond achievement to support their flourishing on all levels. Authentic caring is reciprocal, “that is, the teacher establishes an emotional, human connection with his or her students and demonstrates a real interest in the students’ overall well being” (Cammarota & Romero, 2006b, p. 309). Rojas and Liu (2016) also found that successful social-justice oriented teachers are sympathetic to their students in a proactive sense—not as a kind of pity denoting student deficiency, but as a recognition of the challenges students face that translates into loving care, genuine relationships, and high academic expectations. Authentic care also means acknowledging the failure of nice policies and practices centered on “inclusion,
optimism, and assimilation” (Castagno, 2014, p. 4) that ignore the institutional inequities experienced most acutely by students of color (Office for Civil Rights, 2016).

Why Relational-Cultural Theory?

Valenzuela’s conception of authentic care fits perfectly with the larger goals of CCI for supporting marginalized students, and reinforces the critical pedagogy component by linking care to its cultural and political underpinnings. While this conception is definitely relevant to how I am utilizing CCI, I have also chosen to use and mainly focus on the RCT framework, and, again, want to be clear about this choice. First, this is a pragmatic choice because RCT was a theory I was able to learn about extensively through an entire course I took during my doctoral studies before I had even discovered CCI, and I found it closely aligns with my existing understanding and enactment of compassion. Secondly, I believe RCT has a lot to contribute when looking at CCI in novel ways and considering how it might be applied in varied settings. In translating CCI specifically to the teacher education classroom, my perspective on compassion needed to be broader and explore more deeply larger sociocultural norms because my student population is demographically and contextually very different than the students in Valenzuela’s and Cammarota and Romero’s projects. Similar to many teacher education programs, the majority are white and middle-class, and all are, of course, college students, not ethnic minority public high-school students; so, while I remain committed to supporting my students’ cultural identities and lived experiences, I cannot ignore that these students mainly reside in positions of cultural privilege. Consequently, most relate happy experiences in their recollections of their own schooling—rather than feeling uncared for, many express that relationships with their teachers were positive and even inspirational to their decision to become teachers themselves. They generally felt supported and valued by their teachers, culturally connected to their
curriculum, and fairly treated by school policies. In this regard, it would be less productive and somewhat incongruous to view their experiences only through Valenzuela’s framework. I feel RCT expands the field of vision to account for diverse experiences of privilege and vulnerability when applying CCI beyond its original contexts, while retaining core similarities with Valenzuela’s framework as a counter-hegemonic perspective that values relationships, authenticity, trust, and associated aspects of care to be explored in the coming sections.

**Missing Perspectives**

RCT challenges the strong focus on attributes of independence and separation seen in leading Western developmental theories of the second half of the 20th century (Erikson, 1959; Maslow, 1970), which tended to de-emphasize or even ignore the ways growth is socially and relationally constructed as well as the importance of preserving relationships of mutuality and interdependence for healthy psychosocial development. Through early work of Jean Baker Miller (1976) and Carol Gilligan (1982), RCT emerged as a feminist theory of development proposing that the female predisposition to experience the world and grow through relationship and emotional connection was as valid as those dispositions identified in predominant theories that emphasized the goals of autonomy and rationality. Particularly, their psychological research was meant to fill in the missing perspectives of girls and women in traditional theory that was empirically androcentric, based only in studies of male subjects just as most research had been to that point. While the relational understandings of women had traditionally been seen as weakness, as a less mature phase of development, or pathologized completely, RCT demonstrates that the ability to care for others and to form growth-fostering connections is actually the epitome of moral and emotional maturity and psychological well-being.
Gilligan’s (1982) and Noddings’s (1984) related theorizing of care ethics also contrast with traditional ethical viewpoints in which to do the right thing out of caring or love holds no moral standing on its own. Blum (1988) juxtaposes Gilligan’s moral theory of care with Kohlberg’s theory of the stages of moral development, the latter of which holds that the highest and most desirable stage of moral judgement is based in “impartiality, impersonality, justice, formal rationality, and universal principle. This impartialist conception of morality…has been the dominant conception of morality in contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophy” (p. 472, emphasis original). Because caring depends more on emotion than reasoning, it has typically been dismissed in a Western world view that emphasizes reason over emotion.\(^4\) However, care ethicists hold that care indeed relies on sophisticated reasoning, it is just motivated by emotion, empathy, and a concern for the cared-for (Noddings, 2012). This is not empathy as a projection of oneself into the mind of the other, but as a feeling-with the other, reading the other (Noddings, 2012). It is a recognition that we are each situated within a complex system of ongoing relationships, and morality “consists in attention to, understanding of, and emotional responsiveness toward the individuals with whom one stands in these relationships” (Blum, 1988, p. 473).

RCT theorists also assert that supposedly “feminine” tendencies toward emotion, care, and relationship are, in fact, human tendencies that have been suppressed under false ideals of competition, guardedness, and individuation held throughout Western thought in patriarchal societies (Spencer, 2000). Relational theories are informed by the observation that “societal

\(^4\) Matias (2016) offers an evocative discussion of the incongruence in whites’ typically emotional responses and resistance toward topics of race, where suddenly emotion is allowed to completely overrule otherwise glorified principles of reason and logic. “In fact, white emotionality is perhaps the most egregious violation of Enlightenment principles because it represents the gateway practice leading to denial, failure to weigh social science evidence, and, ultimately, violence” (Leonardo, 2016, p. xiii).
systems perpetuated within patriarchy create a particular relational context which negatively impacts psychological development through the subordination of whole groups of people and the normalization or valorization of some forms of disconnection” (Spencer, 2000, p. 15). In contrast, the relational model of human development has been shown to apply to individuals of any gender, and holds that all “people gain a central sense of meaning, well-being, and worth through engagement in growth-enhancing relationships” (Jordan, 1995, p. 1). Relating RCT back to CCI, we see that while it is meant to be a universal theory of human development, its message is particularly salient for those most disempowered by the dominant cultural norms and systems in U.S. society.

A Culture of Disconnection

RCT defies theories and cultural norms that represent human nature as greedy, selfish, aggressive, and lacking in capacity to care about others, asserting that these are not natural, but socially constructed (Jordan, 2014). “RCT argues that mutuality should replace the dichotomy of selfishness versus selflessness, the prevailing model characterized either by competition over scarce resources…or self-sacrifice. In mutual relationships…safety is gained by building good connections and not by exercising dominance over others” (Jordan, 2014, p. 681). Jordan (1995) names persistent flaws in Western culture that produce and reinforce feelings of disconnection and isolation, which are particularly enforced for the boy, who is “taught to see himself as standing over or against rather than with; in such a stance he is taught to deny basic human engagement and vulnerability” (Jordan, 1995, p. 2). This artificial separation can be seen throughout the established structures and habits of our stratified and individualistic culture.

**Defensive disconnection.** The types of problems Jordan (1995) describes particularly persist in traditional classroom relationships, especially as students mature and advance through
the system. The first of these is a “normative emphasis on defensive disconnection as a means to feeling strong and self-sufficient” (p. 2). Students are encouraged to compete with one another, and praised for gaining self-reliance rather than for their ability to relate to others. Dependence on other students is typically discouraged, seen as incompetence to do the work on one’s own or even as cheating, rather than being encouraged as shared, growth-enhancing learning in collaboration. These separations might stem from a sincere desire for students to grow as individuals, however, the assumption that this makes students stronger or more self-sufficient is misguided. For example, neuroscience now shows that our brains process the “pain” of social rejection, exclusion, and other social disconnections and losses similarly to how they process physical pain (Eisenberger, 2012). We literally physically need social connection to thrive. Instead of making students strong and self-sufficient, separation thus hinders the deeper learning that would be possible through interpersonal connection.

Hierarchical disconnection. The second force Jordan (1995) identifies are those contextually produced disconnections that occur when certain groups are made to feel “lesser than” others. This is seen, for example, when students who compete academically are subsequently tracked into stratified learning groups based on ability, rather than seen as relational beings who might be able to enhance each other’s varied knowledges. This effect is especially pronounced for students of color when we recognize that they are more likely to experience de facto school segregation (Donnor, 2013), have their cultures only superficially represented in curriculum (Chandler & McKnight, 2009), and to be labeled with learning disabilities (Office for Civil Rights, 2016), placed on vocational tracks (Cammarota & Romero, 2006a), and otherwise sidelines through a system that privileges Eurocentric norms and ways of knowing.
In the generally non-democratic current educational setting, teachers and students are also obliged to assume a hierarchical relationship, as in Freire’s (1970/1993) notion of “banking pedagogy” wherein the teacher holds “expert” power over the student, as well as the capacity to substantially impact the student’s future with the simple assigning of a grade. Interdependence and collaboration between teacher and student is viewed with even more apprehension than between students, perceived as illogical, inappropriate, or insufficiently disciplinarian based on hierarchical power models. The result of hierarchical forms of disconnection is that over time, “the suppression of all experience which makes the dominant group uncomfortable or threatened leads to self-protective inauthenticity in many marginalized groups—another source of disconnection” (Jordan, 1995, p. 2). Students in general are a disempowered group, however, when this is compounded through intersections with other identities such as race, class, socioeconomic status, ability, or gender, the effect can be even greater disconnection from learning.

**Interactive disconnection.** Finally, this relates to a third cultural impairment Jordan distinguishes, which are the individual disconnections caused by repeated interactive violations in close relationships (Jordan, 1995). This creates a *central relational paradox* (Miller & Stiver, 1997), particularly applicable in situations where one person is dependent upon the other, as is the child upon the parent, and likewise, the student upon the teacher. One example of the central relational paradox in schools occurs when, after years of increasingly fractured and discouraged interactions as students move up in grade levels, they still desire connection with and approval from teachers, while simultaneously self-protecting and taking cautious steps to avoid revealing this vulnerability. If this need for connection goes unmet for too long, a student may cease to
expect much connection with any instructor, and even be surprised by or mistrusting of one who does seem to care.

Miller and Stiver (1997) assert that repeated instances of either connection or disconnection in a particular context form *relational images* that continue to impact our behavior in future relationships in similar contexts. “The belief that no empathic response will be available from another person leads to deep withdrawal and immobilization,” particularly when we decide based on these relational images that it is unsafe to share our authentic selves (Jordan, 1995, p. 4). In the classroom, Miller and Stiver (1997) infer that students “invent strategies of disconnection” to safeguard themselves, such as becoming silent and essentially “disappearing,” adopting the “good student” role as they try to be whatever the teacher wants from them, or acting up in order to gain the teacher’s attention as well as the ability to control or predict the teacher’s reactions (p. 106). In all these strategies, students fail to be true to themselves to some degree. While some students are resilient enough to press on despite relational obstructions in school, the pain of this isolation can cause other students to withdraw from their educations completely. We are then apt to “blame the victim” for not being independent or “gritty” enough to soldier on despite these contextual and relational failings.

**Healing through Connection**

RCT theorists propose several concepts that when better understood may help nurture healing and growth in relationships. When this is accomplished, Miller (1986) proposes that we can tangibly observe at least five “good things”:

- Each person feels a greater sense of “zest” (vitality, energy).
- Each person feels more able to act and does act.
- Each person has a more accurate picture of her/himself and the other person(s).
• Each person feels a greater sense of worth.
• Each person feels more connected to the other person(s) and feels a greater motivation for connection with other people beyond those in the specific relationship. (p. 3)

These are the workings of mutual empowerment, which is achieved through several elements RCT generally proposes are essential in successful growth-fostering relationships. These elements are: trust, mutual empathy, authenticity, “power with,” and growth-in-connection. It follows that successful teaching–learning relationships are founded on these same ideals. While these elements are differentiated in this theoretical summary, it goes without saying that this is a false separation, and that in practice they occur much more synergistically within our teaching–learning interactions.

Trust. “Trust has become a popular word in educational discourse these days…In an educational climate that has devastatingly eroded this foundation of the teaching–learning enterprise, teachers and researchers are assiduously working to grasp, describe, resurrect, recreate, or otherwise hold on to what we know sustains human capacity to construct knowledge” (Raider-Roth, 2005, p. 17–18). Raider-Roth (2005) writes about the imperative to develop a context of trust in the classroom, and particularly the need for students to “trust what they know,” meaning to be able to “discuss, use, and depend on their understandings” within their teaching–learning relationships (p. 28–29). Examining this notion of trust in the perspective of Hawkins’s (1973) concept of I, Thou, and It means the trust students have in themselves and their own knowledge, in what they know about and their interactions with others, and in the content and context of their learning creates a relational triangle that enhances and fortifies their growth (Raider-Roth, 2005). Unfortunately, “practicing teachers as well as teacher candidates often do not appreciate the funds of knowledge that students bring with them into schools, nor
the legitimacy of this knowledge and the language and cultural practices in which students engage” (Richmond, 2016, p. 6). Teaching and curriculum must therefore be truly culturally relevant and sustaining, not just infused with superficially multicultural content, in order for students of non-privileged identities to be able to trust in their personal knowledge and ways of knowing. McDermott (1977) reminds us that trust is not a personal trait that some have and others do not, but occurs within contexts where people actively work to achieve trust, and in schools, an environment must be conducive to creating the kinds of trust that lead to learning.

Trust is an important part of CCI’s compassion element because students who consistently experience compassion within this relational triangle can come to trust that they and what they know will be treated with respect and kindness as they venture into unknown academic territory, which in turn creates positive relational images and future trust. They can trust that their unique situations are being taken under consideration, and can therefore more easily remember to consider the environments others must navigate. The downside to this is that in the current educational setting, many relational triangles lack compassion, so that students instead experience disconnection between themselves, their co-learners or teachers, and the material, are discouraged from trusting their own knowledge in a culture of banking pedagogy, and may even come to expect to be treated uncaringly or to distrust future acts of compassion, which hinders their ability to learn. In teacher education, therefore, it is imperative that students are able to trust in compassionate treatment from their instructors, not only to enhance their learning ability, but also to help them enact trust in their future classrooms. This is doubly important in matters of socially just education strategies, as many marginalized students already distrust a system that has repeatedly let them down.
Mutual empathy. Interwoven with trust, *mutual empathy* is also important to relationships and learning. People need “others who can be mutually empathic with them, can resonate with them and respond to them—can join with them in these thoughts and feelings…in order to even experience their important feelings in all of their depth and complexity” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 45). Empathy as it is generally regarded tends to be seen as a one-way action in response to another’s emotions or ideas as one recognizes, understands, experiences, and responds to the other person (Segal, 2011). However, *mutual empathy* creates a different dynamic in which both individuals are affected in an active creation of both mutual and individual understanding (Miller & Stiver, 1997). The student, for instance, may experience a teacher’s empathic response as empowering validation of what is important or interesting to the student, helping the student construct similar and future knowledge around these ideas and feelings. At the same time, the teacher is acting on her own ideas and feelings about what it means to be a teacher, and the student’s response can make the teacher feel effective, which impacts her growth as a teacher. Both are empowered and enabled to proceed in similar and improved future action. When this *mutuality* is lacking, however, the result is immobilization, as both student and teacher fail to move into deeper understanding of their own and each other’s ideas and feelings, leading to stagnation rather than action (Miller & Stiver, 1997). This is the kind of stagnation that, if it persists, results in a vicious cycle of educational failures on the part of the student, and the inability of the teacher to learn how to remedy the problem.

A compassionate response is an important part of empathy; it is the action that shows one’s needs have been recognized, understood, and personally experienced by the other, for without this response, it is hard for the person seeking mutuality to know whether they have found it. In essence, empathy is a cycle and compassion is the action in that cycle that hopefully
leads to more empathy and more action. When a teacher is compassionate to a student’s learning and relational needs, the student experiences the teacher’s empathy, and is more likely to reciprocate a level of compassion toward the teacher and the job the teacher is trying to do.

As tools toward broader social justice in education, compassion and mutuality are a step in the right direction, however we also need to develop empathy in ourselves and students as a prosocial capacity toward a common good.

Individual empathy is insufficient to motivate a society or community toward social justice. The most effective way to change structural inequalities and disparities is to provide people with opportunities to gain a deep contextual knowledge and have experiences that create empathic insights into the lives of people who are oppressed. (Segal, 2011, p. 268)

In teacher education specifically, this can begin in the classroom through a critical and in-depth examination of the historical, cultural, sociological, philosophical, and political roots of injustice, as gained in an educational foundations course. In this way, empathy is more likely to derive from a whole-picture understanding of the structural nature of inequity (Gorski, 2016), rather than shallower explanations and deficit ideologies that position students and their communities as somehow inherently deficient and needing “white martyr-messiahs” to help them overcome these deficiencies (Matias, 2016, p. 9). Too often we accomplish little more than turning our privileged students’ dysconscious racism (King, 1991) and “emotions of disgust to false claims of love, empathy, and caring” (Matias, 2016, p. 26). As Delgado (1996) posits,

False empathy is worse than none at all, worse than indifference. It makes you overconfident, so that you can easily harm the intended beneficiary. You are apt to be paternalistic, thinking you know what the other really wants or needs. You can easily
substitute your own goal for his. You visualize what you would want if you were he, when your experiences and needs are radically different. (p. 31)

It is therefore vital that teacher candidates be compelled to examine their own implicit biases and taken-for-granted assumptions in order to hopefully avoid the false empathy so typical of the latest multiculturalism and diversity initiatives (Castagno, 2014; Duncan, 2016; King, 1991).

It is possible that students may acquire a more profound empathy when they are sent into actual classrooms in high-needs schools or other youth development sites to experience the realities of what they have learned (Romo & Chavez, 2006; Tinkler et al., 2015). Given the right preparation and support through coursework and structured reflexivity (Duncan, 2016), in these settings, pre-service teachers could create mutually empathic relationships with individual students, where the students gain from the extra attention and compassion of the student-teachers, and the latter can gain a more solid grasp of the experiences of underprivileged students and hopefully come to realize that they have the power to help improve those experiences through genuine empathy and compassionate care. Taking this a step further might entail doing youth participatory action research projects in which our pre-service teachers learn to lead their students in investigation and action on issues the students themselves identify and find meaningful (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Rubin, Abu El-Haj, Graham, & Clay, 2016), and practitioner inquiry to critically examine their own assumptions and aims related to their teaching practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009a; Lysaker & Furuness, 2011).

It is important that these experiences not be isolated or random course requirements, but sustained threads of community engagement throughout students’ time in their teacher education programs and in their practicum placements (Sanford et al., 2015), especially since it is typically the newest and least experienced teachers who are hired into the most disadvantaged schools
(Office for Civil Rights, 2016). This exposure must begin in the first term of the program, be incorporated into as many of their courses and other requisites as possible, and emphasized through connected course topics and projects that oblige students to critically reflect on these experiences (Pugh, 2014). Unfortunately, students typically only get this exposure later in their programs during their student teaching—and not at all if they are not placed in high-poverty schools—at which point they might already be too entrenched in a deficit mindset (Kirkland, 2014). Programs are also increasingly removing or de-emphasizing foundations courses, as discussed in chapter one. Placing too much emphasis on field learning that students are not adequately prepared to comprehend is more likely to exacerbate their privileged biases and ideologies, therefore, theory and practice must go hand-in-hand.

**Authenticity.** If it was possible to place these different aspects of growth-fostering relationships in a linear order, authenticity might come after trust and mutual empathy, for without these, it is difficult for individuals to feel safe enough to share their true selves, feelings, and experiences with one another. Authenticity is a person’s ongoing ability to represent her-/himself in a relationship with increasing truth and fullness…If we don’t have other people in our lives who can resonate and respond, we become less and less able to state our feelings and thoughts or even to know them…If we have found it disconnecting and dangerous to put forward our feelings and thoughts, we begin to focus on methods of not representing our perceptions and feelings.

(Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 47–48)

This is a particularly troubling state within our current education system, where students and teachers are subject to increasing demands that they conform to externally prescribed goals for the time they spend together. Teachers may not feel safe to authentically represent their own
beliefs about what is important or right for their students and to act on these beliefs. Students are expected to convey little more than whether they have met the prescribed goals, while at the same time often denied expression of their authentic identities when these don’t align with the goals. For example, a standard protocol for students is to “give teachers what they want,” disingenuously engaging with subject matter and assignments as they do whatever it takes to meet imposed ideals and get the best grade or score. And students whose identities include minority or marginalized distinctions due to their race, gender, or class, for example, can be further distanced from their learning when their identities are ignored in curriculum, assignments, and class norms and discussions. Teachers gain little in return through these exchanges, as they fail to receive truth from their students and therefore cannot really gauge whether students’ growth, if it even occurs, serves any real purpose.

Even when steps are taken to promote trust, empathy, and authenticity, “one of the hardest things teachers learn is that the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 1). Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) craft a notion of authenticity in teaching that confronts the rampant inconsistencies between our claims to support students and the actual policies and practices that seem to prevent it. This entails teaching “as engaging in an authentic relationship with students where teachers know and respond with intelligence and compassion to students and their learning” (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 265). They define this as presence—”a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step…it involves self-knowledge, trust, relationship and compassion” (p. 265–266).
It is not surprising that compassion is a key element of presence. As an action of empathy, compassion facilitates presence because it requires a genuine care and concern for one’s students for a teacher to want to be fully present in the first place. Teachers who are authentically present with themselves, with their students, and with the subject matter are more able to use this relational triangle as a way to bring out students’ authentic selves, and thus to facilitate the students’ own presence and self-awareness within their own triangles of self, other, and context. Here, “development of self is asserted not by autonomy and separation but rather by construction, defining, and refining of relationships” (Raider-Roth, 2005, p. 20).

Authenticity and presence in teacher education requires that instructors be reflective practitioners and encourage reflectiveness in their students. This self-knowledge entails acknowledging the “cultural, psychological and political complexities of learning, and the ways in which power complicates all human relationships” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 1). Authenticity is an especially relevant concern in teacher education, where mainly white and relatively privileged candidates can genuinely hold deep fears and biases toward the kinds of difference they will encounter in their potential students of non-privileged races and backgrounds. These are candidates who “rarely engage the word race, have not had prolonged relationships with people of color, or have never stepped inside an urban community of color” (Matias, 2013, p. 70). Representing themselves and their feelings authentically, in this case, becomes potentially very uncomfortable and destabilizing for students. While this is an appropriate kind of personal suffering in the process of learning about the suffering of others (Mintz, 2013), it is important to provide an environment of trust, empathy, and compassion rather than one that will further put them on the defensive (Conklin, 2008). Although too often we do cater to the “interests, fears, and feelings of whites” (Gillborn, 2013), in teacher education, recognizing and owning these
feelings are essential parts of mediating candidates’ privileged worldviews that can otherwise end up hurting the already marginalized students in their care (Matias, 2016; Matias, 2013; Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016). Presence means facilitating an honest investigation of privilege and race dominance in ways that simultaneously acknowledge our students’ feelings, backgrounds, and lived experiences. While this is no guarantee that our students will fully overcome their fears and biases, making the process as compassionate as possible is at least a step in the right direction.

In essence, through presence and authenticity we are hopefully better able to express our humanity and learn to support the humanity of others. “To be more fully human is to act, think, and reflect on one’s presence and position in the world, and to be allowed to do so” (Reyes, 2016, p. 339). Our compassion for the humanity of our students means we desire for their true selves to be recognized, seen, and understood, “not just emotionally but cognitively, physically and even spiritually” (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 267). For the student, this is experienced as “a feeling of being safe, where one is drawn to risk because of the discoveries it might reveal; it is the excitement of discovering one’s self in the context of the larger world, rather than the worry of losing one’s self, in the process” (p. 267). One of the greatest gifts we can give pre-service teachers, and that they can give to their own students, is the gift of discovery that comes when our full presence facilitates expression of their authentic humanity.

“Power with.” Moving forward with trust, mutual empathy, and authenticity means coming to understand the acts of shared power these entail. RCT draws much attention to power in relationships, particularly as it has historically been used by some to dominate others and as it operates as one of the means by which a Western epistemology of separation and competition is perpetuated. Under these conditions, power typically exists as one person or group’s “power
over another. In the classroom, this is seen, for example, as teachers’ power over students as they make most decisions as to curricular content, pedagogy, assessment, and so on. In the other direction, students theoretically hold some power over teachers in districts who use students’ test achievement to evaluate teachers’ performance and whether they get to keep their jobs, or, in extreme cases, whether the school even remains open (Saltman, 2012). In higher education, the students do hold some power over their instructors’ livelihoods by means of officially or unofficially evaluating their performance, recommending or enrolling in future courses with the same instructor, or even whether or not they choose to remain in and financially support the university. These types of power are not really in the hands of the students, however, but ultimately in those of administrators and policy makers, so basically, both teachers and students are threatened by someone or something holding “power over” their futures. This goes beyond the more confined effects of a teacher’s power over students through traditional, banking pedagogy; this larger power-over threatens individuals’ and groups’ sense of security, triggering a fear of nonconformity that can paralyze efforts toward trust, mutual empathy, and authenticity.

On the contrary, RCT positions people in growth-fostering relationships as actively creating “power with” one another. In their study of female dispositions, early theorists discovered that women use “power with” in relationships in order to foster others’ unique development (Miller & Stiver, 1997). A teacher of any gender enacts this special attribute when using power “to increase the other person’s resources and strengths in many dimensions—emotional, intellectual, psychological, and more” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 16). When power is not used over others to intimidate or control them, but instead with them, it empowers both actors to grow.
The power of people to interact so that both benefit is unlimited. It is possible to create repeatedly more of this kind of power...teacher and student...can and do engage in mutual empathy and mutual empowerment. Each may contribute a different kind of action based on her/his age, role, or experience, but each can be fully engaged in, and affected by, their shared activity. (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 47)

This symbiosis of activity through mutually empowering exchanges between student and teacher leads to growth on both their parts, as they are both positioned equally as givers and receivers of knowledge and enrichment.

Because our culture inherently stations us in hierarchical roles that can be difficult to shake, close attention to compassion is still necessary in even the most democratic classrooms where students and teachers actively co-create learning together. With consciousness of the structurally imposed power differentials between them, and in order to account for the inevitable disconnections that occur in any relationship, compassion and mutual empathy help to preserve a power-with stance in the classroom. Power-with is perhaps most important in nurturing trust and authenticity with traditionally disempowered people and groups, such as underprivileged students and their families who have grown accustomed to a “politics of desperation” in which they have been victimized by reforms that were supposed to help them (Stovall, 2013). Indeed, part of the potency and importance of compassion lies in its ability to disrupt such inequities.

If a person with power hurts a person with less power and the less powerful person can represent his or her hurt to the more powerful person, who then responds with empathy and earnestness, both people develop an enhanced sense of mattering to each other and of being effective. Trust grows and the relationship gains strength, stability and resilience. (Jordan, 2014, p. 682)
Teacher educators and future teachers must learn how best to craft an environment of trust and to enact mutual empathy with their students by sharing power with them.

**Growth-in-connection.** All of these factors contribute to what RCT proponents term *growth-in-connection*, which is essentially the enhanced ability to learn and progress through healthy, growth-fostering relationships. Knowing what we know about trust, mutual empathy, authenticity, and enacting power with others, it seems nonsensical to believe that growth could ever possibly occur through the opposites of isolation, separation, disconnection, or competition—in essence, growth-limiting relationships.

While the attribute of “independence” has rarely held a negative connotation in our traditional understandings of human development in the context of educational, personal, and interpersonal growth, perhaps it should. As Miller and Stiver (1997) summarize:

> In our view, the goal of development is not forming a separated self or finding gratification, but something else altogether—the ability to participate actively in relationships that foster the well-being of everyone involved…Participating in growth-fostering relationships is both the source and the goal of development. (p. 22)

As a crucial component of CCI, RCT situates compassionate, caring relationships at the center of any worthwhile teaching and learning endeavor. This is particularly significant when the goal of that endeavor is to create genuinely humane and empathetic future educators empowered to do the same for their own students, often despite cultural and structural norms that encourage them, or at least make it too easy for them, to do otherwise.

**Conclusion**

It is clear through this examination of the theoretical components of critical pedagogy and relational–cultural theory that they would have a strong influence on any practice of
emancipatory education such as that embodied in critically compassionate intellectualism. Remembering to honor the roots of CCI within a social justice project for Latinx students, I have expanded on the project in order to show how CCI can help future educators from all backgrounds better understand the needs of their future students, especially those educators who will teach in racially diverse or impoverished communities. “For critical social reform to occur, teachers must become grassroots educational activists who recognize their capacity and potential as both intellectuals and leaders in reform that follows a social transformational model” (Fregeau & Leier, 2002, p. 172). In order to successfully advocate for their future students, it is imperative that teacher education programs nurture pre-service teachers’ sense of their own and others’ humanity and inherent worth, co-empower them to understand both the material and existential purposes of education, and facilitate their learning about social, political, historical, economic, and other contexts that influence the varied learning experiences of students in all settings. Through these efforts, it is my hope that future educators would be better conductors of as well as activists for socially just practices in education.
Chapter 3: Methodological Framework

Over the course of four semesters, I conducted practitioner and participatory action research on my use of critically compassionate intellectualism (CCI) in my *Introduction to Education* courses. This dissertation represents a qualitative analysis of how CCI influenced my teaching and students’ learning across the four semesters. The CCI stance not only influenced my classroom practice, it also governed the ways I could study that practice while still upholding this stance. Given these challenges, as well as the teacher education practice and theoretical orientations explored in chapters one and two, in this chapter I will explain how I applied traditions in action research to study the implementation and implications of CCI, and in ways that were consistent with CCI’s inherent values. I will begin with the study’s contextualization, including my positionality and other assumptions and how these contributed to my choice of methodology. I will then describe and justify the specific components of how I enacted my action research project.

**Research Questions**

One of the main ideals of my emancipatory educational and research stance has been valuing the students’ or participants’ knowledge as much as my own, and trusting them to understand their own needs. As such, I found it necessary to involve at least some form of participatory meaning-making in the devising of my original research question. This led me toward the beginning of my research to discuss with students straightforwardly what aspects of our course they saw as most important and worthy of study. Their answers, combined with my own understandings of my work as a practitioner, helped me “name” what it was I was doing—CCI—in order to more deeply examine my approach.
Four semesters of my original research represented four action research cycles of action and reflection if viewed broadly, and many micro-cycles throughout each semester as I navigated students’ implicit and explicit responses and made constant adjustments in all the myriad choices I had to make as an instructor (Hill, 2015; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). In this fifth cycle—a more systematic and descriptive analysis of the data for my dissertation—I sought to make explicit connections between the CCI approach and how this shaped my practice and student responses during the first four cycles, as well as document my methodological processes as a contribution toward understanding more socially just research methods. Specifically, I asked:

1. How has CCI shaped my research methodology and how is this significant to the field of educational research?
2. How are my policies, practices, and pedagogy as an instructor influenced by the CCI approach?
3. How have students responded specifically to these policies, practices, and pedagogy, and in what ways are these responses evidenced?
4. How are my enactment of CCI and these student responses significant for teacher education?

Here I answer question one, describing the research methodologies I used during both the active research and the analysis cycles that helped me answer my other questions in sufficiently humane and just ways.

**Research to Defy Boundaries**

Because the aim of this work was to appraise the value of embodying a critical and socially just stance in the classroom, I felt it necessary to also name the epistemological barriers
that continue to constrain certain kinds of research and evaluation in the field of education. Kincheloe (2008) has very succinctly identified these barriers in his concept of FIDUROD, “an acronym for the basic features of a contemporary mechanistic epistemology that is used sometimes unconsciously to shape the knowledge that permeates Western and Western-influenced cultures” (p. 22). In short, this epistemology is: formal, intractable, decontextualized, universalistic, reductionistic, and one dimensional (Kincheloe, 2008), and it is evidenced in positivistic paradigms that attempt to control rather than embrace the complexity of educational experience.

Alternatively, the past few years have witnessed an upsurge of interest in more contextualized and descriptive methods of research and evaluation, as discussed by Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011): “Indeed, it would be difficult to miss the distinct turn of the social sciences toward more interpretive, post-modern, and critical practices and theorizing…The legitimacy of postpositivist and postmodern paradigms is well established and at least equal to the legitimacy of received and conventional paradigms” (p. 97). Likewise, the American Educational Research Association’s journal *Educational Researcher* devoted a special section to questioning “What should count as quality education research?” that emphasized the misguidedness of approaching work in the social sciences as we do the “hard” sciences (Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014; Phillips, 2014; Rudolph, 2014; Wieman, 2014).

The University of Cincinnati has also been undergoing a major transformation toward broader diversity and inclusion, investing millions to shore up programs and organizations that support minority students, as well as incorporating credentials associated with a focus on diversity into its hiring requisites (Ono, November 24, 2015; Ono, December 1, 2015; Ono, December 09, 2015; Ono & Davenport, December 02, 2015; Ono & Marshall, November 30,
2015). This was important to the research methods I chose because it was in this setting that my research was conducted, thus the types of research coming out of this institution should also support these efforts. And specifically, as I have previously stated, our teacher education program emphasizes preparing educators “committed to issues of social justice” for urban students (UC School of Education, 2017), who, despite decades of educational reform, remain underserved (Au, 2009; Donnor, 2013; Rector-Aranda, 2016; Saltman, 2012; Stovall, 2013). For too long there has been an over-emphasis on fragmented and objective measures that only shallowly gauge a person’s growth and experiences, and those who seem to suffer and be silenced the most from this narrow focus have been underprivileged and disenfranchised populations, as it is they who hold the least power to find other ways of showing their growth and being heard (Frank, 2013).

What is still comparatively lacking is research that is conducted holistically and democratically with and for participants with the main goal being empowerment of the individuals involved, and the secondary goal being transferability to similar settings (Dick, 2014; Malterud, 2001) and wider dissemination of findings. In this type of work, research must at the very least produce change for its immediate stakeholders, the researcher included, and ideally, sustained improved practice and experiences through future action (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). As such, this study adds to the growing, yet incomplete, body of knowledge generated using methods of practitioner and participatory action research in teacher education (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

Contextualizing My Researcher Stance

The positionality and assumptions that drive my work are undeniably relevant to the questions and design of my study, and should therefore be clearly articulated (Cochran-Smith &
Lytle, 2009a). In the research tradition I embrace, research is seen as more than a quest to learn—it is political and therefore clearly biased, this bias itself being critically examined in the process (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). While many would denounce this proclamation, instead assuming researchers can somehow set aside their own ideologies and aims for their work, as a critical scholar and researcher, these are exactly what drive my work, and as long as this is made explicit and accounted for, I believe the work to be more powerful and honest because of it (Maxwell, 2013). I can, of course, respect the practice of “bracketing,” but only with recognition that it should be a temporary move away from natural assumptions in order to stay “persistently curious about new phenomena” (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 419), rather than a denial of these assumptions.

Brydon-Miller (2004), in her description of the ways in which activist scholars choose to use their power and privilege, or sometimes to defy structural limitations that would impede their resistance, discusses the use of personal narrative as an assertion of the scholar’s subjective presence in his or her work: “To pretend invisibility through the use of the passive voice or a bland third-person narration of events masks the multiple ways in which the researcher, scholar, author shapes any act of inquiry” (p. 6). As a criticalist, I purposefully write in the first person and describe my connections to the subjects and actions about which I am writing. Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) describe the “criticalist as a researcher, teacher, or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions” (p. 164). Briefly, these assumptions are that thought is mediated by social and historical power relations; facts cannot be separated from values and ideology; relationships between concepts and objects are never fixed; language is central to subjectivity; some groups are privileged over others and most oppression results when subordinates accept this as natural or
inevitable; oppression must be viewed through its multiple forms and their interconnections; and, mainstream research practices tend to reproduce systems of oppression (Kincheloe et al., 2011). While attempting to place people and their ideas into neat packages is typically anathema within a critical stance, my positionality aligns with these assumptions, among others.

To further place myself within some common and relevant boxes, I am a middle-aged, white, working-class, cisgender female married to a Mexican immigrant, mother of three, a first-generation, non-traditional college student, and I suffer from an often debilitating yet invisible physical disability. More broadly, I have personally faced, and/or witnessed in close family members, varied educational, economic, legal, and political struggles, relational disconnections, nonconforming sexual identities, and profound physical and mental illness, and have dealt with death much too intimately. At the same time, I have certainly experienced comparable heights of joy, opportunity, adventure, and love. To describe all that makes up who I am as an academic, a researcher, an educator, and a human being would therefore take more space than I can realistically commit to here. It would require an epic autobiography, as my varying access to resources, personal tragedies, privileges, and other experiences have been plentiful at this point in my life. And in innumerable ways, my experiences have also been rife with paradox, which has greatly influenced my critical stance. My own encounters with the world have proven the dialectal nature of reality in which one can have conflicting identities, positionalities, and experiences simultaneously.

In order to specifically address the tensions I have previously expressed regarding my use of CCI as a white educator of mostly white students, I have also chosen to “research the self” in relation to my racial and cultural positionalities (Milner, 2007). My racial heritage is white, resting on European culture passed down from predecessors who were some of the first to
emigrate to the Americas—privileged immigrants at the beginning of our nation’s subsequently violent conquest of land that had once belonged to indigenous people of color. My husband, however, is a resident alien from Mexico City, and we have spent over twenty years navigating the different circumstances he faces as a modern immigrant of color from a nation whose immigrants to the U.S. have historically been (and under the current administration, are more than ever) viewed especially unfavorably compared with those from predominantly white nations. My children have a foot in each heritage and an even more complex racial/cultural status, which further encourages my desire for personal and societal consciousness when it comes to issues of race and culture.

Also because my cultural background is white/Eurocentric, my socially prescribed inclinations for a long time were to pursue a typical white, middle-class lifestyle, usually despite a lack of resources to match, leading to much financial failure and actually further distancing me from that lifestyle. Experiencing first-hand the damage this kind of cultural norming can cause also influences my stance against the uncritical glorification of certain cultural norms and statuses over others. Conversely, this inclination has also led me from a working class background to aspire toward a doctoral degree, through which I now try to stand up for those people and ideas our society and the dominant culture have marginalized.

These examples as well as my many other conflicting experiences and knowledges of racial/cultural privilege and oppression certainly impact “how I experience the world, what I emphasize in my research, and how I evaluate and interpret others and their experiences” (Milner, 2007, p. 395). And while I definitely have plenty of “white guilt,” it is not this self-centered emotion that drives my work, but a desire to honor all those lives who have and continue to suffer due to a global history of colonization and white supremacy in which many
have been treated inhumanely and unjustly, based largely in a “birth lottery” that is beyond these individuals’ control.

Suffice it to say that my resulting stance is that we should strive foremost to live in a just and caring world, where all are entitled to the same rights to happiness, health, and overall well-being, and where it is everyone’s responsibility to create and uphold these rights and opportunities for themselves and for each other. I view education as having the potential to be an emancipatory avenue through which all people should be able to gain the skills to co-exist and co-create this world, yet all too often education is bound to a flawed system that instead maintains the current state of hegemony and disconnection. I feel inclined based on my knowledge and position to contribute somehow to the changes required to remedy this. Meyerson (2001) describes my plight well in her concept of “tempered radicals,” individuals who slowly and steadily [push] back on conventions, creating opportunities for learning, and inspiring change within their organizations. Sometimes these individuals pave alternative roads just by quietly speaking up for their personal truths or by refusing to silence aspects of themselves that make them different from the majority. Other times they act more deliberately to change the way the organization does things. They are not heroic leaders of revolutionary change; rather, they are cautious and committed catalysts who keep going and who slowly make a difference...[They] struggle between their desire to act on their “different” selves and the need to fit into the dominant culture. Tempered radicals at once uphold their aspiration to be accepted insiders and their commitment to change the very system that often casts them as outsiders. (p. 5–6)

I have gained insight through existing research and my own work that agency and voice are strongly tied to individuals’ and groups’ ability to have a measure of control over how they are
treated, and to pursue their own outcomes and take ownership in those outcomes (Ardizzone, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2006; Rector-Aranda, 2014; Rector-Aranda & Raider-Roth, 2015). They are tied to how people learn and grow in their abilities to make critical choices about themselves and their place in society, and how they are able to help others do the same. As Freire (1970/1993) called it, this “conscientization” is imperative to any effort toward liberation of the mind and body, and therefore, it is essential that this be the foundation of a productive educational system. In my research I seek not only the conscientization of my students, but my own conscientization as both a practitioner and a researcher as well.

My research assumptions are constructivist, “an orientation toward social reality that assumes the beliefs and meaning people create and use fundamentally shape what reality is for them” (Neuman, 2006, p. 89). I believe that people can best tell their own stories, and that these stories are highly nuanced and unique to the individual, as are the realities attached to them. From my own experience, I know that people’s lives are shaped, and often scarred, by their experiences and positions of power and powerlessness, and we cannot begin to judge their understandings and capabilities without first learning as much as possible from these people’s own perspectives. I therefore approach research specifically from a critical constructivist stance that seeks to validate the experiences and ways of knowing of my participants (Kincheloe et al., 2011). “When critical constructivist researchers produce knowledge, they are not attempting to reduce variables but to maximize them. Such maximization produces a thicker, more detailed, more complex understanding of the social, political, economic, cultural, psychological and pedagogical world” (Steinberg, 2014, p. 204). When researching my own practice, I automatically become one of the participants, creating yet another layer of experience to be critically examined. Both Denzin and Lincoln (2013) and Kincheloe (2001) describe the concept
of the *bricoleur*, one who “understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 11). The *bricolage* is also a space where the researcher pragmatically uses whatever methodology best suits the situation, rather than expecting the situation to mold to a particular methodology. I would add that in action research, the stakeholders in the situation should also have the opportunity to inform the methodology, which is inherent in this practitioner study, and which I have also endeavored to do through participatory modes of inquiry.

**Action Research to Expand Horizons**

The foundational principles of action research as a mutually empathic form of inquiry wherein the researcher exerts authentic “power with” rather than “power over” participants correlates with key tenets of relational–cultural theory as identified in my theoretical framework. “Radical respect for others’ experiences, openness to being moved and influenced by others and shared power are at the heart of social justice…Data now shows that when empathy levels fall in a society, violence increases, economic inequality increases, instability infiltrates the social institutions, health conditions worsen and educational systems are short-changed” (Jordan, 2014, p. 682). Action research was the appropriate choice for this study because at its core, action research is research done *by* and *with* actors and stakeholders in a setting, rather than *to* or *on* them, which is vital to research meant to empower participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015). “AR promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just, sustainable, or satisfying situation for the stakeholders” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 3). In addition to being a researcher, I was a participant and stakeholder along with my students, which is significant considering educational research is ordinarily conducted by outside researchers on
teachers and students who hold little or no influence on the process or its implications for their work.

Although it might have been possible to study my question using a different research approach, action research was more fitting than any other specifically because of its emphasis on immediate reflection, action, and movement toward positive social change for those directly involved in the research. Unlike most other forms of research that are purposely designed to separate out theorizing from action, action research, as its name implies, is unequivocally meant to link interpretation and theorizing to immediate action with and on behalf of the participants. Likewise, while some methods consider relationships between researchers and their participants to cause unacceptable bias, action research sees relationships and their consideration as key elements of any humanizing research process. Furthermore, as action research is less a distinct methodology and more a larger research paradigm, the methods under which it may be enacted are practically unlimited. This fits with the notion of research as a bricolage in which the setting and subject actions are not controlled in order to test an effect, but rather, the methods are evolving and directed by the identified needs of the changing actors and context. This focus on the participants as subjects rather than objects aligns well with a social justice stance.

The study of CCI and how it shaped both the instructor and students falls under the action research category of educational action research, and because this was a study of my own practice, practitioner action research was the fitting methodology. However, because I still sought the input of the whole “community” of my classroom, participatory action research techniques were a valuable addition for gaining insight from multiple perspectives. I will first describe these methodologies, then, in the remaining sections I will discuss the specific methods I used. Traditional qualitative methods align with an interpretive and participatory framework,
but even these must sometimes be adjusted to ensure they fit with a relational and
transformational model. I will discuss this as well as ethics and rigor, sources and collection of
data, analysis and interpretation methods, and finally, how implications, documentation, and
dissemination must influence future action on this topic. Simultaneously, I will note the
necessary modifications of accepted research methods to fit the political, critical, and ethical
stance within a liberatory action research paradigm.

**Action Research**

An action research study is “defined by its unapologetic ethical and political engagement
and its commitment to working with community partners to achieve positive social change”
(Brydon-Miller, 2009, p. 243). Action research is best known for its cyclical, iterative nature,
wherein after identifying a problem, the researcher and/or community plans, acts on that plan,
observes, reflects, and makes the next plan based on that reflection, beginning the cycle again
(Hill, 2015; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). Herr and Anderson (2015) illustrate the less-
than-predictable nature of action research vividly:

> Action researchers are proposing to document what can seem like a moving train where
they are both passengers as well as part of the train crew. Much as with a train ride,
researchers are capturing the process as well as narrating an ultimate destination. To
further complicate the picture, because ongoing action is involved, researchers are called
on to make meaning and then take action that will intervene in the site and test the
questions being explored…Qualitative researchers often refer to ongoing data analysis
but in action research, there is virtually no choice since it is imperative for the process.

(p. 90)
In action research, the methods are emergent and generally not static or pre-determined past the first cycle, making it difficult to determine a set research design, or even a fixed research question. It is typical through the cycles that what is learned will change the plans and require a re-evaluation of the entire array of questions, methods, and processes (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Raider-Roth, 2005). This study proved true to these qualities of action research. At each decision point along the way, I found I had gained new insight and perspectives that affected how I should proceed.

**Educational action research.** Educational action research centers on “altering curriculum, challenging common school practices, and working for social change by engaging in a continuous process of problem posing, data gathering, analysis, and action” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009b, p. 40). Noffke (2009) writes about the different and interconnected dimensions of educational action research—professional, personal, and political. The *professional* dimension lies in its use as a practical tool for teachers to generate knowledge, as well as new and different “ways of knowing” and understanding, while bridging theory and practice. The *personal* explores the growth and development individual teachers can experience through their work, and more saliently, how it helps them create practices that are more consistent with their personal beliefs about education, particularly regarding issues of social justice. This also connects to the professional when the focus on personal learning and development through action research helps improve the status of teachers as professionals. The *political* dimension embodies the aims of democratic practice and the use of research to directly leverage social change through new avenues of both knowledge generation and implementation. The contextual and often localized nature of action research creates both relevant professional and personal growth while politically linking these local struggles and developments to larger social and global contexts (Noffke,
Viewing the professional and personal as forms of and inseparable from the political is key to critical approaches to emancipatory action research, as promoted by Carr and Kemmis (2009), who argue that such action research is “constituted and constitutive of the values and principles of the democratic form of social life it seeks to foster and achieve” (p. 74).

**Practitioner action research.** The practitioner action research movement in North America rose in the past few decades in response to several circumstances: the wider acceptance of narrative, qualitative, and “insider” forms of research; reports that school-based change efforts were more successfully implemented than external, top-down initiatives; the desire to re-professionalize teaching in the face of increasing deskilling and distrust of teacher knowledge; a growing use of teacher research in teacher education programs and university/school collaborations; and certain restructuring movements that emphasized teacher inquiry and reflection (Anderson et al., 2007). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009a) point out that much practitioner research is conducted solely for the betterment of practice, for which outcomes and publication may be limited to local participants and colleagues, or never circulated at all. This is practitioner inquiry conducted by “people who teach differently, who advocate for students, who take leadership roles in their schools or districts or universities, and who question current assumptions and taken-for-granted practices” (p. 7). Teacher researchers have also, for the most part, conducted their inquiries lacking much logistical support or a reward system for doing so (Anderson et al., 2007). These types of projects have therefore remained mostly invisible to the larger academic community, however as this form of research continues to gain acceptance and is more broadly used for teacher training, development, and improvement of practice, many practitioner studies are finding their way into wider distribution. In fact, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009a) argue that going public is an essential part of high-quality practitioner research.
Practitioner research is a way of taking a social justice stance in the face of the “current educational regime” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009a, p. 2), which is typified by positivist methods and epistemologies such as those to which Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998a) propose critical teaching as an alternative paradigm, as outlined in my theoretical framework. Just as critical teaching is “counter-positivist” teaching, practitioner research can be a counter-positivist form of research when it is grounded in a radical stance. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009a) describe this stance, where practitioner researchers are “deliberative intellectuals who constantly theorize practice as part of practice itself…the goal of teacher learning initiatives is the joint constructions of local knowledge, the questioning of common assumptions, and thoughtful critique of the usefulness of research generated by others both inside and outside contexts of practice” (p. 2). This practitioner research study was primarily first person action research, which is a systematic inquiry into personal practice marked by the desire to inform or transform (Adams, 2015) based in an extended epistemology that recognizes experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical ways of knowing (Heron & Reason, 1997). It is an investigation into experience through a full range of methods assembled to suit the occasion all within the characteristic action research spirals of inquiry (Adams, 2015).

**Participatory action research.** While this was primarily a practitioner inquiry, my assumptions and social-justice stance required a participatory component. “Even in a case in which a lone practitioner is studying his or her own practice, participation or at least ongoing feedback should be sought from other stakeholders in the setting or community to ensure a democratic outcome and provide an alternative source of explanations” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 4). Participatory action research as its own methodology entails several characteristics that correspond with other forms of critical action research, which are described by Anderson et al.
(2007): contextualization of events within historical and macro-level social forces; integration of theory and practice, and of research and action; dialogue changing a subject-object relationship into a subject-subject relationship; participants and the researcher producing critical knowledge toward social transformation; and immediate application of research results (p. 25). While most participatory research involves the community members in the entire research process, sharing ownership in the devising of questions and methods, data collection, and interpretation, and especially, subsequent action, this was beyond the scope of this particular project. However, in the spirit of democratic practice, I utilized a condensed participatory element as part of the data collection and interpretation. This was accomplished through small projects within the practitioner cycles of inquiry that allowed students to produce their own data and co-interpret it, enabling more accurate actions on my part as the practitioner.

**Qualitative Research Methods**

Interpretive and critical qualitative methods of design, data collection, and analysis—modified where necessary to fit an action research methodology—were most appropriate for this study based on a socially just research stance. Ellingson (2013) describes a “qualitative continuum” in which research methods may move between “humanistic, openly subjective” forms that are artistic and impressionist, through a “middle-ground approach,” to a far-right emphasis on traditional positivist methods of value-neutral, scientific experimentation (p. 414–422). While many who hold my research assumptions embark upon more artistic data and interpretation representations, my own disposition and comfort level tend toward the middle-ground, which is “not a fence-sitting, ambivalent, or commitment-phobic place, but a rich, varied, and complex location…that offers descriptions, exposition, analysis, insight, theory, and critique, blending elements of art and science or transcending the categories” (p. 421). Socially
engaged research recognizes the array of ways in which participants know and show that knowledge, and the researcher’s own ways of doing so are therefore no exception. The qualitative continuum facilitates this kind of authentically enacted research.

**Distinctive Conceptions of Ethics and Rigor**

Rigor and ethics must be approached unconventionally in action research due to the typically “insider” role of the researcher, as well as the multi-modal, layered, and participatory ways this research is conducted. In such highly interpretive contexts, “the moral integrity of the researcher is a critically important aspect of ensuring that the research process and a researcher’s findings are ‘trustworthy’ and valid” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 86, emphases original). Therefore, ethics will be the first topic addressed in this section. In considering further ways action researchers may give thorough attention to trustworthiness/validity, a good starting place is to weigh different concepts of rigor in other forms of research, then look at how these are interpreted and expanded upon in action research settings.

**Ethics.** Action research has as its central goal the betterment of the communities in which it is practiced, and therefore relationships are critical to this form of research, which, of course, has ethical implications. Zeni (2009) writes about negotiating the dual roles of researcher and insider, positing that “the bonds of caring, responsibility, and social commitment that engage action researchers with other stakeholders may be the most appropriate basis of ethical decision-making” (p. 257). Augmenting the traditional, “contractual” research ethics utilized in required institutional review board approvals and consenting processes, action research embodies a “covenental” research ethics in order to acknowledge this relational factor, which suggests “a solemn and personally compelling commitment to act in the good of others” (Brydon-Miller, 2009, p. 255). Where contractual research ethics ignore and even eschew interaction and
relationships between researchers and subjects, covenantal ethics is fortified by such interaction, in which bonds of mutual respect, responsibility, and trust are forged as a vital part of the research process (Brydon-Miller, 2009). As with care ethics, this shift from principalist notions of ethical research conduct to “a view of ethics embedded in contextual relationships” requires the researcher to consider ethics as an ongoing consideration and to implement substantial reflexivity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 106). Likewise, researchers are called upon to be reflective not only in the traditional sense of thinking about their expectations, actions, and results from a personal perspective, but must also discuss implications of their own biographies and what assumptions might impact the work (Zeni, 2009), as I have endeavored to do through my positionality statement earlier.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) conclude that ethical considerations need to be specifically addressed throughout the research process. In addition to adhering to IRB protocol—which, ironically, determined this as “not human subjects” research and therefore exempted it from further oversight—in my study I utilized the process of Structured Ethical Reflection (SER). The SER process compels the researcher to establish a set of ethical values from the beginning of the research and continually question and assess how these values are being upheld throughout the study, from developing partnerships and constructing the research question through to going public (Brydon-Miller, 2009; Brydon-Miller, 2012; Brydon-Miller, Rector Aranda, & Stevens, 2015; Stevens, Brydon-Miller, & Raider-Roth, 2016). In my SER, I identified several groupings of values relative to my own actions and in my treatment of participants, including: Compassion, Curiosity, Adaptability, Conscientiousness, Democratic

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5 The University of Cincinnati IRB offers this somewhat unique designation to research it deems to be producing non-generalizable knowledge, among other criteria. For more information, see http://researchcompliance.uc.edu/HRPP/IRB/NotHumanSubjects.aspx
Practice, Transparency, Rigor, Inclusiveness, Conviction, and Resilience (See Appendix A). I adapted the original SER grid by filling in an additional column to the right of my original questions noting how/whether I had answered those questions and thus upheld each of my values in order to meet the high standards I set for myself, for the work, and on behalf of participants. This also made it easier for me to think about the tensions I had encountered throughout the study and whether/how the SER had helped me navigate them.

Looking back on the overall study has raised several questions for me about my use of and the usefulness of the SER for addressing the many and often competing values and positionalities I held along the way. Specifically, I looked for ways the SER might have assisted me regarding the tension I came to feel in using a framework derived from work with minority students for my work with more privileged students. In the modern era, when racial violence is still a prominent part of the landscape and candid discussions of race and whiteness are becoming more and more essential in our work, how do we account for race in the purpose and product of our research? How does the SER account for and/or influence the researcher positionalities and theoretical underpinnings of a study, and might this be a new column that should come even before “developing partnerships” or “devising the research question”? I have concluded that it was my own interpretation of the SER process that foreclosed this possibility, however, I do believe making this step more explicit as well as adding values like “racial justice” and “racial awareness” to the ever-growing list of sample SER values will be beneficial for my future projects.

Compared with my previous uses of SER that took place over the course of a few months, another difference in this project was that it spanned years, and I can see how this also had implications for how well I made use of it. I wonder now about devising questions perhaps
years before my final analysis, and whether it was too easy to feel like I had everything covered and not even realize when new values had emerged or new questions were in order. I think this is what prompted me to add the “answer” column to my final SER, however, I did this rather late in the study, retrospectively. How can we keep an SER more at the center of a project so as not to lose sight of how it can help with emerging tensions? One potential solution is to pose questions about each particular phase of a study only just before beginning work on that phase. However, this restricts the potential to be able to foresee and account for some issues before they arise by looking at the entire span of the project in advance. Perhaps the solution is to do both—create the value chart from start to finish before beginning the project, then re-visit/re-create each column along the way. In the future, I plan to make this another mandatory part of my SER process.

**Rigor.** While quantitative studies are marked by their own specific measures of rigor, qualitative studies adopt measures of trustworthiness more suitable to this paradigm such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) articulates in detail how these can be direct replacements for quantitative measures. Credibility, he argues, stands in place of quantitative’s internal validity; transferability in place of external validity/generalizability; dependability rather than reliability; and confirmability instead of objectivity (p. 64). Malterud (2001) mentions these measures as well as those offered by Mays and Pope (2000): triangulation, respondent validation, clear detailing of data collection and analysis methods, reflexivity, attention to negative cases, and fair dealing. She offers her own guidelines for relevance and validity, adding that reflexivity must be considered just as important in qualitative research. She suggests that in order to ensure trustworthiness the researcher must: question findings and interpretations, taking nothing for
granted; assess internal and external validity; consider context and bias; and display and discuss the processes of analysis (Malterud, 2001).

These are all worthwhile to think about when conducting practitioner and participatory action research using interpretive and qualitative methods. However, while it is often useful to show how an underprivileged paradigm can meet equivalent standards as the privileged paradigm, this approach does rather contradict the plight to articulate a completely new counter-narrative that challenges the favoring of some norms over others. While action research has not fixed a specific set of alternate criteria that make up what quantitative researchers would call “validity” and qualitative researchers “trustworthiness,” action researchers do equally value and seek rigor in their work (Anderson et al., 2007). I argue that we take it further and think about it more deeply precisely because in these projects there is so much at stake for both the participants and the researcher, as well as for the reputation and acceptance of action research as a paradigm in general.

In practitioner action research particularly, many of the criteria for trustworthiness used in qualitative methods are inappropriate given the traditionally outsider role of the qualitative researcher versus the insider role of the practitioner researcher. Because the right guidelines are still evolving, practitioner researchers must take it upon themselves to navigate the available options and apply those which make most sense for the particular study, adding others where the existing are inadequate. I find that Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) offer criteria especially useful when practitioner inquiry is undertaken with the goal of transformative action. These forms of validity/trustworthiness include outcome and process validity as well as measuring how democratic, catalytic, and dialogic the research methods have been (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 40–44). These were all relevant criteria for studying CCI through practitioner action research.
Anderson et al. (2007) describe *outcome* validity in action research as the degree to which the problem under investigation is resolved, or a deeper understanding has been achieved that will help lead to its resolution, with the recognition that as often as not, action research can lead to a whole new set of questions, as well as the fact that “success” is subjective. In this study, both students and I were able to describe the mechanisms and influences of my use of CCI, reflect on what occurred, and make connections between CCI and our personal growth and improved understandings, therefore, the criteria for outcome validity was achieved.

*Process* validity entails whether the questions are framed and answered in ways that allow ongoing learning, and requires evidence that findings are the result of several reflective cycles, as well as dealing with what counts as “evidence” (Anderson et al., 2007). They note that this is where the action researcher might depend on some qualitative criteria such as triangulation, which is accomplished by incorporating a variety of methods and forms of data into the study and seeing how they converge. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) discuss triangulation, saying, “Viewed as a crystalline form, as a montage, or as a creative performance around a central theme, triangulation as a form of, or alternative to, validity thus can be extended. Triangulation is the display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously” (p. 10). In the case of this research design, using multiple research cycles, both practitioner and participatory methods, as well as multiple data sources and modes of interpretation, fulfilled the criteria for process validity.

Democratic, catalytic, and dialogic validity are terms most specific to action research. *Democratic* validity, according to Anderson et al. (2007), denotes how collaboratively the research is conducted with stakeholders, or how multiple perspectives and interests are taken into consideration so that results do not benefit some at the expense of others. Again, this was mainly
accomplished in my study by using both practitioner and participatory methods, and through member-checking findings with students. Catalytic validity conveys how the research serves to reorient, focus, and energize participants and the researchers themselves, moving each toward action or reaffirming their support of the subject of inquiry. “The most powerful action research studies are those in which the practitioners recount a spiraling change in their own and their participants’ understandings” which “highlights the transformative potential of action research” (p. 42–43). As will be shown in chapter four, students and I were both able to experience profound personal and relational growth and learning through the CCI framework. Students also reported feeling particularly engaged by the participatory projects we conducted together, which helped them see their experiences, knowledges, and ideas around educational topics in new and exciting ways. Finally, dialogic validity is akin to peer review processes in the larger research community, and is usually accomplished either through collaborative inquiry with participants—as in this study—or the enlisting of a group of “critical friends” who can help the researcher to more judiciously examine findings in order to detect manifestations of bias, or to advocate for alternative interpretations.

Sources and Collection of Data

Brennan and Noffke (2009) draw our attention to the importance of theory in relation to how we view “data,” particularly within educational action research. It is therefore very important to consider the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of what data sources are chosen and how they are collected. A politically and socially engaged project must consider data that is conceived, generated, and collected by the immediate stakeholders of primary status. While the goals and input of stakeholders outside the classroom must also be considered, in this case, their input was already fairly clear, embodied in all the mandates that
had already been placed on the course to begin with by the university, the School of Education, and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Additional requisites had to be met to qualify the course in the university’s general education program, discussed below. Certain topics, assignments, and student learning outcomes were required for fulfilling these varied obligations, and as such, only certain types of data were available, with little space for other types of data to be generated, nor time for their collection and interpretation. My students and I negotiated this structure by engaging with existing topics and assignments in the most personally chosen, reflective, and descriptive ways allowable.

**Setting and Participant Selection**

The setting for this study was the University of Cincinnati, an urban Midwestern research university with a teacher education program specifically geared toward preparing teachers for urban contexts. I studied a foundations course that I taught called *EDST 1001: Introduction to Education*, which teaching majors are required to take toward the beginning of their bachelor’s degree programs. This course was also open to the wider undergraduate student population as a *Historical Perspectives* or *Diversity and Culture* option to fill general education requirements, however, the majority of students were teaching majors or those seriously considering becoming a teaching major at the early childhood, middle childhood, or secondary level. This course is frequently taught by graduate students like myself who are working toward their doctoral degrees in an education field. This was the first course I had ever taught at the college level, and I spent four semesters teaching it. Each semester I taught one section of the course, and student enrollment varied widely, with my first section having only eight students, and my final section having maximum enrollment of 32 students. Any student who enrolled in this course was
qualified to take part in this study, since, of course, I wanted to include as many perspectives as possible.

As previously mentioned, the IRB exempted my study from oversight, however, I chose to use a formal participant consenting process as part of my own ethical program, which gave students many options to specify the types of data they were willing to share (See consent form, Appendix B). I verbally informed students at the beginning of each course that as a doctoral student I was studying my use of CCI with them (the research began at the end of the first semester, so that class was the exception), however, I held off formally recruiting them to share their data till the final weeks of each semester, after the students and I had sufficient time to get to know one another and there was a degree of understanding and trust between us. I felt this was important given my stance that relationships are a vital part of this type of research. It was also imperative that the research not alter or interrupt students’ regular course experience since the primary purpose of examining these concepts was for students to benefit from improvements to my pedagogy and curriculum. Therefore, all assignments, interactions, requests for feedback, etc. would have occurred with or without this study (except discussing the research with them and the consenting process, of course). I hoped that asking for students’ consent later would further ensure that my research did not interfere with their learning experience, as I believe this prevented them from altering their activity throughout the semester because it might be used as part of the research, resulting in more accurate and authentic work. Moreover, this allowed students to know exactly what they had already produced that might be included in the study, so they were able to consider their level of comfort sharing these existing artifacts, and had the option to exclude from the study any portion they did not want to share.
In order to avoid coercion, after fully explaining the research I allowed students to decide in private, either on their own time or while I was outside the room, whether to consent to be included in the research, placing their consent documents in an envelope that remained sealed until after grades were posted. I assured them that any data collected about them would not be used or would be deleted if I found they did not consent once I opened the envelope. It was also made clear that anonymous forms of data would be used unless someone objected, which no one did. A large proportion of students (N=65 out of 92) consented to at least partially participate (i.e., they might have preferred not to be interviewed, but they allowed their assignments to be studied, etc.). I attribute this high consent rate to students’ familiarity with me and the relationships I had built with them, aligning with my covenantal ethical stance. I think this is noteworthy when compared to the typical style of research recruitment done by an unfamiliar researcher as soon as he or she meets potential participants and before any real trust or knowledge of one another has been established. I feel my approach upholds the “transparency/trust/mutuality” and “caring/compassion/kindness” values in my SER. While some might argue that established relationships influenced my students’ decision to participate, I contend that this was the point. How often as researchers are we sorry to have missed out on the perspectives of those who did not consent to be included in a study? In this case, their consenting was partially the result of their trust in me as a researcher, so I was able to enroll more participants and therefore have far fewer gaps in my findings because of it.

Sources of Data

Many types and a very large quantity of data were available from the four semester cycles (See Figure 3.1 below). For the analysis cycle conducted for my dissertation, I selected the data that most directly answered my research questions.
Practitioner and student data. My personal data included planning and observation notes, syllabi and other curricular artifacts, and critical reflective journaling using Napan’s (2011) Questions for Co-Creative Inquiry (See answered questions in Appendix C), with awareness of the roles of my own feelings and intentionality (Heen, 2015; McCallum & Nicolaides, 2015). Student data and artifacts I chose to analyze included:

- Mid-semester questionnaires from the first semester (N=5) and anonymous early-term feedback online questionnaires from the other 3 classes (N=anonymous) that asked:

  1. What has helped your learning so far in this class?
  2. What has hindered your learning, or you think could be improved? What would you rather see or have happening?
  3. How are the readings and assignments working out for you?
End-of-course reflection questionnaires for all but the first semester (when these were not used yet) (N=51) that asked:

1. How did the relationship with your **peers** help or hinder your learning in this class?
2. How did the relationship with your **instructor** help or hinder your learning in this class?
3. How was your experience in this course different or similar to **other courses**?
4. What **ONE THING** about this course do you wish all courses had?
5. Did you feel comfortable **communicating** with your instructor for this course? Please explain.
6. What **ideas** have been most important to you and your learning this semester?
7. What aspects of the course have been most **supportive** of your learning?
8. What aspects of the course have interrupted or **hindered** your learning?

- Anonymous formal university-wide course evaluations (N≈67) (See Appendix D)
- Final portfolios (N=40)
- Audio recordings of informal 15-minute end-of-course meetings (N=18) and longer semi-structured interviews (N=2) based on the same questions as in the end-of-course questionnaires

Questionnaires were based on topics not addressed in formal course evaluations that were relevant for my understanding of CCI and improvement of the course. During data analysis, these questionnaires formed the foundation for understanding the student response, as I discuss later. Portfolios were not coded, but were used to check findings from these questionnaires around the ideas and activities students identified as being most important to their learning or
impactful on their evolving understandings. A sample number of portfolios were used as sources for quoted material (N=6 out of 40, 2 each from 3 classes).

**Participatory data.** The participatory portion of my data involved students enrolled in the final two semesters in the research method known as Photovoice, in which participants are not subjects, but creators of inquiry through photography and a collaborative meaning-making process (Griebling, Vaughn, Howell, Ramstetter, & Dole, 2013; Lykes & Scheib, 2015; Mejia, 2015; C. Wang, 1997). The Photovoice project counted as a journal assignment for students in which they were asked to take five to ten photos of what education means to them, describe each photo briefly, and select a favorite or most important picture to be shared with the class for analysis (they were also allowed not to share a photo if they preferred, as these were sometimes very personal photos/descriptions). I arranged these photos and accompanying captions into a Prezi that we used during class time to discuss themes and implications (See Fig. 3.2 below). The Photovoice products examined in this fifth cycle were the results from the two class-level analysis sessions, and individual student Photovoice journals (N= 33).

Fig. 3. 2. Brainstorming themes and issues from the Photovoice Prezi during class time
The other participatory method used in three classes was a Group-Level Assessment (GLA) activity, an anonymous, participant-driven approach for them to make meaning of their evolving learning, as well as assess course content and practices, which then helps inform proposed changes or solutions (Vaughn & Lohmueller, 2014). For this activity, I placed 25–30 prompts on separate sheets of paper around the room, taped to walls or on desks, and students walked around the room responding anonymously to the prompts (See Appendix E for example prompts and Fig. 3.3 below for a sample page with student responses).

Fig. 3. 3. Sample page from Fall 2015 GLA
In the first semester, the GLA was more informal and was conducted on the last day of class for my own assessment purposes, so I reviewed their answers on my own. In the next two classes, we did the GLA around mid-term and reviewed responses together, discussing students’ evolving ideas, and brainstorming solutions for any areas we thought could improve the course experience. The fourth class did not do a GLA.

**Considerations.** As shown, not all data types were drawn from all four courses, and this was due to varied factors, most of which were pragmatic, or a side effect of my own time/energy constraints or the iterative nature of authentic classroom practice. For example, I did not have the idea to do Photovoice until the second year of my teaching. I did not conduct a GLA in the final course because other curricular and student needs made it difficult to set aside time for this. In the third semester, I lost the opportunity to use student portfolios because they were deleted from where the course documents were housed online by the university before I had a chance to save them to a local file. I selected quotes from sample portfolios only as points of cross-verification with other findings, because fully analyzing them all was beyond the scope of this study. Likewise, because audio-recorded sessions with students were based on the same questions found on the end-of-course questionnaires, I did not transcribe and formally code the majority of them, but instead listened to them as a way to corroborate or gain deeper insight into students’ written responses. Because the quantity of data was so abundant, there is rich potential for future action research cycles that concentrate more closely on these other data sources.

As a practitioner already intimately familiar with every possible piece of data, I was able to confidently make these kinds of decisions. These were also some of the ways I upheld my CCI stance. First, from a critical perspective, I challenged norms around what counts as data—in this case, whether uniformity is necessary to create a full and nuanced understanding of a
phenomenon. Similarly, I attended the question of whose knowledge counts—I honored my own intuitions as a practitioner and researcher by making decisions about data inclusion and analysis that honored my existing knowledge. Finally, I was able to be compassionate to myself as a graduate student and a teacher–researcher by crafting a manageable study given the dynamic nature of teaching, learning, and classroom life. The appropriateness of these decisions was confirmed by the fact that the findings across all data I analyzed resulted in consistent findings and saturation of concepts from all four courses when triangulated.

Data Analysis Methods

Brennan and Noffke (2009) argue that data can be interpreted differently based on the theoretical lens with which it is viewed. Through a critical race theoretical “counter-narrative,” for example, teachers in one study were able to overcome their initial deficit interpretations regarding behaviors and attributes of their underprivileged and underachieving students to see these students’ strengths and potential through alternative explanations, which helped them identify the factors that really needed to be addressed. This also highlights the deeper meanings and understandings possible when someone knowledgeable of theory, in this case the outside researcher, combines this knowledge with that of insider practitioners, here, the teachers in the school—when local participants and co-researchers are allocated the tools to “name” their existing inclinations and experiences (Brennan & Noffke, 2009).

We look at data as a means of constructing groups…and of providing “testimony” for their social actions—data provide a means for identifying potential interventions in the setting; they are representations made from the local about the local, and also provide insights into their connections to other settings and people. Examining “data” allows for slowing down the movement between doing and the next action, long enough to “see” the
practice rather than being immersed in it as an actor. Data are constructed representations of the practice, which can thus provide both a connection to the site of practice and a “distance” to seeing it also from the “outside.” (Brennan & Noffke, 2009, p. 433)

In the case of practitioner action research in teacher education—which would be conducted by, at minimum, a graduate student like myself, and more often by a tenured academic—the researcher/practitioner typically already possesses a good deal of theoretical knowledge to help her understand the varied and often competing perspectives with which she might view the phenomena under study.

In this study, the theoretical orientations embedded in CCI played a central role from start to finish. As part of a social-justice project based in these theoretical frameworks and the assumptions discussed earlier, I also conducted my analysis through a critical constructivist lens, incorporating a participative worldview that was self-reflexive, based in my own experiential encounters with reality as a practitioner–researcher (Frank, 2013; Heron & Reason, 1997). This project was mainly descriptive, as opposed to interpretive or theory-generating, with the aim to provide evidence about what occurred in relation to the CCI framework—to show and explain the most important ways students and I enacted, experienced, and made sense of the existing theoretical frameworks.

Coding

Saldaña’s (2016) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* guided my selection of specific coding methods relevant to the work I was trying to accomplish. Because I was working with multiple cycles of research that included many participants and multiple data types, and my aim was to ensure a critical analysis, I chose to use eclectic coding in order to get a more multi-dimensional perspective. Eclectic coding draws from multiple coding methods and synthesizes or
refines from them. My eclectic coding incorporated several different types of both inductive (Dick, 2007) and deductive coding methods (Pope et al., 2000), particularly provisional, structural, evaluation, and emotions coding (Saldaña, 2016). I include below short descriptions of these coding types and how they were used. I purposely did not use any method for tracking quantity or frequency of particular responses, as all were equally important to me regardless of whether they came from the majority of students or a single student. Nevertheless, some ideas were clearly more popularly expressed than others, to which I paid due attention during my analysis phase.

I chose to begin my initial coding with an in-depth examination of students’ end-of-course reflection questionnaires because these provided students’ direct responses to topics most relevant for answering my research questions. Though I initially chose additional coding methods to those described here (values and concept coding), after I had coded 51 questionnaires it was clear to me that these other methods were unnecessarily repetitive and/or not as fruitful as those I chose to keep using. (See Appendix F for a sample of questionnaire text with margin coding that incorporates all coding methods I initially used.)

Inductive coding included structural coding (Saldaña, 2016, p. 98) to identify conceptual phrases based on the data, which I then grouped according to specific research questions to which they corresponded. With evaluation coding (p. 140), I assigned color codes to denote whether a participant conveyed a positive, neutral, negative, or mixed evaluation of the merit, worth, or significance of what they were describing. I also used emotion coding (p. 124) for those student expressions of emotions they experienced or connected to a particular topic. As a deductive method, I employed provisional coding (p. 168), beginning with a list of codes based on my theoretical frameworks and looking for evidence in the data that corresponded to these
concepts. With this method, I kept track of which provisional codes existed in the data, however, my main focus was on the inductive codes that emerged directly from the data and how these might overlap with the provisional concepts. Because I was not keeping track of frequency, I did not need to record every instance of a code, only new codes as they emerged. I kept track of codes and sample quotes in a matrix (See Appendix G). After very thoroughly coding the questionnaires, I was able to use these codes to reduce the work of coding the remaining data types, in which most codes were repetitions of existing codes and any new codes were added to the matrix.

**Interpretation**

Once I had gone through all the data types and reached saturation, or the point when no new codes were emerging, I began my interpretation. Here I did what I had already practiced and become familiar with in other solo and collaborative qualitative inquiry: considered larger themes and connections; arranged and re-arranged data; looked for agreement/disagreement; developed visualizations; hypothesized and speculated, seeking alternative interpretations; distilled and explained my interpretations; and triangulated the evidence from the above various sources (Rowley, 2015). Because I tend to think and view things best as complete statements rather than try to make sense of single words or phrases (such as those used as codes), the technique that worked best for me was to simply start writing about the codes and selected quotes, progressively forming the larger themes as I combined similar ideas into logical topics using the interpretive devices above. Showing how one theme flowed into or overlapped with the next distinct theme was the most intuitive way for me to arrange the findings in a way that would still be coherently linear for readability in chapter four.
**Documenting and Disseminating Findings**

Throughout the process of conceiving and planning a research design that fit within my worldview and chosen methodology, I knew reflective practice would be key to producing dynamic scholarship that both improves practice and experience, but also contributes to larger social struggles. As noted, too much practitioner research is conducted almost invisibly to the larger academy. Affiliated with the description of a tempered radical is Ellingson’s (2013) notion of “guerilla scholarship,” which is a way to utilize the full spectrum of qualitative and interpretive methods in ways that meet the demands of traditional research outlets. “Those of us who feel passionately that our work holds the potential to help people, to promote social justice, to shed light on complex problems, and to significantly influence our disciplines need to make sure important work that serves those goals gets done and published (or otherwise shared)” (Ellingon, 2013, p. 435–436). She offers an interesting tool she calls wondering, which allows the researcher to consider her goals and how they influence or are influenced by empirical materials and analyses, topics, audiences, personal desires, and genres, in order to realize a representation of the project that aligns with these goals. Further considerations for dissemination in a study such as this one are the ways in which the practitioner and students might take purposeful action, utilizing their findings in their future work, drawing the attention of administrators and policy makers to the issues upon which they have gained knowledge worth sharing, and generally, putting to immediate use the products of the research. This part of the work is discussed in chapter five.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explicated both an epistemological stance that supplies a logical foundation for the traditions in action research utilized in this study, as well as offered
descriptions of my specific methods and how they aligned with this stance. Any study of critically compassionate intellectualism must itself be undertaken in ways that are highly critical, relational, compassionate, and cognizant of the struggles of those who are socially and educationally marginalized. I believe the modes described here served both the means and ends of socially just research practice in these ways.
Chapter 4: Findings—Teaching and Learning through CCI

*I have had teachers that complain about the system and explain that they don’t want to do it that way but they never change anything.* (AMM, Fa15, EOC)⁶

The student quote above both troubles me and reaffirms the importance of this work for educating future teachers. Our students, perhaps more than in any other field, need to see what they are learning put into action. An instructor who is clearly critical of the very things he or she is expected to do, yet fails to do anything to change the situation, is setting a poor example for students. Such an instructor is telling students that teachers are essentially powerless—powerless to truly question what we do and why we do it, and powerless to change things that do not work or do not align with our personal philosophies about what education should be. As teacher educators, we must hold ourselves to a higher standard. When we do feel powerless, we need to discuss this with students transparently. We need to give them the opportunity to help us figure out what does not work, and to envision alternatives, and we need to actually implement those alternatives ourselves to the greatest extent possible. I recognize that not every change is possible, and not all problems even have solutions, at least not in some contexts, but we need to talk to our students about these complexities. In my personal journaling, I answered the related question “How do I act with integrity and how do I teach my students to do so?”:

I believe that by holding to and modeling my own convictions, transparently, I am upholding my own integrity, since I believe certain things are important and I am explicit when something I must do does not align with my values, as well as why what I do is

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⁶ Student quotes in this chapter will be identified by their initials, semester, and data source. “EOC” means a quote came from the End-of-Course Reflection Questionnaire.
based in those values. I offer this with respect that not everyone has the same values as me, which is why it is important to be clear about their influence.

Alternately, if we complain but then do nothing, we are reinforcing a “that’s just the way it’s always been done” mentality, rather than modeling teaching for change and showing future teachers that their values do matter, and improvement and innovation are always possible.

I want to recognize here that the majority of education instructors are constantly assessing and re-creating their pedagogy and content, and thus, what I have endeavored to do in this project is not something revolutionary. Hopefully, the value of this work will be in its naming and making visible the kinds of things social-justice minded instructors in particular do, and to show through examples what is or is not actually working to achieve the goals those of us with this aim have set for our teacher candidates. Specifically, because of my successful experience using CCI, I wanted to offer evidence that it may be a worthwhile transformative pedagogy for others in teacher education to consider adapting for their own settings.

Although as a practitioner I knew my course inside and out, had a good grasp of students’ responses to and learning from the course, and recognized my own growth through CCI across the first four cycles of research, the fifth cycle analysis concretized much of this knowledge as well as added unexpected depth and brought to light some things that had occurred without my noticing. Overall, conducting this analysis has been very personally significant, validating, and instructive, which is in keeping with the mandate of action research that what we do should have meaningful impact on the experiences of those closest to the project. As will be shown, students also experienced the course in personally significant ways.

A retrospective limitation to this analysis was that I did not collect identifiers directly from students on the consent forms, such as their race/ethnicity, SES, gender/sexual preferences,
primary languages, citizenship status, dis/abilities, and so on, as well as their intended teaching areas and grade levels. Informally, I was aware of most of these based on university rosters and the information students provided in discussions and, specifically, in their positionality journals near the beginning of the semester. I think, at the time, this caused me to overlook the importance of asking for this information on the consent forms. I can say broadly that across the four courses, I taught majors in a full array of teaching subject areas and grade-level credentialing programs, as well as students who had not yet formally decided their primary concentrations and/or whether they definitely wanted to become teachers. From their journals, I know that the majority of students were white, middle-class SES, able-bodied, straight, U.S. citizens who primarily spoke “standard” American English. However, a few identified themselves as: African American, Middle Eastern, Latinx, Asian, and/or Pacific Islander; working-class/low-SES or upper-class/high-SES; not born in the U.S. and/or having family ties outside the U.S.; multi-lingual; LGBTQ; dealing with learning, physical, or emotional disabilities; and embodying other intersectionalities with their simplified status as “teacher education students.” While making extensive connections between these identifiers and the data would have been beyond the scope of this project, noting easily apparent trends would have been a useful addition, and I would have preferred to highlight the subjectivities of individual students in relation to their data below. However, out of respect for students, because I did not include these identifiers on the consent form, I do not make formal connections between the data and these identifiers in my findings and discussion.

My own way of making sense of concepts is always to consider the whole picture and how the different parts are interacting and related. Respecting and trusting my personal “ways of knowing,” I have chosen to employ a panoramic view of the project, triangulating the data across
time, participants, methods, and representations. I also had to be especially purposeful in
deciding how to organize the findings into this somewhat linear written form given the multiple
layers in the project—multiple goals, theoretical frames, action research cycles, research
methods, and types of data sources. Rather than separate out findings into the three components
of CCI, which would have essentially negated the claim that the three must work in tandem, I
wanted to situate the data across all these components simultaneously. And rather than separate
out my practice from students’ responses to that practice, as I did in my research questions, I
found I could not describe one without describing the other. Still, my main emphasis in the
classroom-based aspect of this study has always been on what CCI can do for students, therefore,
this is what will be unmistakably highlighted here as I summarize students’ ideas and use their
direct quotes as examples alongside my own explanations and analyses. Student quotes are
representative of all similar student responses, and are shown in italics throughout the chapter
(spelling is corrected where appropriate for readability) along with students’ initials, the semester
they took the course, and the type of data source. Photovoice quotes are connected to their
images when possible, however, because many students’ photos included personally identifiable
information or featured individuals who did not formally consent to be in this study, I am not
able to publish those here.

I have chosen to describe my own practice in the present tense because CCI is not
something I did, it is something I do, so writing in past tense felt odd and artificial. I primarily
describe my most current practices, noting how they evolved over time when applicable, and
bring in excerpts from my journaling with Napan’s (2011) Qualities of Co-Creative Inquiry
(Appendix C) to illustrate the specific ways I have thought about my work. Throughout, I
incorporate results of the different coding methods, joining students’ and my own evaluative and
emotional/feeling responses with the more descriptive structural and provisional coding concepts that connect findings to the research questions and CCI’s theoretical framework.

With all these considerations for presentation, the findings that emerged are arranged here as organically as possible, ending up in somewhat of an arc that is built on relationships, flows through the students’ experiences, and ends up in their important learning. Recognize that within and between each topic there is a great deal of overlap among the concepts, showing that rich educational experiences like these cannot be easily reduced to discrete particulars, and that multiple factors play out synergistically in our teaching and learning experiences—which also reinforces the need for frameworks like CCI that provide a holistic approach.

While the majority response reflected a positive student experience of CCI, there were, of course, that handful of students for whom the course did not appear to have much impact on their thinking or ways of seeing things, who failed to successfully complete the course despite my very deliberate academic and relational supports, who maintained resistance to practices or ideals of socially just education, and so forth. Some of their own perspectives on this are difficult to account for with specific evidence because many did not give formal consent for me to use their stories/work in my study, so this is another limitation to the findings that I am permitted to disseminate. However, as a practitioner and thus a participant to the study myself, I was and am still able to reflect on the types of barriers these students encountered from my own perspective and continually try to address these discrepancies in new iterations of my practice.

Overall, most students felt empowered to take charge of their own learning and goals, to become critically reflective practitioners, and wanted to act as advocates and change agents for their diverse students. However, certain structural limitations and personal struggles meant some of my key aims still went unmet. Candidates did not always leave the course fully
comprehending their power beyond the classroom due to our focus on their future students that largely ignored the topics of teacher rights and organizing. We lost out on opportunities to connect learning to action by not bringing their field experiences more prominently into our work as a class. Many missed the depth of topics by neglecting some important readings, likely due to my relaxed policies that put our coursework behind that of their more traditional and less flexible classes. In these and other ways, my limitations as a full-time doctoral student, a graduate instructor, and a fallible human being thwarted some of our ability to enact more physical and proactive interventions that would have strengthened their CCI experience.

However, it is both in spite of and because of these imperfections that I still was able to realize my own moral vision of socially just teacher preparation, where reflexivity, critical consciousness, and compassion became assets to their learning and my own continuing growth as a teacher educator.

**Relationships**

Overall, students valued and felt that many relational aspects of the course were uncommon, such as the amount of freedom and time to work with and learn from peers, the fact that I sat with and talked to them like equals, or the ability to approach me about anything and trust that I would value their ideas or be compassionate to their needs. The role of our class relationships is explored here under the themes of authenticity and vulnerability, confidence and safety, trust and respect, and care and engagement.

**Authenticity and Vulnerability**

From day one, I go against norms that assume teachers and students should maintain strict personal boundaries, instead attempting to help students feel at ease by sharing a lot about myself, especially my vulnerabilities, and asking to learn more about their lives and experiences
beyond school. This opening up led one student, for example, to come to me to discuss that he was considering dropping out of college; another was able to gain an elusive diagnosis of a confusing and debilitating condition with which I also suffer because I shared about my symptoms during class. This transparency and the resulting contributions to my students’ wellbeing are not customary or required of me, but they are the kinds of actions transformative pedagogues must take to show our students the value in authentically engaging with their future students, which is especially important when they are teaching students who may face challenges many of us cannot even imagine enduring.

I proceed similarly throughout the semester to model the sharing of personal experiences, ideas, and opinions, and invite them to do the same, pointing out how instructors do, indeed, have human lives and minds of their own. Recognizing the potential for my authentic sharing to also inhibit students’ own authenticity, in my journaling, I answered the question “How can I manage my power and not impose my beliefs on students?”:

By being explicit and transparent about it while assuring them they are still free to be just as explicit and transparent about their own beliefs. I ask them to explore their beliefs, and, in journals, for example, when they express a belief I do not agree with, I ask probing questions to invite them to think from a new perspective. When they express a belief I do agree with, I do the same, for that matter! They know what I think, and because I still ask what they think, they seem to feel safe to think it. They are not penalized for their beliefs. In discussions, I try to leave the talking to the students, who will likely challenge each other’s beliefs so I do not need to. Rather than offer ideas and beliefs, I ask them questions and expect them to come up with their own answers through discussion, so the beliefs remain in their control, not mine.
Students appreciated the opportunity to know me and my thinking in these ways, rather than spend the semester wondering where I stood on important issues, so they could compare it with their own ways of seeing things.

*Having such a level relationship without fear of always being told I was wrong really helped me be more honest with myself which helped me figure out more about who I want to be as a teacher one day.* (KS, Sp16, EOC)

*It always felt very genuine...I think this made me more interested because after hearing your opinion on a topic I wanted to form my own and learn more about the subject.*

(AMM, Fa15, EOC)

At no point have I felt like my authenticity and vulnerability reduced students’ “respect for my authority” or similar reasons given for maintaining more personal and emotional distance. In fact, I believe the façade of objectivity such separation presumes is just another form of hierarchical disconnection, an excuse for not wanting to feel vulnerable in front of our students in a banking education system that positions us as experts who are supposed to be in charge. Educators of already vulnerable students whose identities have been marginalized by mainstream norms must realize how mutual empathy through the disclosure of vulnerability can actually lead to stronger levels of respect between these students and their instructors (Cammarota & Romero, 2006).

*It was different because of the level of trust and understanding the instructor had for us. She was realistic with us and if anything that made me want to get my work done for the class more, even when I had a lot going on.* (KK, Sp16, EOC)
Furthermore, the assumption that teachers cannot love or share their lives with students is based on a culture of separation in which we are taught to be competitive and self-protect, rather than to collaborate, connect, and share our real feelings or the most authentic parts of ourselves (Jordan, 1995; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

**Confidence and Safety**

Students attributed their feeling self-confident in the space of our classroom to the relationships they were able to build, both with their peers and with me.

*I felt comfortable to speak my mind and be engaged in discussions with my peers which was crucial for my learning in this class. I never felt intimidated to share my opinions around my peers.* (AT, Fa15, EOC)

Of course, this did not always happen from day one. Actually, I was surprised at how shy students who are planning on becoming teachers can be—a profession in which speaking to a room full of other people is required. Still, even students who recollect feeling more comfortable listening than talking stated that relationships helped them find their voices.

*In the beginning of the semester, no one really was interested in talking with me. This made me a bit sad. It was also very hard for me to speak in class, and therefore my journals were the only way to express my thoughts. Later on, I started a small chat with my classmates. This helped me to create classmate friends. With this, I became more self-confident in class. This helped me to be interested in class discussions.* (SM, Sp15, EOC)

These students remind those of us who are more outspoken that forming positive classroom relationships is integral to many other students’ ability to fully participate. While most courses
require certain kinds of participation, too often instructors fail to support participation in these necessary ways.

Some students described feeling safe to express themselves in our class, or used similar terminology. I reflected in my journaling, answering the question “Which conscious activities do I undertake to make it a safe place?”:

From day one I convey that students are free to question—the work, my methods, the topic, etc.—and to offer suggestions. I try to approach topics being transparent about my own inclinations, but also showing that I accept that mine are not everyone’s and that’s okay. I also offer many ways for students to share their ideas inside and outside of class time. Those who are less inclined to speak about things during class have the option to reflect their ideas in private journals. Many do share very personal experiences in these journals that only I see.

I do not necessarily connect students’ statements about safety with formal notions of “safe space,” in which guidelines for dialogue are devised that can actually inhibit a lot of the “unsafe” talk necessary to truly get at topics of injustice. While the ability to dialogue across difference has been touted as a key aspect of social justice pedagogy, we must be sure to recognize how notions of safety in this dialogue can also be problematic from a social justice perspective because they have a tendency to subdue important dialogue as well as privilege the dominant groups’ ways of feeling safe. Instead, I follow Sensoy and DiAngelo’s (2014) “less-orthodox adaptations” of the typical safe space guidelines in which intellectual humility, understanding the difference between opinion and informed knowledge, looking for group-level patterns, noticing our own defensive reactions, recognizing our own social positionality, learning comfort with
discomfort, and pushing ourselves to extend our thinking beyond our existing “learning edge”
become the emphases of our interactions and assignments (p. 8).

**Trust and Respect**

In our class, trust between students and myself, students and their peers, and students’
trust in their own funds of knowledge (Raider-Roth, 2005) creates a context of shared power and
mutual respect in which students felt confident enough to explore intimidating topics, attempt
creative modes of conveying their learning, and otherwise test unfamiliar waters. Students found
the trust and respect they received refreshing.

*I usually never have professors who care what I think or believe in. This instructor was
different. She showed me how she really respects me, and this made me respect her and
what she teaches in class.* (SM, Sp15, EOC)

*The class respects her because she respects us.* (MB, Fa15, EOC)

I believe it is this trust and respect that made it possible for students to explore their own
privileges, assumptions, and other positionalities without getting defensive, as so much of the
literature says our mainly privileged teacher candidates tend to do.

Being what students considered *knowledgeable* and *enthusiastic* about what I am
teaching them, foregrounding democratic knowledge building that is *not intimidating* or
overpowering, and generally practicing what I preach also helped students trust what I was
offering.

*She was giving, we were giving and it was just a great set up. It was an awesome
experience to be able to feel like I had a voice that mattered during class.* (AM, Sp15,
EOC)
Because of the trusting and reciprocal relationships we had built, students were able to trust in their own abilities to create knowledge and wanted to extend their existing thinking in new directions.

I also make it clear to students that I believe they are capable of thinking deeply, acting for themselves, and learning in their own ways.

*I felt more respected as an individual in this class because the instructor was understanding and flexible of student needs. I was more responsible of my own work and grades. I also felt like I had more of a voice and opinion because there was not a fine line of right and wrong.* (AK, Fa15, EOC)

All policies, assignments, and other requirements for which I am able to offer choices are negotiable (within the constraints of our program requirements). This means anything from encouraging students to propose variations on how they complete a project, to allowing them to take responsibility for their attendance. This also translates into mostly flexible due dates, individual and collaborative projects in place of exams and quizzes, and extensive qualitative feedback instead of quantitative evaluation of their work (Kohn, 2012).

*I actually spent more time trying to make it as good as possible before turning it in and really upped the quality of my work.* (AP, Sp16, EOC)

*I took what the instructor said seriously and became a better student by receiving direct feedback on my work rather than just a number. This method of grading allowed me to focus on what I believed and what I was learning rather than the end result.* (AMD, Fa15, EOC)
I believe these policies also helped mediate the potential that students would “tell me what I want to hear” for the sake of their grade. In my own journaling, I did recognize the drawbacks of such a system when answering the question “How many students do their best?”:

Most seem to do their best. Very few seem to be half-assing it, even if their work is not of the highest “quality,” they all do what is for them their best work according to what they believe they are supposed to be doing. Because I do not judge their work according to a standardized rubric, I look at their work only in relation to their own growth and improvement over time, I can say most are putting in effort to grow. There are always some who slack and have to play catch up toward the end, but this is because I have given them that license and openly stated I know that puts me at the bottom of the list when it comes time to choose coursework priorities.

Some might wonder about the objectivity of such a system for ensuring a “level” playing field, especially in light of the standardized forms of assessment so dominant in education today. However, students actually expressed that they thought this individualized approach was more fair and effective, making them more responsible for their work, and allowing their achievement to be based on their personal effort and growth rather than comparison or competition with classmates.

*Without the stress of having to memorize things for a test, I felt like I was being evaluated in a more effective manner. I felt comfortable and wanted to learn and take my time really grasping the topics we were learning about.* (MC, Sp16, EOC)

[GLA prompt: I think the non-grading method is…]
• **A very good idea because it makes people focus more on the content than just getting a good grade.**

• **Nice because students are less worried about criteria and more about their ideas.**

• **Mixed feelings…puts responsibilities upon yourself and makes you take charge of your learning.** (anon., Fa15)

I also provide a lot of structure for those students who need it, and students have access to written instructions and the option to receive traditional grades for everything they do—an option that even the most self-proclaimed extrinsically motivated students never exercised and without which, they seemed delighted to discover, they did as good or better work. By the end of the course, having freedom with their assignments no longer felt strange to students.

_Honestly I think [the final InTASC portfolio required for credentialing] is going to challenge me the least…I’m a bit surprised by how much the rubric holds your hand through the whole thing. All of the previous assignments made me think about what I was working on._ (AB, Fa14, Mid-Semester Questionnaire)

Students do receive a final grade that depends on their participation and performance of class assignments, which is cooperatively decided between us after they send me a final written reflection on their performance of each task. Students and I typically agree on their grade, and when we do not it is usually because they grade themselves lower than I would have graded them, in which case they are, of course, happy to accept my choice of grade.

_Overall, my relationship with my instructor I think was built on mutual trust that we would both complete our work and put effort into learning together, and I think this really helped my learning throughout the course._ (OS, Sp16, EOC)
In my own journaling, I respond to the question “How does trust manifest in my class?” by discussing how trust plays an important role in all aspects of my pedagogy:

I trust students to take responsibility for their performance by giving them a lot of options, and very few consequences that I impose. I trust them to be respectful of this freedom and me. I trust them by sharing my own vulnerabilities and hoping for their respect and compassion. They trust me to show I care in ways beyond grading and the usual. They trust me with sensitive personal information in their journaling. They trust that I mean what I say and that they won’t end up failing the class, for example, because I wasn’t really as flexible as I claimed to be.

As a larger theme in Napan’s questions for my journaling, I reflect extensively on trust in Appendix C, where I discuss how trust can be ignored or manifested in the larger culture within a department, in the classroom, between students and instructors, and between student peers. I note:

If we were more willing to do things democratically and to be partners with students, the trust would be stronger and students would feel valued and able to return that trust. When we hold everything to our own standards without consulting students, we are automatically creating an “us vs. them” culture.

Not only do trust and mutuality alleviate an immense amount of stress for students—which may be one of the most repeated appreciations in their feedback—I am also able to trust in my own understandings of education, prioritizing my compassion for students as human beings and their authentic expressions of learning and engagement. This comes with an inherent vulnerability, however, as I know my methods are sometimes in direct conflict with aspects of
our traditional teacher education program and the larger educational apparatus. I do not, myself, feel particularly trusted and respected, but rather, feel that I must resort to “guerilla” tactics (Ellingson, 2013) to uphold my educational values, which acutely affects my sense of security as a student with no guarantee of graduation, and a non-tenured, essentially low-wage temporary worker in a system that privileges status and conformity. For example, alignment with credentialing standards typically obliges instructors to focus on transmitting certain knowledge and uniformly measuring student achievement based on externally prescribed outcomes. While my students still achieve the standardized competencies stated in the syllabus, we go about it in radically different ways that are not so measurable nor uniform.

Overly regulative practices and policies that prevent students from questioning, challenging, exploring, and experimenting are, from the perspective of critical pedagogy, the epitome of oppressive education—a means of privileging the kinds of docility and conforming that maintain the status quo. Rather, because I uphold my values (albeit precariously) by trusting students to make the most of their learning, they live up to that trust, and also learn to trust in themselves.

While we still had responsibilities and work to do, this course felt a lot more self-led in that I could get out of it whatever I put in, and it is my responsibility to learn rather than the professor forcing the information upon the students. (RR, Fa15, EOC)

In place of banking methods, this trust entails another kind of vulnerability from instructors—acknowledging the possibility that what we think is the most important idea or the best way to do something is not always necessarily so. In this way, we can actually learn as much from our students as they learn from us.
Care and Engagement

Care in this class was perceived as my compassion and concern for the overall wellbeing of my students, care for their genuine learning that goes beyond their achievement, and care for the subject matter that made students want to care as well. As I state in my journaling about our class context, “I believe my critical nature shows that things bother me, excite me, bewilder me, etc. about our education system, and students believe this shows my expertise and genuine care about the subject I am teaching.”

I truly believe I tried my hardest in this class because I knew the instructor cared about my learning which made me care about my growth as a learner. (AK, Sp16, EOC)

Returning to the earlier topic of authenticity, students could tell that my care for them and their learning is a priority and is genuine.

Most of my other courses are very strict and have little to no compassion. This instructor showed so much love and care for her students inside and outside of the classroom and I do not receive that from a majority of college professors. I felt very comfortable sharing my opinion in class which is very difficult for me to do in other courses. (AH, Sp16, EOC)

Much of this care stems from my own suffering—with disability, with heartache, with trial and error—which I have been able to deal with partly due to the love and support of my teacher–mentors. This motivates me to do all in my power to ensure my students know they are loved and supported through their own explorations and dilemmas. Students conveyed that my care and approachability facilitated their greater engagement with learning.
I never felt weird asking her questions, often times instructors or professors are really intimidating and it scares you away from asking questions which is stupid because the professors and instructors are there to help you learn and if you don’t feel comfortable talking to them that stinks because that affects your learning. (MB, Sp16, EOC)

I have had apprehensions that my sensitivity or relaxed policies might inhibit students’ levels of commitment and engagement, which I always candidly discuss with them early on. Many did miss out on the depth of topics by neglecting some important readings, for example, likely because they put our coursework behind that of their more traditional and less flexible classes. Overwhelmingly, however, students showed the opposite response, stating that is was precisely these policies that made them want to turn in assignments in a timely fashion, come to class, do their best work, fully participate, and so on.

I was never bored, stressed, or frustrated during class and I think that is a big part of why I never procrastinated with assignments and always came to class because it was actually enjoyable. (MS, Sp15, EOC)

My solicitation for feedback in all data forms includes space for students to tell me what interrupted or hindered their learning. The interesting thing about their responses to these questions was that students typically took responsibility for these hindrances, such as for procrastination, or attributed such interruption to other students, such as others’ lack of preparation or contribution. Overall, they admitted that while certain assets of the course could also be drawbacks, they tended to conclude that the benefits far outweighed the negatives.

In one semester, however, during which I was the most stressed academically, personally, and physically, I correspondingly received more of what I would consider complaints about the course or my performance in the early term anonymous feedback questionnaire than in any other
term. I had also been acutely aware that my own issues were affecting my usual levels of attentiveness and teaching ability. This indicated something of a disconnection with students at a point in the semester when we were still getting to know one another and relationships were tentative, as well as their potential disconnection with learning. Both disconnections bothered me deeply and compelled me to take swift action to improve my performance and their experience. I feel this is a telling example of why relational awareness and authentic care are essential to teachers’ ability to meet students’ needs and do our jobs well.

The Course Experience

Students expressed the most enthusiasm about having their voices heard, exploring alternative perspectives, and our flexible policies, activities, and assignments. These prominent aspects of the course included a student-centered learning environment, emphasis on student voice, agency, and questioning, discussion and collaboration, reflection and reflexivity, field experiences in urban youth spaces, and a social-justice oriented curriculum.

Student-Centered Learning Environment

One way students were able to make the most of the course was through our collaborative and student-centered learning environment. I aim to always take a strength-seeking stance when viewing students and their contributions, both to the course and to their own learning. In my journal, I wrote, “I find it very interesting to learn the backgrounds and opinions of my students, to try to make sense of how they see the world and education. I directly ask them to explore their own experiences in early journals so that I can know where they’re coming from.” This combined with other forms of feedback I seek out helps me utilize their existing knowledges and perspectives in my pedagogy so they can relate more personally with the content and processes of our course. I also noted some of my students’ strengths as openness to new ideas, a desire to
enjoy their learning, appreciation for their opportunities, and ability to forge their own friendship support networks and to question things together as a community. I found there were always a few students in particular who were exceptionally socially aware and passionate, others who were outstanding writers or researchers, or those who had very innovative streaks, who took my offer to be creative and ran with it. I concluded that the majority were remarkably compassionate and caring and want to do great things for their future students.

Affirming attitudes toward my students, seeing them as individuals that each bring their own unique assets to our community, also helps me create a positive learning space. Students attributed feeling at ease, calm, less stressed, comfortable, engaged, motivated, interested, and so on to the overall student-centered feel of the classroom environment, the ease of relationships between students and with me, and the personalized policies and ways of learning.

*I think that this is the only class I have ever taken where I didn’t feel a little nervous walking in the door each day. It had a very calm and relaxed feel to it and I really appreciated that. I feel like it really helped me learn the material because I wasn’t constantly on the edge of my seat feeling like I was missing something or doing something wrong.* (AMM, Fa15, EOC)

Students were able to enjoy the environment of our classroom because they were not intimidated or constantly worried about repercussions for their actions.

Students also recognized and appreciated that I deliberately attended to multiple learning styles. Answering questions about catering to diversity and utilizing students’ prior knowledge, I reflected:

*I offer choices…Students can use their personal strengths more fully and avoid showing their learning only by the mainstream or prescribed modes. We discuss learning styles,
and I encourage them to embrace their own styles in their work…[their prior knowledge]
is integrated as part of the learning we are doing about diverse learners. We examine how
people are each different, with different backgrounds, experiences, worldviews, strengths,
weaknesses, interests, and so on. Then we discuss how teachers can find ways to respect
and support these differences.

I ask in the first week to know more about students’ educational backgrounds and personal
learning preferences, and then frequently remind them that this is why I present information in
multiple formats and want them to show me their learning and participation in ways that feel
most personally meaningful to them.

_There have always been multiple choices in how I wanted to show my learning which was
great. If I did not feel that I was able to effectively communicate and show my learning in
a discussion, I always had the option to include my thoughts in a journal at the end of the
week and vice versa. Also, many different learning needs were catered to through
discussions, group work, videos, etc._ (AT, Fa15, EOC)

I give students options, as previously explained, to remove barriers for those who do not do their
best within the privileged modes of learning and evaluation of that learning.

The participatory projects, Photovoice and GLA, are also valuable as student-centered
learning tools in addition to being ways I was able to include students’ as co-researchers for this
study. Students showed and discussed what education means to them and appreciated viewing
their peers’ and their own ideas as the basis for their learning and exploration. In all these ways,
students felt like their needs and ideas mattered and their presence was valued in our classroom
community, which made them want to be there.
**Voice, Agency, and Questioning**

Students very consistently cited the ability to voice their ideas and opinions, to make their own choices about their learning, and to question previously taken-for-granted knowledge and ways of seeing education as essential to their ability to construct new knowledge in the course.

*In this class we were encouraged to debate and explain why we felt a certain way about a topic, and usually in other classes we don't get that option.* (RG, Fa15, EOC)

In two GLA prompts that offered a list of 50 values and asked students to select what they personally value in their work in this class, and what we value as a class in our work together, the most popularly chosen values shared across both charts were: *authenticity, communication, critical thinking, honesty,* and *open-mindedness* (anon., Sp15 and Fa15). Answering “Are beliefs something people should talk about? Why or why not?”, I reflected in my journaling:

Definitely. We cannot understand why we do what we do unless we understand our beliefs and motivations. And we cannot change/improve our beliefs without exploring where they come from.

Given the current era’s emphasis on developing students’ “critical thinking skills,” it was interesting to hear that the critical aspects of the course were what students considered the most novel.

*I liked being able to develop my own ideas and opinions for subjects rather than being told the instructors opinions of the story and being expected to agree with it. This has helped me to learn and dig deeper and find a greater meaning in my learning. I was able to discover things for my own, rather than just think about one persons ideas and not dig deeper to develop my own.* (AK, Sp16, EOC)
Considering that social justice educators are often accused of indoctrinating their students to their own liberal or radical perspectives, this shows that when we simply present the evidence, foregrounding multiple perspectives and options for understanding a phenomenon, students are able to choose for themselves.

[GLA prompt: This class makes me __________.]

- *Think about and understand how certain aspects of social and cultural influences have an impact on the classroom.* (anon., Sp15)
- *Think outside the box and see the bigger picture.*
- *Evaluate my philosophies on education.* (anon., Fa15)

Problem-posing and trust in students as capable thinkers particularly sets the stage for students to comprehend marginalized perspectives as part of their own process of discovery.

*Most classes just view the facts to students, are asked to memorize it, and apply it on a test. But this class challenged our own thoughts, allowed us to think about overlooked minorities and how they feel about education, and for once we were allowed to question the education system.* (ME, Fa15, EOC)

This form of criticality is different than mainstream views of critical thinking, which focus too much on the technical aspects of deconstructing passages of information. Instead, critical thinking in this course means acknowledging the historicity of knowledge production, or the ways knowledge is continually being created and re-created. Critical thinking becomes critical consciousness, or as Freire (1973) called it, conscientization—the ability to question received information and its validity, comparing it with one’s own experience of the world, and judging its contribution to a just society.
Discussion and Collaboration

The types of questioning just described were facilitated by the course’s use of discussion and collaboration in place of lectures and exams. Discussions and the ability to hear other people’s ideas and perspectives were common responses when students were asked what was different or most important about this course.

*Open ended discussion, because sometimes it’s just the teachers ranting the entirety of the period and by the end everyone just has the same views as the prof. which doesn’t make for the greatest thing.* (AR, Sp15, EOC)

Students particularly liked that we discussed topics relevant to their personal experiences of education, as well as to the contexts they will themselves face as teachers.

*We talked about real world situations and approached education at a realistic level, so it provided for an interesting class with controversial discussions and topics.* (AMD, Fa15, EOC)

Throughout the semester, each class includes small or large group discussions, activities, and cooperative projects and presentations. By the final semester of this study in particular, the groups were assigned and changed each week to help some students ease more quickly into interacting, based on earlier feedback that some of these students’ comfort level had been delayed during the time it took to get to know all the other students. Because every class includes some form of discussion in place of lectures, students grow more confident speaking with each other from the sheer level of practice. Some students commented that this also helped them learn to speak out in their other classes where previously they might not have. Relatedly, establishing
caring relationships between us all made it easier for students to venture out and say things they would normally keep to themselves.

*In each of our discussions, everyone would get so involved and we were all able to share our own opinions without judgement. Everyone would continuously bounce ideas off of one another and keep the discussion going. They were always very interesting topics that were easy to get involved in, it was very easy to feel included.* (LN, Sp15, Portfolio)

I want to note, however, that I also never require students to speak in the way that some instructors do in order for students to receive participation credit. There are many types of participation besides speaking in class that need to be honored (Schultz, 2009), especially for shy students, students who prefer to express themselves in writing, students who attentively listen as a form of participation, or students, like me, who only wish to speak when we feel we have something especially relevant to offer the discussion. Consequently, large group discussions in particular can end up being dominated by more outspoken students, so, more often, we split into small groups for discussions and I walk around and join each group for a couple minutes at a time to be sure everyone is engaged and comprehending the material. Despite some being less talkative, students overall still conveyed that the discussions were one of the most valuable aspects of the class.

That said, discussion activities were not completely seamless. Answering the journal question “What are my most common criticisms about my students?”, I admitted:

Some can get too comfortable with my leniency and seem to not pay enough attention during discussions, which would be remedied if they participated more, but they also tend to be a shy bunch, which is not a fault, but seems odd given their choice of profession. I would also complain that they don’t do the readings well enough, and this subtracts from
our capacity to have good discussions. A main problem, then, is getting them to fully participate in substantial ways.

And as mentioned previously, some students harshly judged their peers for not being prepared enough to maintain small group discussions of readings or having enough to say, or were dissatisfied if discussions went off-topic (which did not actually bother me since I saw it as an opportunity for students to strengthen friendships through more personal talk). Some students explicitly challenged the usefulness of discussions at all based on these complaints.

*The discussions do not really improve my learning experience, since some people don’t join in, while others comment on others comments (repeating the comments)… The other thing is, when we are put in small groups I feel like I am really wasting my time. We talk about the assigned reading (or an exercise we were assigned) for 5-10 minutes and then get completely off topic for the rest of the class time.* (Fa15, Early Term Anonymous Questionnaire)

This was one of those comments that really spurred me into action, however, so as hard as it was to read, it was valuable as I worked to improve my curriculum and pedagogy. After this round of feedback, for example, I developed some very interactive activities in which students had to simultaneously learn the content, teach each other the content, utilize visual and physical methods of understanding the content, and otherwise interact with each other and the material from the readings in ways beyond the typical discussions. These types of complaints were also most likely to be expressed earlier in the semester and in courses with larger numbers of students, and I believe this was because students were still less familiar with each other and with me and my ways of doing things. That is, they had yet to develop friendships or fully trust that
they would not be penalized for what they perceived as their peers’ shortcomings, a well-founded fear under traditional grading methods.

One way I make sense of what happens when our discussions and collaborative projects are more successful is to think about the “flow” in our classroom (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), which Napan (2011) summarizes as “the optimal experience which often involves painful, risky, difficult activities that stretches the person’s capacity and involves an element of novelty and discovery and…a feeling when things [are] going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness” (p. 18). I noticed that the flow in our class was strongest when we were participating in the deeper questioning and more physical activities, such as the “privilege walk,” fishbowl discussions on controversial topics, creating collaborative lessons in small groups, and other times when we were literally moving into new positions and approaching topics in new ways.

**Reflection and Reflexivity**

Learning to be reflective practitioners is also a priority in this course, which I model through my own reflexivity in frequently asking for feedback from students, discussing the feedback and considering solutions with them, then implementing changes to the course. The Photovoice and GLA projects were also very reflexive in that they not only offered students a novel opportunity to learn and show their learning, they were also modes to critique both our course and the larger education system, then deconstruct the findings together, and, again, implement changes to our own ways of seeing and doing where possible. Students noted how

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7 The privilege walk (California Newsreel, 2006) is a visual/physical exercise that “reveals hidden disparities and advantages” by asking participants to move forward or backward based on their answers to a series of prompts related to different kinds of privilege. I then have students try to throw a ball of paper into a trash can at the front of the room, which represents achieving a good education and life prospects. Considering that some will be standing directly in front of the trash can while others are at the back of the room, this exercise leaves a lasting impression on my students.
these collaborative projects were especially beneficial because they were able to see and discuss their peers’ perceptions of topics and course learning and compare them with their own. This resulted in more and deeper ways of looking at topics due to the varied perspectives that were collectively represented in the final products and analyses.

Almost weekly reflective journal assignments are also central to students’ overall learning, especially for those quieter students who explore more of their thoughts in this private space in which the students and I dialogue. For each journal, students are able to answer a prompt or choice of prompts, or to write an open-ended personal reflection on that week’s topics.

*I was able to take what was taught in class and apply it to my own thoughts through writing. I was able to come full circle in my knowledge of the content presented each week and reflect on the things I took away from the lessons.* (AMD, Fa15, EOC)

Students also have the option to submit video/audio journals in place of half of their written journals, which helps some tailor their work to their preferences and/or try out new modes of representing their learning. Journal prompts encourage them to explore their own positionalities of privilege and vulnerability, to connect topics to their personal experiences, and to think about how these positions and experiences have influenced their assumptions about teaching, learning, and learners.

*This course taught us to not be self-centered and not take education for granted.* (ME, Fa15, EOC)

Although I cannot offer journal quotes as concrete examples because I did not include journals as part of my data, from my practitioner perspective, I recall students’ growing understandings of educational disparities and privileges reflected in their journals. For example, some may have
started out displaying meritocracy-centric notions of why they and other students may or may not be academically successful. However, over the course of the semester, they began to develop a structural understanding of inequity (Gorski, 2016), discussing unfair advantages and how the educational and social systems help some while hurting others, and particularly, how these advantages are usually beyond students’ personal control.

In my responses to journals, I pose questions for them to think further about the ideas they express and how they express them, offering alternative explanations and inviting them to think more broadly.

*She not only affirmed what I was doing was correct but she also challenged my opinions and how I supported my opinions. It developed my debating skills as well as myself as a learner.* (MT, Sp16, EOC)

[GLA prompt: For me, the journals are…]

- *Test my understanding and allow me to relate to subject.*
- *Difficult, and make me truly reflect.* (anon., Fa15)

Through these journals perhaps more than anywhere else, I was able to see, and students corroborated, that their thinking evolved and their consciousness of the complexities of education increased. I believe this is because the journals are the most intimate space students have in which to really delve into their personal feelings, ideas, experiences, and learning. Unlike class discussions where some students may spend more time listening, in journals, *all* students must take the time to put their thoughts into words, which helps them make meaning of course content in deeper, more personal ways.
Field Experiences

Students in this course also engage in ten hours of service-learning field experience (Tinkler et al., 2015) in local schools and other youth settings that serve racially, economically, and otherwise disadvantaged students in the urban neighborhoods surrounding the university. Here they are able to take the foundational knowledge they have gained and turn it into action with and on behalf of actual students. This connection of knowledge and theory to practice is vital in order to avoid reinforcing pre-service teachers’ potential deficit mindsets about students in these settings. In my journaling I answer the question “How are theory, practice and experience integrated?”:

Theory is what we learn about, practice is what I model, what they do in their field experiences, and what they do in our projects, and their own experiences are vital components of making sense of all these learning opportunities. They are expected and encouraged to connect ideas to their own experiences of the world.

Because of the extensive level of reflection we do in class discussions and journals, students easily contrast their own homogeneous and/or privileged upbringings and school experiences with the often starkly different experiences of students in their field placements, and have a lot of opportunity to reflect on what this means for them as teachers of potentially diverse students.

In a connected observation assignment, students critically examine their taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning, using description vs. interpretation to explore alternative explanations for everyday student behaviors (Raider-Roth, 2011). We begin this with an in-class activity where we view a YouTube video of a teacher teaching a class. I model to them what a description is, such as “the student is looking out the window,” and ask for their observations. We then compare this with an interpretation, which could too easily and too often
be “the student doesn’t care about what the teacher is saying” or “the student is disrespecting the teacher.” I offer alternative interpretations, like, “the student is watching a bird in the tree outside” or “the student is thinking about an argument she had with her brother this morning.” Acknowledging that it is perfectly conceivable that the student really does “disrespect the teacher,” my hope is that my students will come to recognize that not all explanations are so simple, and not all student actions that could be construed as misbehaviors should be automatically viewed through this deficiency-prone lens. Students then practice describing and interpreting as one of their journals, based on their field placements if they are already working there, to which I respond with further scaffolding and question-posing to be sure they clearly understand how easily description can become personal interpretation, as well as how certain mindsets can be very ingrained in us. They then continue to do some type of description vs. interpretation memoing during their field experiences, which is required to be submitted with their final portfolios.

Students confirmed that working with actual pK–12 students helped them develop personally meaningful views on teaching and start to figure out what kinds of teachers they want to become.

Students respond very well when they trust the person helping them. The students taught me patience, understanding, and perseverance, everything necessary, in my opinion, to be a good teacher. (AK, Sp16, Portfolio)

Working with [student] for a few weeks really made me realize why I want to be an educator. She truly enjoyed the time I got to spend with her and loved learning different things. I can’t wait to be able to do that for a group of children. (AR, Sp16, Photovoice)
Importantly, however, students who reported that their experiences were less hands-on with actual students—those where they only observed or where they primarily performed tasks like grading papers—were less instructive and fulfilling. It is therefore important that field experience requirements be action-oriented, giving teacher candidates the opportunity to work with and help students so they have a better chance of feeling mutual empathy and compassion that can come with the inevitable forming of relational connections with these students. In retrospect, I also believe it would have been more instructive for students and I to discuss their observations weekly, where students could bring up questions, surprises, challenging interactions, or interesting experiences and we could talk about them as a class. Another issue I now see is that when students hold onto their description/interpretation assignments till the end of the course, I miss opportunities to give them constructive feedback that could substantially help them refine this skill. Instead, many students show little advancement in this regard across the semester, still including some very interpretive “descriptions” from their first through their final memos. If they were able to get frequent written feedback, for example, they would be able to go back to their field sites and fine-tune their perspective-taking throughout the semester. I believe I did not do enough of these feedback exercises due to the very packed curriculum that I was required to get us through in such a short span of time, however, I plan to make this more of a priority in future practice.

Readings, Videos, and Other Curriculum

Because CCI is an anti-oppressive pedagogy meant to alleviate racial/ethnic inequities, and because poverty and nearly all educational injustices have been felt most acutely by students of color, we pay specific attention to the role of race in the U.S. institution of education. We begin by looking at the history of a purportedly common school system in which it was illegal to
educate slaves, and Native American youth were taken from their homes into white-run boarding schools, the goal of which was assimilation—as was also the case for immigrant students—while simultaneously their home languages and cultures were disregarded (Fraser, 2014). We consider the intentions of Civil Rights’ era integration efforts as well as their failures in light of the de facto segregation students of color still experience, analyzing the sources of this failure such as school funding patterns, white flight, and legislation that undermines the original Brown v. Board of Education ruling (Fraser, 2014; Rector-Aranda, 2016). We use Milner’s (2010) opportunity-gap framework to critique color-blindness, cultural conflicts, the myth of meritocracy, low expectations/deficit mindsets, and assumptions of context neutrality in schools. We watch A Class Divided (Peters, 1985) about the brown-eyes/blue-eyes lesson a teacher implemented after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s murder to school her white elementary school students about racial injustice; and Precious Knowledge (McGinnis & Palos, 2011), discussing the legal attacks on Arizona ethnic studies programs, the appropriateness of student and teacher activism, and the root mindsets and assumptions held by those who favored and opposed the programs.

Above are just a few examples of what is an overall curriculum and pedagogy meant to sensitize my students to the historical and modern injustices disproportionately borne by students of color. Like others, I believe this content and purpose should be incorporated across teacher education curriculum rather than isolated to a “multicultural education” course (Matias, 2015). I have therefore incorporated it alongside the other foundations curriculum in this course, which is additionally aimed at raising students’ awareness of educational issues based in ability, gender, SES, language, sexuality, culture, religion, country of origin, and so forth.

Answering the question “What is the most interesting part of the subject I teach?”, in my journaling, I stated:
The hidden aspects of education that no one thinks about. It’s a real eye opener for students who have only ever really considered education from the perspective of the student, not the teacher, admins, community, society, and globally.

Practically the only recurring concern with curriculum each semester was students’ dissatisfaction with the textbook, which I tried to remedy by offering a different approved textbook every new semester, to no avail (see, for example, sample formal evaluations in Appendix D). I also did not particularly like the traditional textbooks that only superficially and uncritically addressed the issues most important for social justice education, and the alternatives I tried using ended up being too advanced for students. Beyond the textbook, students did enjoy most of the outside readings more than the textbook readings, but still preferred less reading generally. Students are required to do an immense amount of reading in college. Because there were no harsh consequences or quizzes for tracking whether students had done it, those students who were not intrinsically motivated to do the reading were probably less likely to do it, especially when pressed to get reading done for other classes. I learned to pack what I thought were the most important and essential readings into the first few weeks of class, before their other coursework piled up, turning our attention to less reading and more group activities in the later weeks. Almost amusingly, nearly all students reported frustration that others in their discussion groups had often not done the reading, though very few admitted they had ever skipped the reading themselves—if everyone did the reading, how is that “no one else” did the reading? Getting students engaged in the readings remains an elusive goal I am still trying to reach.

In contrast, students fairly unanimously enjoyed most of the videos we watched together, and especially Precious Knowledge, which became a cornerstone of the course because it made
visible the kinds of challenges marginalized students endure in the current system. The
opposition that the Latinx students in the film faced in fighting to retain their ethnic studies
program astounded and angered my students. They said they had never even considered how the
standard pedagogy and curriculum could be problematic because they come from relatively
privileged and homogeneous positions in terms of their race, culture, SES, language, and so on.

It is not every day that a class really talks about those adversities that minority children
may face, and I think for someone who comes from a predominantly white area, it was
really eye opening to hear about that. (OS, Sp16, EOC)

[GLA prompt: Diversity in education is __________.]

- Providing students with the context and experiences to acknowledge personal
  privileges and disadvantages. (anon., Fa15)

That the film fits well within my curriculum makes sense, since the ethnic studies program
portrayed in this film is directly linked to the original CCI project, though this is coincidental
because I showed the movie in my first class before my discovery of the actual CCI framework.
Important Student Learning

So far, I have illustrated ways CCI influences my teaching practice and how this has enabled my students to gain important learning around topics of social justice. It is also useful to consider what counts as important student learning toward this end, given the mixed and often competing definitions of what it means to educate for social justice. Using the CCI framework makes these aims clearer for me—through CCI, I aim to raise my students’ critical consciousness, relational awareness and compassionate responses, and desire to alleviate oppression through structural understandings of inequity. This important learning was evidenced in several specific ways from my own vantage point. Overall, students showed an increasingly critical awareness, frequently discussing the importance of classroom relationships, supporting diverse perspectives, thinking innovatively, and otherwise pushing up against educational and societal norms. They unmistakably grew in both their ability to recognize relational dis/connection and educational in/equity, and to envision change through their own purposeful thinking and future action. Importantly, they made many connections between these forms of consciousness and specific aspects of how I operated and what we learned or did within the course.

Adding to my journaling and interpretations, students reported their most important or impactful learning both in their direct answers to related questions and in how they described and discussed their evolving views on education, particularly through the questionnaires, final portfolios, and the participatory projects. Data from the GLAs and Photovoice activities contributed more directly to these findings around student learning than to the findings previously discussed. The GLA posed additional, different, and more probing questions and prompts about students’ ideas and learning than the questionnaires and other reflections, and two
out of three of these were implemented around mid-term. The Photovoice project was a completely open-ended exploration of “what teaching and learning means” to students conducted near the end of the semester. Therefore, the participatory data offers some unique insights into students’ specific learning progress and outcomes. Students’ feedback about these projects also showed that they found them particularly memorable and meaningful in ways not necessarily duplicated in the other activities because they offered creative and collaborative ways to make meaning of their thoughts and ideas. They were intrigued, for example, that in the Photovoice project they could all view education in so many different ways through their varied photos, yet still locate commonalities around the most important topics across all these perspectives. Overall, students say these projects helped them think outside the box when considering their personal beliefs, experiences, and important takeaways.

Themes below emerged not only in their direct references to those topics, but were also demonstrated in discussions and in the Photovoice project in relation to their own positive and negative experiences as university students. They considered topics such as college as a privilege and an opportunity, the importance of the Black Lives Matter student protests occurring on campus, and enjoying our outdoor settings for relaxing and studying. They also critically pondered topics like inadequate accessibility for differently abled students, the high cost of textbooks, student sleep deprivation, what they perceived as poor use of campus resources, distractions from construction noise, and other more disruptive facets of university life. I separate out these findings here to illustrate how students incorporated their immediate experiences of education into how they viewed their future work with pK–12 students. This portrays our class emphasis on connecting topics to our own realities, interests, and lived experiences.
I have summarized findings across both students’ and my own observations and analyses, however, this section will be heaviest with student data samples. First, I wanted to remain as true as possible to students’ own rich accounts of their learning rather than risk appearing to impose my personal hopes for their learning on the data. Fortunately, their own accounts corroborate with and demonstrate my own interpretations very well. Second, Photovoice findings that were much less prominent in the previous two sections are much more relevant here and require replication of text along with photos whenever I wish to portray their contribution, which adds considerably more data “mass” than in previous sections.

While students also communicated abundant learning about other sides of education not necessarily tied solely to issues of social justice, here I focus only on the topics that are most relevant to their reception of CCI, which centered on classroom relationships, educating the whole child, equity and diversity, and the power of teachers.

**Classroom Relationships**

Students’ Photovoice images were overwhelmingly populated with people because relationships took such a central role in how they described education. Students relayed that they now better understand the importance of forming close and caring relationships with and between students. In all data forms, they spoke of having fun, understanding, loving, caring, encouraging, partnering, mentoring, and other emotionally significant ways of connecting with students as vital to meeting students’ personal and learning needs.

*What kids really need is someone to show them that they care. I think that’s where education should start.* (AW, Sp16, EOC)

*Fostering an understanding and loving environment is very conducive to allowing children the needed expression to learn how to love learning.* (NJ, Sp15, Portfolio)
It is very important for a teacher to build a connection with his/her students. A student needs to feel comfortable around their teacher and be able to laugh and have fun while also learning and expanding their mind. (BH, Sp16, Photovoice)

They also stated that reciprocal relationships, sharing power with, and learning with and from students are just as important as how we teach.

The partnership style of relationship between the instructor and the students. I feel as an educator it is important to realize that you learn just as much as your students in a day’s time. (OS, Sp16, EOC)

![Fig. 4.1—This is a picture of a student making a star and writing their academic goals on it. As a teacher, I think that it is important to have your students set personal goals so they have something to look forward to. I think it is important to personalize their learning experience. Setting goals with them is also a good way to help build a strong teacher-student relationship. (SC, Fa15, Photovoice)](Image)

Collaboration, communication, and finding common ground were also recurrent themes when students discussed what was most important in teaching and learning relationships.

I think that this is important because collaboration is necessary in classrooms today to succeed. I believe that combining ideas and listening to other opinions can help shape students into more open-minded learners. (RG, Fa15, Photovoice)
Fig. 4.2—*Group work allows for collaboration and can cause for an abundance of creativity which all classrooms need more of.*

Thus, a teacher cannot stress enough the power of working with others has on learning. (AMD, Fa15, Photovoice)

Students often relayed the ways that relational disconnection hindered their own or their students’ engagement with learning. They discussed the importance of incorporating fun and play, especially with younger children, to foster a relational environment that primes students to learn from and with each other and the teacher.

*I have found the students’ attitude change in the classroom with another teacher that is calmer, overwhelmed, and gets straight to the point in class. The students are no longer excited to be in class and are feeling overwhelmed and bored themselves. I decided to change up the schedule and taught them for one day; I immediately saw the excitement in their eyes to learn again and gave them time to goof off and have fun with each other.*

(ME, Fa15, Photovoice)

Care and love were frequently mentioned emotions students connected with the task of being an educator. Unlike students in *Precious Knowledge* and in Valenzuela’s (1999) study who experienced traditional schooling as uncaring, my students frequently recollected (without my prompting) teachers who inspired and made them feel supported, and wanted to be this kind of teacher for their future students.
**When I think of a good teacher I think of patience, kindness, confidence, independence, and the ability to be loving in all circumstances.** (MK, Sp16, Photovoice)

In their views and feelings about their future classroom relationships, students discussed many of the relational concepts I had modeled for them, and in ways that closely echoed how they described relating and feeling in our class.

**Educating the Whole Child**

My students expressed many ideas around the belief that students’ creative self-expression, criticality, engagement, and non-academic needs are as important as their measurable achievements, and teachers must create learning environments that are conducive to supporting the total wellbeing and growth of all types of learners. Learning environments were frequently the focus of Photovoice images, and several students used our own classroom as an example of concepts, such as teachers discussing the sociopolitical world with students or engaging with students rather than lecturing from behind a podium.

[photo of our class working in small groups]: *Working in groups benefits students greatly. Students interact with each other and learn so much more than they would if they were to work individually. Students can gain a lot from having the professor act as a facilitator rather than controlling the classroom.* (BH, Sp16, Photovoice)

Creativity was important in our course and it was important to students, who lamented the lack of creativity in many classrooms and the de-emphasizing of creative and extracurricular forms of learning.
This is the most important to me because this image represents CREATIVITY, which is the most important part of education. You have to be creative in the way you think and in the way you learn. All of us do not think the same way and creativity is way of expressing ourselves, creativity is also a good way for us to learn about ourselves. I feel as though creativity is something that needs to stay alive in education.

Fig. 4.3

Fig. 4.4—I believe fine arts is a very important part of education. Students need to learn to express themselves in creative and unique ways and I believe decrease in funding for fine arts is negatively affecting students. (BH, Sp16, Photovoice)

Students also strongly opposed what they considered learning for assessment over authentically learning for the sake of learning. Topics like grading and testing brought up
negative emotional responses for most students, particularly those who were beginning to question whether there might be better methods of understanding student learning and growth.

_I was always taught that grades were important, that they were a way to quantify and assign value to what you have learned and how well you have learned it. However, when I look back at my past as a student, I am troubled when I consider how often the focus of my efforts were on getting a good grade versus learning the material and understanding its importance._ (RC, Fa14, Portfolio)

Because they appreciated our course evaluation methods, (as evidenced earlier in this chapter), they considered similar options for how they might navigate this dilemma.

_Everything one does in school is observed and evaluated which can create an uncomfortable learning environment for students. In my classroom, I will not stress to students that the grades are the end all be all in regards to their success in school. I will assess my students’ growth through qualitative feedback rather than attach a number to their performance in class._ (AMD, Fa15, Photovoice)

Many related personal experiences with test or grade anxiety and how they did not feel as interested in learning that they associated with such anxiety. Standardized and high-stakes testing were frequent topics of disdain among students, who had themselves recently been public school students under modern reforms. Students did not look forward to the pressures of “teaching to the test” that they would face in their classrooms, and therefore, the need for alternatives was frequently their chosen topic of discussion.
Students also expressed that after this course, they now feel it is teachers’ job to really know their students’ interests and needs in and beyond school in order to support them in meaningful ways that will engage them in this kind of learning.

**Fig. 4.5—**This is a picture of the [field experience] program I am in, Reds Urban Youth Academy. At the RUYA, we relate students’ interest with their academic life (in this case it is baseball). This makes learning more fun for the students. As a teacher, I want to know my students’ interests so I can relate to them and bring aspects of their life into the learning experience. (SC, Fa15, Photovoice)

This speaks directly to research and topics we study that show that marginalized students especially need these kinds of connections to their learning in order to succeed. In Photovoice particularly, students frequently discussed student-centered learning and catering to student needs as important ways they intend to support students.

_I think technology is so important in education because it is a great tool to break learning barriers. Especially with special education students because they have more learning barriers than average students that the technology can help them overcome._ (AP, Sp16, Photovoice)

In all these ways, students were making connections with our course’s critical questioning of what counts as learning, student-centered pedagogy, and curriculum aimed at
authentically supporting all kinds of learners. They were able to take their experiences from the course and see applying similar practices in their own future teaching.

**Equity and Diversity**

On the whole, students were able to gain important structural understandings and comprehend issues of equity that adversely impact underprivileged students, schools, and communities. Like the examples we studied and values we exercised in our course, they advocated acceptance, care, respect, and recognition as essential to any effort at overcoming these and other educational disparities.

*The biggest idea I have taken away from this class is acceptance. That meaning that accepting someone for who they are, culture, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Everyone is different and that is something we should celebrate and learn more about.* (AH, Sp16, EOC)

*Through this experience [Precious Knowledge] and the readings discussed in class, I have learned that when a student is given confidence and is in an environment where they feel respected, they will not only improve their grades, but will begin to really care about what is going on in the classroom.* (AK, Sp16, Portfolio)

Students critically examined and consequently expressed frustration with the way some students’ backgrounds have been disregarded in mainstream curriculum and school culture that attempt to be “blind” to differences in race, class, ability, and so forth.

*Like we learned in class, minority student’s history and culture is not focused on in schools which can lead them to be very disinterested in the material being taught to them.*
These experiences have helped me see that education is not just and simply helps reiterate stereotypes and statistics. (NJ, Sp15, Portfolio)

[GLA prompt: My most important personal takeaway from this class so far is…]  
- I must be able to teach my students (who could be diverse) that we all are here to make the world a better place to be. We are capable of leaving racism behind us after we have dealt with it. (anon., Sp15)  
- Not to be colorblind.  
- Be open to others’ cultures and learning styles.  
- Be aware of other cultures and teach to students, not yourself.  
- Observing in schools the effects of social inequality. (anon., Fa15)

In place of difference- and color-blindness, they now want to fully recognize and value the diversity of students’ identities, backgrounds, abilities, knowledges, and lived experiences.  

Meeting these children and learning about their culture and learning styles has influenced me to become a teacher. Every child learns differently, and there is a plethora of diversity within schools that should be recognized...Being a part of her journey of learning in the US was such an uplifting experience, and one I will never forget...Being yourself is very important, and children need to know that being yourself is one of your most prized possessions. (BB, Sp16, Photovoice)

Students also recognized and appreciated their own changes in perspective due to this learning and the importance of these understandings for their future teaching and positive action. Through our course’s extensive opportunities for students to reflect on their own evolving thinking, they were able to grow as responsible and thoughtful practitioners.
I really have valued learning about the ways in which schools perpetuate inequality as I feel that this is an issue that should be taken with the utmost importance. The sociology and politics behind education are very interesting to me and I feel they have had a huge impact on my personal philosophy as a future teacher. (HD, Sp15, EOC)

Another thing that stood out was the disparities within our society about unequal teaching. Our discussions and readings opened my eyes to the many challenges that the very poor schools deal with. The class challenged me to think of everything in new ways and to come up with solutions. (MC, Sp16, Portfolio)

This class challenged me in many ways, from understanding new concepts of teaching, thinking, learning, and caring, to changing some of my old notions about education in America, the ways people learn, and all of the different factors that influence learning. (RC, F14, Portfolio)

They were also better able to recognize their own positionalities, assumptions, and privileges, a shift that was largely facilitated by their experiences working in urban youth settings, through which they were confronted with some stark differences from their own time in PK–12 schools.

Fig. 4.6—This is basically all they have...I was not expecting this when I first walked in. I was expecting bright colors and posters everywhere. But that shows how different I am from those kids. (SL, Fa15, Photovoice)
After being in three different Cincinnati Public Schools, and volunteering at the Reds Urban Youth Academy I have seen the diversity that can be found in a big city. After growing up in a 99% white town moving to Cincinnati has opened my eyes and shown me the diversity not only in the University of Cincinnati, or in Cincinnati, but in the overall diversity all over the country. (AK, Sp16, Photovoice)

This recognition spurred many to reflect that they want to be, and, in fact were “proud to be” part of the changes needed to give all students equitable educational opportunities.

[A student] inspired me to be a teacher, because I made a connection with him through the 10 weeks that I tutored him. This connection we had was very important to him. [He] came from a high poverty area, and didn’t get to experience some of the things that other kids his age may have. Several things that we talked about during the time I tutored him, worked on developing relationships, building knowledge, and introducing him to new things. (BB, Sp16, Photovoice)

**Fig. 4.7**—Something I am very passionate about is urban school districts...My passion for the kids in these schools is so strong and I would put that passion into my work every day...I would love to teach younger kids and start to instill in their brain how cherished and full of opportunity they are. They don’t have to be affected by outside voices as long as they know they are loved and smart from their core. I want to change these schools so bad...
into something beautiful, and I feel like this is why I need to be a teacher. (MK, Sp16, Photovoice)

Some comments did border on the kinds of “white savior” proclamations warned of in the critical race and whiteness literature (Matias, 2016). Such proclamations take the focus away from students and their communities—recognizing their existing strengths/assets and otherwise seeing them as fully capable of creating their own futures—instead positioning the white teacher as the one who will lift up these students from their deficient existence into a better, brighter, (whiter) world. Knowing my students and their good intentions when they make these comments, I feel this is why it is crucial that they continue to be provided critical social justice curriculum in their future courses so they may come to learn why such a positionality can be problematic. The important thing is to keep them learning so they can eventually gain a more nuanced understanding of their role in these contexts.

I believe comments like this are also likely due to the adoration so many of them showed for those who had been most influential in their own lives.

[GLA prompt: __________ really makes me optimistic about education.]

- Teachers I’ve had in the past.
- Parents of children.
- Very inspiring teachers who really did change me. (anon., Sp15)

Students especially noted how they had been well supported by teachers, family, and other mentors, and attributed their academic success to this support.

This makes me think about the students without a support system, and how hard it must be for them. I think this is one of the main problems in the education system, and I hope
to instill in my children, in the classroom or children of my own, how important school is and how important it is to support one another. (AK, Sp16, Photovoice)

Working in an underprivileged school opened my eyes. There are so many kids that need help and a good education in this world and I want to be a person that can help. (AR, Sp16, Photovoice)

They used terms like passion, inspiration, empowerment, resilience, positivity, determination, and engagement, connecting strong emotions with their commitments to helping all children learn and succeed. They understood that while they could not necessarily change things overnight, their feelings, ideas, and actions do matter.

**The Power of Teachers**

Finally and very importantly, students grew to recognize how teachers and systems have the power to perpetuate or disrupt educational inequities, and saw it as their responsibility to work for their students’ right to a good education.

*When in my own classroom, I will have a lot of responsibility and pressure. It will be the rights of every child who enters my classroom to receive an education that they’ll be better off for. Failure to impact and improve the lives of these kids would essentially be to infringe upon their rights as citizens, and what many would consider their natural rights of life. I will always be conscious of my privilege as an educator and how important my position is. Everyone can look back and recall the teachers that were most effective and special, and I hope to be one of those teachers.* (RC, Fa14, Portfolio)
Many specifically recognized my example of alternatives, stating that how I taught helped them think about their own positions of power and how they might enact their own moral visions and responsibilities as teachers of diverse students.

\textit{An idea that has been the most important to me and my learning was how my instructor taught this semester. It had me thinking about what type of teacher I would want to be and the style of teaching I wanted to have when I graduate.} (LC, Sp15, EOC)

They acknowledged that there are many challenges both students and teachers face, and that it is educators’ responsibility to be proactive in confronting these challenges, rather than feign neutrality or complacently accept situations as given and unalterable.

[GLA prompt: \underline{_________} really makes me angry about education.]

- \textit{Disparity between suburban and urban schools.}
- \textit{Teachers not being understanding and flexible of student needs.}
- \textit{Test scores coming back on teachers.}
- \textit{Standardized tests, overregulation, and no support from administration.}

(anon., Fa15)

[GLA prompt: This class makes me \underline{_________}.]

- \textit{Dig into deeper thinking of how classrooms and schools are what they are today, and how we can improve/change certain things we as teachers don’t agree with.}

(anon., Sp15)

They saw diversity as an asset that teachers can use to make learning more meaningful.

\textit{I have learned in this class and from my observations that every child learns differently. I want to be able to serve my students and help them reach their better selves. I think it is}
my job to make sure that I try every possible way to make sure that my students can apply
critical lessons that I have taught to their lives. I am curious to see how diverse
classrooms work and how I can use their various experiences to link them together and
help them learn better. (NJ, Sp15, Portfolio)

Students were, of course, fully conscious that not everything we were able to do in this course
would be possible in the pK–12 settings in which they would work, but they were still hopeful
that they would be able to make changes for the better, even if only in small ways.

Students were also painfully aware that the teaching profession is not a glamorous one,
and that in the U.S. particularly, teachers have a long way to go to achieve the status and respect
they deserve.

I think that this country needs to reevaluate how we look at our teachers, as they are not
just the nation’s babysitters who give the kids useless information to memorize, but the
sculptors of our children’s minds and ideas. They show children how to think and make
decisions. I hope to push this movement and show that educators are one of the most
capable and necessary people in this country. (RC, Fa14, Portfolio)

In America, teachers frequently don’t receive enough credit for what they do as they
develop our future generations. It is one of the most important jobs on the planet and yet
the respect for teachers is not what it should be. The same applies to people studying to
be teachers; I’ve heard more than one person refer to it as a blow off major. (MC, Sp16,
Photovoice)

Problematically, however, not all students seemed to fully comprehend their own power or how
to effect change beyond their classrooms. For example, a portion of students who were unhappy
with the situation in *Precious Knowledge* still believed teacher activism—and particularly, activism alongside students—was not necessarily appropriate when asked about this topic in a journal prompt following the film. I found this surprising considering how passionately they discussed what they saw as blatant educational injustice following the film, as well as their other expressions of angst around similar topics over the course of the semester. This relates back to Stitzlein’s (2014) work in which teachers not only lacked skills for enacting their democratic right to dissent, but had somehow come to believe and self-enforce that good teachers do not do these things in the first place. While hopefully my feedback and our subsequent class discussions could have influenced a change in these students’ mindsets, I did not find much evidence to know whether this occurred. This is definitely a part of the curriculum I would like to better emphasize in the future through related readings about teacher rights and organizing. While we were able to touch on it during the film’s module, our focus was mainly on the students’ experiences with ethnic studies and how it helped them. I would have also liked to give students opportunities to express their ideas and concerns to stakeholders outside our classroom, to experience their democratic rights in action. The Photovoice activity would have been an ideal entry point. However, my physical and time limitations, as in so many other instances, seemed to keep such activities always just beyond our reach. In the future, it is clear we must give equal attention to the rights of the teachers who were involved in the ethnic studies struggle, as well as find ways to take action beyond our classroom if students are to understand their own capacity to stand up for larger educational goods.
Conclusion

Humorous as it may sound, answers that aptly summed up students’ perceptions of this course were to one GLA prompt that asked them to finish the sentence: “If this course was an animal, it would be a…” Responses included:

- *a bird, flying to see different perspectives*
- *a snake, subtle yet profound*
- *a cheetah, dangerous in a good way; or, similarly, a lion, relaxed but dangerous*
- *a sea sponge*
- *and even a drawing of a “teacher”-labeled animal in a cage!*

In all seriousness, these responses denote that students caught on that the main purposes in this course were for them to critically examine and absorb multiple ideas and points-of-view, question what does not align with their ideals for education, and do so by refining and reflecting in a nurturing and supportive space. As for my own learning, this analysis of my previous four cycles of action research would not have been worthwhile if it could not offer me insights I did not already possess, so it is important to ask, what new knowledge did I gain here? What do I know now that I did not know before? In chapter five, I discuss how findings from this cycle added to my existing knowledge, implications related to my original purposes, openings in the current research, and considerations for future action.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Future Action

In this study, I have shown how my practice of critically compassionate intellectualism (CCI) supports pre-service teachers in a justice-oriented teacher education program as they gain important foundational competencies around issues that disproportionately affect low-income, students of color, and other disenfranchised student populations. As our teacher candidates will most likely begin their careers in schools that serve these students, it is vital that they are able to construct the kinds of knowledge teachers in these settings in particular need in order to fully support their diverse students. Modeling CCI, a proven transformative pedagogy for ethnic minority students, helps teacher candidates experience first-hand the kinds of care and empowerment they can enact in order to create similar opportunities for their own students from marginalized backgrounds.

While educating our future teachers toward social justice ends is not a new practice, this study does help to fill certain gaps in the accompanying research and literature, as outlined in chapter one. I begin this chapter with a discussion of the findings and how my previous knowledge expanded in this fifth analysis cycle. I then consider how the study contributes to existing social justice teacher education frameworks, helps us better understand the indispensability of educational foundations coursework, and explicitly rejects oppressive trends and agendas in teacher education research. I conclude by reviewing how the study met the overarching ideal of action research that what we undertake should contribute to action and positive social change with and on behalf of participants, and offer considerations for future action.
New Learning about CCI

At the end of chapter four I asked, what do I know now that I did not know before this fifth action research cycle of analysis? New discoveries I describe here center on the catalytic nature of the research and the interconnectedness of the CCI framework components for facilitating personally significant and profound experiences for both students and myself.

Catalytic Experiences

As discussed in chapter three, catalytic validity is an important determiner of rigor in an action research inquiry like this one (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). “All involved in the research should deepen their understanding of the social reality under study and should be moved to some action to change it (or to reaffirm their support of it)” (p. 42). Students’ catalytic experiences have been well-evidenced in chapter 4, such as in their expanding comprehension of educational inequity, blossoming trust in their own knowledge, and growing consciousness of their power to act as advocates and agents of change for their students. I also experienced “spiraling changes” in understanding (p. 42) as a practitioner and a researcher across these several action research cycles. One of the most personally meaningful discoveries in this fifth cycle was that I could trust myself. Like so many neophyte academics, I often suffer from “imposter syndrome,” in which I feel like I am a total fraud and at any minute my students will find out that I have no idea what I am doing or talking about! As a novice instructor with no formal training as a teacher, I often felt not so different from my students who were just beginning their own teacher training. Students, however, repeatedly commented on my expertise and their trust in my knowledge and practices. While I had previously been aware of these competing perspectives in the data, through this analysis I was finally able to understand the factors that led students to see me as an expert—extensive content knowledge, passion for my
subject and for student learning, reflexive adaptation of curriculum and activities, substantial instructive feedback on their assignments, and transparent debriefing of my own actions for their benefit and understanding. I worked very hard to know and do and be all the things they saw me to be, and by deconstructing, examining, relating, and weighing all this evidence, I was able to see it too.

While I have always expended much energy making sure my students trusted themselves and felt themselves capable and their ideas worthwhile, I had neglected to show the same trust, compassion, and respect for myself. I planned to do so, I thought I tried to do so, yet, looking back, I actually still failed in this regard. Likewise, my stance as a tempered radical, employing what felt like “guerilla” tactics under the radar of a larger education system based in surveillance reform, made me feel especially vulnerable and uneasy for most of the time I spent doing this study. This fifth cycle analysis helped counteract the debilitating worry and self-doubt that I confronted as a beginning instructor and helped me see both the strengths and challenges in my teaching. After studying the evidence of my practices and student responses so closely, I now see myself as a knowledgeable and skilled practitioner, in addition to remaining a fallible and constantly learning one, which also strengthens my resolve to continue doing this work.

**The Interconnectedness of CCI’s Components**

The preceding discovery was personally catalytic, however, a larger breakthrough for this project concerns my understanding of the CCI framework. While I always believed the three parts of CCI were equally necessary, working together to create the contexts for meaningful learning toward social justice ideals for my teacher education students, I did not previously realize how much they were actually *intertwined*, not just working side-by-side. I believed that critical competence was necessary for students to be able to assess content and topics of
importance; that relationships and care were crucial for supporting students in their learning and
growth; and that curriculum that was not specifically geared toward structural understandings of
inequity and social justice had the potential to instead reinforce deficit ideologies and perpetuate
injustice. However, I did not fully realize the complex interactions occurring among the CCI
components.

**Critical pedagogy.** First, care and compassion are necessary in an authentically critical
pedagogy in order to challenge and offer alternatives to the chronic relational disconnections that
are often unquestioned in educational culture. For example, expressing vulnerability, sharing
power with students, and trusting and respecting students as inherently knowing beings are all
ways to disrupt educational contexts of disconnection that mimic the defensive, hierarchical, and
interactive forms of disconnection rampant in the larger culture. Critical pedagogy would
especially associate these persistent forms of disconnection with an individualistic, capitalist
culture, in which such disconnection is necessary to reproduce divisions of labor and hierarchies
of power, knowledge, and privilege.

Critical pedagogy is also as much about social justice curriculum as it is about practice,
therefore, content must be purposefully selected that will help students deeply examine the
structures that perpetuate dominance and oppression and spur them to act. For example, it is
difficult to expect students to get energized about educational inequity when using an uninspiring
textbook that only superficially discusses important social justice topics, if it does at all. It is also
imperative that critical pedagogues pay close attention to whether certain readings may actually
turn off their undergraduate students, which is a common reproach of critical academics who too
often write from a privileged intellectual position using language inaccessible to the less
educated and working-class, the very people whom they claim to champion (Darder et al.,
In addition to more approachable readings, using students’ own cultures and familiar ways of knowing to teach new content are at the heart of critical pedagogy, thus helping them connect new knowledge with their lived experiences. Modern students live immersed in multiple media forms, therefore, the critical pedagogue should equally use art and media to share important content, which has the added benefit of supporting diverse learners who may better construct knowledge through visual or audial modes.

**Care and compassion.** Next, relational connection and support create a safe space in which students may more confidently question taken-for-granted knowledge, trust their own ability to create new knowledge (Raider-Roth, 2005), and become comfortable with discomfort as they critically examine their own positionalities of power and privilege. For example, when teacher–student and/or student–student relationships are established within a context of care and trust, students feel safer voicing their ideas, experiences, and understandings in the discussions, written reflections, and collaborative activities that make up a critical pedagogy.

Care and compassion also make it easier for students to work through the unsettling information they encounter in a social justice curriculum. Through relational perspective-taking, they are more easily able to examine and have empathy for the experiences of others, and less likely to get defensive when new concepts disrupt their existing worldviews. In a context that acknowledges the relational connections in our shared experience, criticality becomes an essential aspect of caring about someone or something larger than ourselves. When students are able to take curriculum further by applying it in real settings, such as when deconstructing course practice together or through field experiences, they may also be better able to attach relational emotions to what were previously disembodied concepts. Relational care therefore supports
students’ learning of social justice content that can prepare them to act with greater empathy and compassion for their own students.

**Social justice curriculum.** Alleviating oppression for those most marginalized by existing systems requires not only a curriculum that explores evidence of structural injustices; it also means a pedagogy and curriculum that helps students understand how relational disconnection and uncritical acceptance of structural limitations create the contexts for such injustice to thrive. For example, it is expected that a social justice curriculum will explore topics such as unequal school funding or the disproportionate impacts of high-stakes testing reforms on students of color and their schools (Au, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2007). It is less common to examine how in some schools focused on raising test scores, underserved students’ behavior is strictly modified to the point that they are conditioned not to speak unless spoken to (Ben-Porath, 2013), which inhibits their ability to socialize and form supportive peer and teacher–student relationships. It is also unlikely that the usual curriculum would study why Latino/a students feel uncared for in their “subtractive” educational experiences (Valenzuela, 1999), or how students of color are disproportionately more likely to receive exclusionary discipline (Office for Civil Rights, 2016), removing them from problem situations rather than teaching them to work through these situations in relationship with others. When teacher education students can compare these forms of relational exclusion and disconnection with their own experiences in higher-achieving schools—where many of my own students report enjoying many more social freedoms, feeling cared for by their teachers, and having more opportunity to safely express themselves—this becomes a relational-cultural social justice curriculum.

Similarly, not all social justice curriculums foreground questioning and challenging dominant norms as does a critical pedagogy curriculum, which illustrates another unique and
transformative overlap accomplished through CCI. For example, in this curriculum, students read articles that argue against traditional grading, are asked to consider alternative explanations for “problem” student behaviors, watch a film in which students and teachers take to the streets to protest unjust education policies, and are even invited to challenge their instructor and request alternative curriculum or assignments. These types of content and activities connect knowledge to action, making dissent and thinking outside the box the new norm. By seeing and experiencing the opposite of complacency, students are better able to understand how complacency can perpetuate injustice. In a less critical social justice curricula, readings center on facts and figures, assignments still come with strict rubrics, and students will lose points for missing a deadline. A critical pedagogy curriculum clearly emphasizes personal empowerment and responsibility, remaining constantly critical and reflective, as well as acting on knowledge toward positive social change.

**The Interconnectedness of Findings**

Findings in this study illustrate that relationships, course experiences, and important student learning are also interdependent in anti-oppressive social justice teacher education. That is, learning that is not founded on growth-fostering relationships will likely fail to produce adequate conditions for the critical learning experiences that produce transformative knowledge and ways of knowing. Likewise, strong classroom relationships must be accompanied by strong content, democratic and equity-focused activities, and worthwhile assignments that adequately stimulate students’ interest in and attention to the structural bases of inequity, challenging them to more closely examine evidence and ideas and find a larger purpose in their learning. Finally, if we do not clearly articulate our aims for social justice teacher education, then specifically evaluate and reflect upon whether students actually gain the kinds of knowledge and mindsets
that will help them in the future to act more humanely and justly toward their own students, relationships and curriculum cannot serve their purpose. Re-reading some of the original CCI literature discussed in chapter one (e.g., Cammarota & Romero, 2006b), I see similar intersections in the work with Latinx students that resulted in the CCI framework. In all these regards, I have identified many directions for continued improvement in my own practice.

Contributions to Existing Frameworks

CCI has proven itself here as a transformative and justice-oriented framework, matching the aims and outcomes of the various existing frameworks discussed in chapter one, as well as offering some less common ways of educating teachers toward social justice. I believe the four aspects of my work that have been the most distinct are: modeling a pedagogy specifically proven to work for marginalized students, strength-seeking attitudes toward teacher education students, tying foundational knowledge to relational-cultural understandings of inequity, and an explicit focus on race-based and radical perspectives.

Modeling a Framework Proven to Work with Marginalized Students

First, instead of using a framework derived from research with mainly white and relatively privileged teacher education students, I have made use of a framework specifically created with and proven to directly benefit marginalized secondary students as a form of both enacting social justice research and modeling social justice pedagogy. As Milner (2007) notes, “the dominant and oppressive perspective is that White people, their beliefs, experiences, and epistemologies…are often viewed as ‘the norm’ by which others are compared, measured, assessed, and evaluated” (p. 389). Here, I turn the tables. My practices as a white educator, and my mainly white students’ experiences of those practices, are evaluated according to an alternative “norm” that is instead based in the epistemologies and experiences of students of
color. I believe this norm is more fitting when considering for whom it is we claim to be doing this work, under what assumptions, and to what ends. “The idea is that epistemologies need to be ‘colored’ and that the research community may need to be exposed to theories, perspectives, views, positions, and discourses that emerge from the experiences and points of view of people and researchers of color” (Milner, 2007, p. 390).

In work such as this, it is also important to consider whether we aim toward radical and transformational justice for underprivileged students, or merely equitable academic opportunities and outcomes. Conklin (2008) and Conklin and Hughes (2016) propose a framework of compassionate, critical, justice-oriented teacher education, which they developed from their direct work with teacher education students. While their framework and study share some similarities with what I have endeavored to do here through CCI, their focus is still on academic rather than transformational ends. Because I have instead adapted a framework developed for racially/ethnically disadvantaged students, I was able to see the precise connections between more critical and emancipatory aims for these students and what this can mean for how we teach their future teachers. While CCI better met my pedagogical and ideological values for this work, I am heeding Conklin and Hughes’s (2016) call for more research on social justice frameworks in teacher education.

In this way, we can collectively contribute to clear conceptualizations of teacher education practices focused on socially just outcomes and avoid Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2009) important warning that, without these clear conceptualizations, we risk the failure of the entire movement to reform teacher education. (p. 59)

By examining how a social justice pedagogy geared toward helping marginalized students may be applied in educating the future teachers of these students, I am able to offer novel
conceptualizations of how the two populations’ educations are intimately connected in achieving transformational outcomes.

**Strength-Seeking Attitudes toward Teacher Education Students**

A second distinction in this work is that through CCI’s care element in particular, I teach my relatively privileged students in a positive, strength-seeking manner as opposed to assuming them to be deficient in their compassion or openness to new ways of perceiving inequity due to this privilege. As I previously discussed, it is incongruent to approach our teacher candidates with a deficit view of them and their capacities and then expect them to avoid deficit ideologies toward their own students. Our students are not inherently uncaring simply because they have been fortunate. I believe this is an inhumane assumption. While, like Conklin (2008), I recognize that student demographics and teacher educators’ experiences with student resistance have led to this predominant view of teacher candidates, I argue that acting on these assumptions is what has made students feel personally attacked and set them on the defensive, creating and then perpetuating this cycle.

We should instead be opening spaces for our candidates to come to their own appreciations of privilege, on their own terms. We must have compassion for our students as individuals whose worldviews have evolved in relation to their own unique experiences, which, like those of less privileged students, have been largely beyond their control or choosing. Further, it is most likely that all teacher candidates have experienced something in their lives from which to draw empathy for the difficulties faced by others, such as the passing of a close family member, a learning disorder, emotional or health issues, or a non-privileged sexual orientation (to name some examples of my students’ and my own struggles). Positioning students in binary terms as privileged or not privileged disregards the myriad incarnations hardship can
take, as well as the dialectic in which many of us simultaneously embody both privileged and non-privileged identities.

Most who decide to become teachers do so because they love learning and want to help their students achieve and love learning, too. Many specifically enter the field because they want to make a difference in the lives of underprivileged students, even if they do not yet fully comprehend what that means or how to accomplish it. Still others have themselves experienced forms of oppression or disconnection in their personal lives or their own educations, and want to do better for students like themselves. With an increasingly racially diverse teacher force, as well as a practically non-existent true middle class in the modern economy, the assumption that teachers have been privileged will also become more and more dated. I would go so far as to say that by assuming and then focusing too much on those students we deem privileged, we potentially ignore or alienate our other candidates. We should be foregrounding the issues and discrepancies in education and the larger structures, and respecting our students enough as individuals to believe them capable of making sense of this information in relation to their own unique experiences, which may or may not have been based somewhere on a broad spectrum of actual privileges.

**Relational-Cultural Theory Contribution**

The addition of the relational-cultural theoretical perspective to CCI’s authentic care component is another distinct aspect of my project. Understanding how the relational-cultural aspects of education influence student learning and growth gives us a new way to view issues of

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8 I recognize that we still have a way to go in this regard. While teacher diversity has been slowly increasing, the most recent report by the U.S. Department of Education shows that between 1987 and 2012, the proportion of white teachers still only decreased from 87 percent to 82 percent, while white students made up just 51 percent of the student population in 2012 (Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, and Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). Furthermore, the report shows that while more teacher candidates of color are entering the field than previously, their representation diminishes along the educator pipeline, with lower employee retention rates versus their initial postsecondary enrollment in teacher education programs.
care and compassion (among other relational issues) in the field of teacher education. Based in feminist theories of psychosocial development, this approach has mostly appeared in the fields of psychology and counseling work. In the past decade, however, Raider-Roth (2005; 2017) and others have applied RCT in other education contexts. To my knowledge, no one has applied it specifically to teacher education, and here I particularly employ its tenets in order to examine the relational-cultural norms that impact teacher education for social justice. I see this as an opening I want to explore further, which I discuss in my section on considerations for future action.

**Focus on Radical, Race-Conscious Pedagogy and Curriculum**

This leads to a final distinction, which is that when I educate future teachers through CCI, I use curriculum that frames the causes and purposes of social justice education in necessarily more radical and race-conscious ways than are currently typical in teacher education, especially for a white educator like myself. As critical race and whiteness scholars argue, mainstream liberal teacher education tends toward a universalized and too often watered down version of what it means to educate for social justice, and who and what it is we are aiming to support in doing so (Castagno, 2014; Matias, 2013). Ignoring that students of color are perpetually the disproportionate recipients of social and educational injustices, especially when their race intersects with other marginalized identities, negates the radical and transformative goals of social justice education, at least the anti-oppressive kind I endeavor to employ through CCI.

Given all I have just said about the nuances of and over-emphasis on students’ privilege, it may sound strange to turn around and say I want my students to closely examine race privilege/supremacy. However, what I do is not geared toward “enlightening” particular students who may have been recipients of privilege. Rather, I provide all students the information, evidence, and tools to be discriminating consumers of mainstream information, policies, and
practices that undermine the success of certain students more than others. In light of current social, legal, and political events, students especially need a space in which to engage the difficult topics of race, ethnicity, culture, and other ways white supremacy is still alive and well.

A critical look at white privilege, or the analysis of white racial hegemony, must be complemented by an equally rigorous examination of white supremacy, or the analysis of white racial domination. This is a necessary departure because, although the two processes are related, the conditions of white supremacy make white privilege possible. In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color. As such, a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantages, or the state of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it. (Leonardo, 2004, p. 137, emphasis added)

White educators in particular are accused of glossing over the specific role of racism as complicit in social injustices, melting race into the pot of multiculturalism and diversity initiatives. Instead, through CCI, I make explicit the most prominent historical and modern disparities unfairly affecting students of color, which form a clear and unmistakable foundation for exploring other less palpable forms of injustice.

Again, I acknowledge I am not alone in all these purposes and practices, however, I believe that in social justice teacher education they are still more the exceptions than the rules they should be. My work, therefore, addresses the need for teacher educators to more critically examine our own assumptions and positionalities in relation to the work we aim to accomplish.
Educational Foundations

This study of CCI in an educational foundations course also holds important implications for foundations courses in general, especially social and cultural foundations courses, which are being increasingly dispensed with in teacher education programs in favor of more practice- and methods-based courses. As foundations courses logically appear at the beginning of teacher education students’ course of study, what is taught here and how it is taught will can form the basis for how these students view teaching, learning, and learners throughout the remainder of their coursework and into their teaching. As discussed in chapter one, when pre-service teachers are not afforded the theoretical and foundational information with which to contextualize their ensuing learning and classroom experiences, how will they be able to look beyond their immediate knowledge of situations to see how historical, social, cultural, political, philosophical, economic, and other forces shape education opportunity, policy, and practice??

My use of CCI specifically in a foundations course that emphasizes these forces in education shows promise for influencing students’ attitudes and aptitudes around the aspects of teaching and learning that are most pressing when educating for social justice. Particularly, my hope is that by critically studying these ideological and structural forces, my students are more easily able to see how ostensibly simple variations in policy and practice can put certain students at considerable disadvantage compared to other students. Through CCI they might also be better able to critically examine the relational-cultural dynamics of systemic injustices affecting disadvantaged students, and especially how relational disconnection is often at the root of historical and ideological movements that perpetuate injustice. Looking beyond decontextualized and individualized explanations that place student underachievement solely on the shoulders of students and their teachers, they should now be prepared to account for opportunity gaps and
other cultural and structural forces outside the classroom whose effects are beyond these individuals’ control. Assuming candidates have also gained a desire to work towards alleviating inequity, the ability to critically examine these forces is requisite as they move into their other coursework, where my goal is that they should then be better able to contextualize all new learning within these parameters, to question its usefulness toward the just outcomes they seek, and to then make educated choices about their own future practices.

If teachers do not understand the foundations of educational injustice, they are less likely to comprehend or even see injustice in these ways, and thus less likely to challenge the hegemony that maintains power differentials to the disadvantage of so many children who are unable to advocate for themselves. From a critical pedagogical perspective, then, removing or de-emphasizing these kinds of foundations courses—especially those taught through social justice frameworks like CCI—is one way to foreclose teachers’ ability to question a system that disserves them and their students, and thus also prevent their full participation in disrupting that system. Rather than intellectually empowering future teachers who can advocate for and help improve the life chances of marginalized students, a teacher education curriculum that ignores the foundations further deprofessionalizes and instrumentalizes the vocation. And while many modern reforms over-emphasize the delivery and products of education under the pretense of ensuring educational equity, inequity remains. Such a focus is distracting us from the real problems while continuing to privilege certain groups who, perhaps not coincidentally, maintain the power to influence these reforms. As I have argued elsewhere (Rector-Aranda, 2016), reforms that fail to take into consideration the foundational causes of educational injustice will never adequately address the resulting disparities.
**Transformative Teacher Education Research**

For all the reasons I originally articulated in chapters one and three, I believe the methodological considerations in this study have especially upheld my CCI stance and offer important implications for the contemporary field of education research geared toward social justice and change. Responding to the culture of evidence in education at large, which, from an anti-oppressive perspective, places too much emphasis on neutrality, control, quantifiable measurement, and standardization, my counter-positivist stance sees teaching and research as participatory, political, contextual, sometimes messy, and always complex. As this stance is already clearly articulated in earlier chapters, here I will briefly discuss how my study contributes to one particular call for research in teacher education that I believe is important when such research is undertaken with a goal of positive and transformational social change.

In their review of current teacher education research and trends, Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2015) make recommendations for future research directions that keep up with teacher quality mandates in education reform, ideas about learning in a knowledge society, and increasing educational diversity and disparities. In several ways, my project falls within the types of teacher education research they say is already prolific—smaller scale, context-specific studies based in our own settings, and research that examines teacher learning or formation of attitudes, but is not longitudinal enough to assess their outcomes on their future students’ learning. I agree that there is much future work I might do in these regards, which I will discuss in my considerations for future research.

What is noteworthy here is that Cochran-Smith and Villegas also found few studies that “completely rejected the neoliberal agenda and directly challenged its tenets,” with the majority of studies instead situated in a sort of middle ground (p. 391). They hold that work not expressly
opposing the neoliberal agenda is “not sufficiently powerful to substantially challenge the material conditions and social relations that reproduce inequalities and profoundly influence teaching/learning” (p. 391). By their definition, my study is one of those few that clearly rejects this agenda, meeting criteria for research that seeks to transform our entire perspective on why and how we do education research.

By “completely” rejecting and challenging the dominant agenda, we mean studies that assume that teaching and schooling are political, that schools and teachers are complicit in the reproduction of inequalities, and that achieving educational equity would require not simply providing access to educational opportunities but also interrogating how current institutional arrangements and existing social and material relations influence who does and does not have access in the first place. (p. 391)

Research that aligns with such a stance should be open and transparent about this aim, and perhaps part of the reason Cochran-Smith and Villegas did not find more of it is because in the current academic milieu, we are still pressured to tone down or silence our dissenting voices in order to have any chance of forwarding our ideas and objectives for our work (or even making a living).

I know I risk alienating my more temperate colleagues through what could be considered too much transparency with my true feelings and positions on education and research. Like other radical scholars, I believe reining this in can quickly deflate the passion necessary to keep fighting for what we know is good and right. It also privileges certain white, masculine, middle-class ways of knowing and showing knowledge that discount the importance of the emotions we connect to ideas and actions in favor of detached rationalization. In our theoretical orientations as activist scholars, as well as our actual lived experiences, we know that emotion and reason are
equally relevant and important to this work. “When we separate our thoughts from our emotions, we retain the capacity to solve logical problems but lose the ability to register experience and navigate the human social world” (Gilligan, 2014, p. 89).

As a tempered radical, I do wish to be heard rather than foreclose important dialogue by turning listeners off to my message before it is shared, but I cannot do this at the expense of my academic “soul.” Scholars I admire do not hide their radical aims and perspectives, but embrace and use them to drive their scholarship, which, not coincidentally, is much more interesting and compelling as a result. And I would venture to point out that many of these scholars are men, for whom it is still more socially acceptable to speak frankly and have strong opinions, and who are more likely to hold onto an audience when they do. In a field that is also still dominated at the higher levels by men while a majority workforce of lower-paid and less powerful women remain at the mercy of these men’s decisions, this is particularly salient. Thankfully, I have had the privilege in my degree program of learning under three remarkably strong women scholars who embody a caring, critical, justice orientation throughout their work, giving me hope and the will to keep striving. While CCI is not an explicitly feminist approach, throughout this dissertation, I have endeavored as much as possible to equally foreground the voices of women—theoretically, academically, and experientially—my own included.

**Action and Sustainable Change**

Immediate action and sustainable change for and/or on behalf of those most directly impacted by a project are important requisites for action research. Because this was part of a practitioner inquiry, directly studying my practice and across ongoing cycles of this practice,

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9 Administrators and others with decision-making capacity are overwhelmingly white, middle- or upper-class, and male (Castagno, 2014; Matias, 2016), another failure of adequate representation for racial minority, low-SES, and other non-privileged students, but also a failure in regards to gender equity, considering that in 2012, 69 percent of the full-time k–12 teaching workforce was female (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2012).
action was an implicit part of the study. As discussed in chapter three, the first four cycles of inquiry embodied a constant spiral of action, reflection, improved action, reflection, and so on in order to continually improve my various content, activities, assignments, policies, and other pedagogy and processes. This action was immediate and sustainable; that is, I frequently implemented changes at the time, those changes contributed to improved practice over time, and this research will continue to influence my future practice, and perhaps others teacher educators’ practice. In this fifth cycle, the action I have taken based on my new analyses are the writing of this dissertation and related dissemination of my findings through publication in hopes of influencing scholarly discussions of what it means to educate teachers for social justice. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009a) convey, “the scholarship of teaching and learning should be public, accessible to critique by others, and exchangeable in the professional community” (p. 40). While this was a study of my practice for the sake of my own improvement and ensuring my students the best possible learning experience, many of my findings may be adaptable and transferable for other teacher educators in their own settings.

For student participants in this study, their participatory projects were a way of taking action toward sustainable change, however, the actual action occurred more on their behalf through my subsequent work than it was actually implemented by them. Certainly, students’ contributions were part of why and how these changes came about and they directly benefitted from the changes (as will my future students), nevertheless, these were still somewhat passive actions on their part. While I believe students left the course more committed to educational justice and supporting all types of learners, and gained important capacities that should help them act more knowledgeably and purposefully in this direction, certain findings suggest that they are still underprepared to actually act as change agents beyond classrooms. As previously
discussed, some students retained the stance that teachers should remain neutral when it comes to taking more political forms of action on behalf of their students, and I believe I could have done more or better here, and will use this information to alter my future pedagogy and curriculum to more prominently support students’ ability to enact more public and political forms of activism and teacher dissent. While we did implement changes based on student research and feedback within our course, we did not do enough to take an activist approach beyond our classroom community. The best action research proposes or implements actual solutions, as well as attempts to draw attention from administrators and policy makers to the important issues arising from the research. The optimal time to have done this with students would have been during their Photovoice project, however, because I had so much I was required to cover (as discussed in chapter three) and barely enough time/energy to cover it with any depth in the first place, this remained beyond the scope of our work together. I believe there must be ways to better direct our attention in this outward direction in my future practice with students.

A further action coming out of this study is documenting how this knowledge can contribute directly to UC’s teacher education program. Overall, the Introduction to Education course is an exemplar of what should be done throughout the program if the mission is to create future educators ready to act as change agents for their students. Coming into this course, my predecessors had already carefully crafted some of the most forward-thinking and social-justice minded aspects of the policies, content, and assignments, such as the more successful readings, reflective journal assignments, service-learning field experiences, and giving instructors the freedom to translate requirements to suit our teaching styles. Other instructors I’ve seen hired to teach this course also tend to be especially passionate and innovative. They have and continue to exemplify many of the same aims as I have through CCI, though each does so in personalized
ways. Who we hire and the resources we provide them, then, largely impact the successful implementation of a social justice mission.

A related concern in social justice teaching and research is that what we do is possibly too unique to the individual instructors and students involved, and therefore may never be fully scalable. While I agree that my enactment of CCI and others’ similar approaches may not be purely replicable—nor do I think they should they be, despite current education trajectories—I do believe the overall matching of our means with our ends, carefully and clearly articulating the assumptions underlying these actions, is a scalable and teachable habit. While I make particular choices, have certain personal characteristics that influence my practice, and my students represent a limited sector of the teacher education student population, I believe it is the overall conscientization, caring, and purposeful action that are replicable, in whatever individualized ways they manifest, and modeling these does exert a sustainable influence on the field of teacher education for social justice.

The downside to all this is that, like so many large universities, UC depends on graduate students and adjunct instructors to teach many of its foundational teacher education courses. I do not discount the expertise of these instructors—I am one, after all. Instead, I am critical of a system that places what I consider some of its most important courses in the hands of relatively low-paid temporary staff, many of whom are juggling their teaching with the full-time job of being a doctoral student. Giving graduate students and underemployed academics the opportunity to teach and gain experience would not be problematic except that they are expected to instill vital competencies in their teacher education students with so little physical, financial, or professional support compared with full-time and tenure-track faculty. The result is likely to be mediocre teaching, mediocre scholarship, and/or mediocre professional involvement and
improvement—all of which, I confess, describe my own work at one point or another—which also further restricts these instructors’ capacity to eventually secure more respected and influential positions. An alarming trend in higher education at large, over-dependence on graduate students, part-time or adjunct faculty, or otherwise undervalued and priority-conflicted individuals to train our undergraduates conveys both a disrespect for these students and for those doing the difficult work of shaping their minds and skills. Anecdotally, I know that most teachers in these situations are less likely to expend the kinds of time and energy needed to make their courses exceptional—not for lack of talent or desire, but because they simply are not provided the adequate means to do so. In such a context, these instructors are also far less likely to find the time, resources, energy, and voice to critically engage in social justice efforts on their own or others’ behalf, another way those in power have historically rendered those they oppress powerless. Justice and sustainable change for students at all levels, then, depends on a serious examination of and, hopefully, reorganization of higher education’s priorities.

**Considerations for Future Research**

I see several directions for future research deriving from this project. Here I make recommendations for future work that result from both my own considerations during the first five cycles and from Cochran-Smith and Villegas’s (2015) recommended future directions in teacher education research. These possibilities include making further use of the abundance of data from this project, more closely studying RCT’s specific influences on social justice teacher education practices, examining how/whether UC’s teacher education program aligns with its expressed social justice mission, and following up with more longitudinal studies that examine the influence of CCI on my students’ actual practice in other coursework and eventually their own classrooms.
First, I have treasure trove of untouched or underutilized data collected that could form future action research cycles for this study, as well as students who were enthusiastic about remaining involved in the future (such as by being interviewed at a later date or helping with data analysis) who I was not able to involve within the scope of this fifth cycle. I could examine the same data and/or the extended data more purposefully for deeper understandings of any of the different aspects that arose in the findings thus far. For example, I might wish to take the concept of authenticity and vulnerability a step further and incorporate transcription and coding of interviews, more extensive examination of portfolios and other artifacts, as well as discuss in more detail the specific findings under this theme that were only touched upon in this cycle of the study. There is room in the existing literature for more contributions around most of the topics I have articulated under relationships, course experiences, and learning outcomes.

Next, I have written about and received serious interest in my theoretical discussion of RCT in connection with teacher education for social justice. An article currently in progress focuses on the conceptual application, so studying specific practices of RCT in teacher education is a promising direction for a future cycle in the existing CCI study or for a separate study in a new context. Because I found relationships were foundational to all other aspects of CCI, I am intrigued to follow up with a more in-depth study of RCT’s unique contributions to practices of social justice teacher education.

Also important would be a study of the teacher education program at the University of Cincinnati to compare and contrast attitudes and practices around social justice teacher preparation. UC’s teacher education program website states the following “Transforming Urban Teacher Education” mission:
Our goal is to improve outcomes for students in high needs schools by preparing professionals who recognize the moral imperative to teach all children. We prepare educators who are committed to issues of social justice, caring about each individual, and competent in evidence-based practice and data-driven decisions. Instilling 21st century skills information and communication, thinking and problem solving, and interpersonal relationships and self-direction, provides the foundation for our work. We strive to prepare educators who support self-determination, advocacy, and empowerment for the most disenfranchised students. (UC School of Education, 2017)

I am heartened by how well this mission statement aligns with many of my CCI aims and practices. The quizzical response I receive from so many in our program when I mention the existence of this mission statement, however, leads me to believe we are not meeting these goals to the best of our ability. What are the underlying reasons for this? What are we doing right? Might we develop more awareness of the mission in order to consciously reinforce our strengths?

In keeping with my research values, I envision a participatory action research project and qualitative case study that brings students, faculty, and administrators together in conversation and action.

Finally, in their discussion of existing teacher education research, Cochran-Smith and Villegas found certain types of studies still lacking, as previously discussed. They conclude that what will be necessary to keep up with trends in the field of teacher education are studies that connect candidate preparation to their actual practices with their future students. “Relative to the number of current studies that examine how teacher preparation enhances or alters teacher candidates’ beliefs and understandings, there are far fewer studies that investigate how preparation enhances practice and/or the relationships between beliefs and practice” (Cochran-
Smith & Villegas, 2015, p. 390). I have always seen this as a future direction for my project, and I plan to conduct a more longitudinal phase in which I track my students into their own teaching after graduation and study whether and how my findings around their important learning translate into how they actually teach students in their own classrooms.

A similar direction Cochran-Smith and Villegas suggest are studies that connect teacher learning specifically to student learning. Under current dominant modes of student and teacher assessment, what defines “student learning” in mainstream education policy and practice does not align with what I consider important student learning. Cochran-Smith and Villegas similarly note that “research along these lines would require funding for the development of authentic ways to assess student learning, defined not simply as test scores, but as students’ academic learning as well as their social and emotional development, their ability to be critical and creative, and their development of the deliberative skills necessary for participation in democratic societies” (p. 391). I still see this as a possibility for extending my CCI work, however, I would absolutely have to emphasize these kinds of alternative conceptions of student learning in order to align such a project with CCI and my teaching and research values. Consequently, another direction for future research would be to join in the task of developing these more authentic ways of assessing students in order to better evaluate CCI’s contribution to more holistic notions of student learning. Because I already authentically assess my college students, it would be interesting to investigate, perhaps with my students, how to extend this into primary and secondary classrooms.

Conclusion

This study of CCI was very inward-looking and context-specific, focusing on understanding and improving my practice in my own setting of an urban, Midwestern teacher
education program with a social justice mission (however varied in its actual implementation of this mission). While I have accordingly highlighted future directions I might take this research, those in the larger field might also consider implications for their own work. I propose that practitioners consider the local conditions and student populations with which their own teacher candidates will most likely end up working and seek ways to model what those specific students will most need from their teachers. I challenge educators with social justice values and aims similar to mine to consider their own practices in teacher education, examining whether and how their means align with their ends. I hope that those teachers and researchers who feel as I do, but who may have been intimidated by current ideological trajectories into hiding or silencing these essential parts of themselves, will be emboldened to join me in standing up for what we believe is right and good. As educators, it is our privilege to create opportunities and alternatives so that all students have a chance to reach their individual potential as well as thrive within, contribute to, and harmoniously interact as equals in a more enlightened and humane world.
References


Atasay, E. (2015). Neoliberal multiculturalism embedded in social justice education:


Milner, H. R., IV. (2010). *Start where you are, but don’t stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today’s classrooms*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.


Appendices

Appendix A—Structured Ethical Reflection

In each phase column, I have adapted the original SER grid with an added “answer” column to the right of my original questions. This helped me more overtly keep track of how/whether I was upholding my values.

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<td>Humor</td>
<td>How can I convey my pedagogical spirit in a way that still secures credibility with admins/ faculty/ funders?</td>
<td>Clear explanations of ambiguity and relation to personal perspectives</td>
<td>Incorporating student input into questions as organic parts of existing processes</td>
<td>How can I create a sense of fun, and build curiosity in potential participants?</td>
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<td>Playfulness</td>
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<td>Curiosity</td>
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<td>Ideas are implicit in the course, by the end, they are naturally curious</td>
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<td>Caring</td>
<td>Do I ensure that the students feel like partners in this work?</td>
<td>Photovoice and GLU</td>
<td>They are at the center of it, the motivation for it</td>
<td>How do I ensure students know that my care for them motivates my research?</td>
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<td>Compassion</td>
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<td>What data would be least imposing on students?</td>
<td>By building caring relationships and foregrounding care through CCI</td>
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<td>Kindness</td>
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<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Are there any good potential partners I might have overlooked?</td>
<td>Considered other teachers who teach the same course; not pursued, lack of time/space</td>
<td>Am I willing to change my question if it makes more sense to do so?</td>
<td>Use of items they have to do anyway, like assignments, class projects; my observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<td>Added questions about the inquiry process itself</td>
<td>How do I ensure students know that my care for them motivates my research?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By building caring relationships and foregrounding care through CCI</td>
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<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>How do I confront potential doubts that PAR is worthwhile/ my critical methods are “effective”?</td>
<td>None encountered</td>
<td>Yes, skeptical, but also embracing my positionality and its influence; transparent about it</td>
<td>Setting clear goals and disregarding data that isn’t clearly related to those goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criticality</td>
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<td>What sources of data might I be overlooking because they do not easily fit my methodology?</td>
<td>What do I do if I don’t get as many participants as I think I need?</td>
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<td>Prudence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not an issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic Practice</td>
<td>Am I treating the students as partners in this research?</td>
<td>Yes, via Photovoice, GLU, choice</td>
<td>Specific questions in EOC reflection questionnaire</td>
<td>Through my own notes and reflection, I broadly discuss these alternatives and limitations</td>
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<td>Mutual Respect</td>
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Return to Ethics discussion
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<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>How can I lay out my proposal/plans in a way that is brief but unambiguous?</td>
<td>What can I do to ensure students are fully aware of the implications of addressing this question?</td>
<td>Again, embedded in CCI itself; students have options throughout</td>
<td>What’s in it for the participants?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Has brevity in my proposal/plans?</td>
<td>This is part of the teaching through CCI itself</td>
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<td>Potential to spread CCI, which they have enjoyed themselves</td>
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<td>Mutuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Am I forming partnerships that will challenge my assumptions/interpretations?</td>
<td>Am I allowing personal bias to influence my question? Is that even a problem?</td>
<td>Have I considered traditional forms of rigor that might actually fit with my emancipatory methods?</td>
<td>What have I done to ensure there is no coercion in my recruitment of students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>None really formed, but idea about other teachers would have been good here or in future</td>
<td>Research is political and personal, especially practitioner and participatory research</td>
<td>Yes, informal attention to sufficient “sample size,” etc., disregarding data type when I don’t have enough, etc.</td>
<td>Depends on how one defines coercion; trust plus anonymous consenting, sealed envelope</td>
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<td>Rigor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Am I being sure to include the least powerful as equal partners?</td>
<td>Students, especially quieter, less open with ideas/opinions, given options for conveying ideas</td>
<td>How do I ensure this project does not just reify existing structures?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
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<td>How does my question contribute positively to the larger educational system?</td>
<td>Constant critical analysis of means and ends, prioritize social justice over academic or other utility</td>
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<td>Inclusiveness</td>
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<td>Answers need for more inclusive, equity-minded practices to address disparities</td>
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<td>Justice</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Conviction</td>
<td>How will I deal with issues of power and related setbacks within a “banking” system of education?</td>
<td>Am I ready to ask the difficult questions? Am I prepared for the answers?</td>
<td>How much time am I willing to commit to this goal? At what point will I cut my losses if necessary?</td>
<td>Have I sought out/treated the least well-off as my most crucial participants?</td>
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<td>Determination</td>
<td>Seeking alternatives; will not allow my work to be derailed by unfair power relations, and won’t support such by abiding by them</td>
<td>Yes and yes, my critical approached require it</td>
<td>Unnecessary, there have been abundant opportunities in this project topic</td>
<td>Yes, I’ve tried to make the process accessible to even the most timid, etc.</td>
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<td>Patience</td>
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<td>Courage</td>
<td>How do I prepare myself to attempt something so personally intimidating?</td>
<td>How much time am I willing to commit to this goal? At what point will I cut my losses if necessary?</td>
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<td>Self-Confidence</td>
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<td>How can I make data production/</td>
<td>PAR methods; choice in assignments</td>
<td>How can I lighten</td>
<td>How can I make this step feel important after</td>
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<td>collection interesting for</td>
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<td>the heaviness of</td>
<td>all the time/work students have already</td>
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<td>students?</td>
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<td>data analysis?</td>
<td>shared?</td>
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<td>Convergent process, reflexive</td>
<td>Difficult given the</td>
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<td>going back and</td>
<td>time lapse between our time</td>
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<td>together and the actual write-up</td>
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<td>What if my plan doesn’t go as</td>
<td>The plan is fluid and not static,</td>
<td>How many</td>
<td>I am willing to chase down students, but not</td>
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<td>can accommodate this</td>
<td>different ways</td>
<td>willing to do to get students</td>
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<td>might my data be</td>
<td>involved in member checking?</td>
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<td>How do I compassionately</td>
<td>Group processes, semi-anonymous for</td>
<td>I contextualize</td>
<td>How do I incorporate their feedback in the</td>
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<td>facilitate students’ input?</td>
<td>shy students; Responsiveness to their feedback, needs</td>
<td>this data to help explain it as a product of experiences and structures</td>
<td>most accurate yet considerate way?</td>
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<td>How do I triangulate the data</td>
<td>Using multiple data types, artifacts, interviews, personal observation, etc.</td>
<td>Using eclectic coding to look for different types of analyses</td>
<td>How much am I willing to do to get students involved in member checking?</td>
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<td>What process will we use to</td>
<td>Not addressed</td>
<td>How can I ensure analysis includes all perspectives?</td>
<td>Am I including “critical friends” as well as participants here?</td>
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<td>decide what kinds of data feel</td>
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<td>This is mainly accomplished through my committee here</td>
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<td>useful/possible to create for</td>
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<td>everyone?</td>
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<td>Am I being careful to inform</td>
<td>Consenting at the end makes this somewhat irrelevant; I do tell them I do this research at the beginning</td>
<td>How do I make my methods understandable to those untrained in research methodology?</td>
<td>How will I account for student(s) deciding to change/withdraw their own data?</td>
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<td>students what’s going on at each step?</td>
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<td>What different types of data can I help students create to increase</td>
<td>Photovoice, GLU; personalized work</td>
<td>How will I handle results that don’t “fit” my original</td>
<td>Transiently and honestly. I explain what happened and implications</td>
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<td>substance and validity?</td>
<td>ideals for the project?</td>
<td>participants’ interpretations?</td>
<td>likely to be least accommodating?</td>
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<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>What types of data will best challenge the status quo in educational research?</td>
<td>Am I considering modes of evaluating data that have been traditionally marginalized?</td>
<td>Have I been sure to confer with/ defer to the least well-off perspective?</td>
<td>I asked every possible student who consented to be contacted, tried to be open to all perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>Photovoice, GLU, etc.</td>
<td>Participatory methods include students, who are typically those most ignored</td>
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<td>How am I ensuring my results are accessible/ useful outside academia?</td>
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<td>Justice</td>
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<td>This is hard, since topic is teacher education, housed within academia... working on this</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conviction</td>
<td>How will I manage the potential abundance of data?</td>
<td>How can I analyze the data in a way that is not overwhelming?</td>
<td>How can I ensure students feel their contribution has a purpose and meets that purpose?</td>
<td>How much time/ energy am I willing to expend on disseminating the results?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Being very organized, through lots of processing and memo-ing as I go</td>
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<td>All my waking hours, apparently</td>
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<td>Patience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>What can I do to build confidence in my methods, both instructional and researching?</td>
<td>What can I do to build confidence in my ability to evaluate data?</td>
<td>How can I be confident in my results?</td>
<td>How will I handle setbacks in attempts at presentation and publication?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Confidence</td>
<td>Instructional, with time and experience; methods via study and reflection</td>
<td>Study! And write! Putting the process into words and into conversation with existing literature</td>
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<td>Resilience</td>
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<td>I have had one particularly unjust setback! Beyond that, I will keep trying because this is good, important stuff</td>
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Appendix B—Consent Form

Return to IRB discussion

Title of Study: Using Critically Compassionate Intellectualism in Pre-Service Teacher Education

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this research study is Amy Rector Aranda of the University of Cincinnati (UC) College of Education. She is being guided in this research by Miriam Raider-Roth. There may be other people on the research team helping at different times during the study.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this classroom-based, practitioner action research study is to study my own work and student responses in the classroom in order to improve the courses I teach and my teaching practice using the particular framework of critically compassionate intellectualism, which consists of critical pedagogy, authentic caring, and social justice centered curriculum.

Who will be in this research study?
Up to 32 people will take part in this study each semester. You may be in this study if you are a student enrolled in the EDST 1001 courses I teach during 2014-2016.

What will you be asked to do in this research study?
- You may choose to be observed during your normal classroom routines and discussions.
- You may choose to fill out short answer questionnaires regarding your experiences with the course.
- You may choose to be interviewed at the beginning and/or end of the course. These interviews will take place in a location of the participant’s choosing and audio will be recorded for accurate data collection. Each interview will last 30-60 minutes and will be conducted outside of class time.
- You may choose to take part in a group semi-structured interview at the beginning and/or end of the course, which may be audio/video recorded for accurate data collection. Each interview will last 30-60 minutes, either during or outside of class time.
- You may choose to provide as data: assignments, personal journals, multi-media, poetry, art or any other medium of your choosing where you may reflect upon your experiences throughout the course.
- You may choose to take part in a participatory action research aspect of the study, wherein you will act as a co-researcher in collecting and interpreting data of your own or of other students. You will also choose whether to allow other students to access your data in this way if you are not participating as an action researcher.
You will not be required to do every activity to take part in the study, nor to be audio or video taped, and will still be able to participate in whatever other way you choose. If you quit the study part-way through, your existing data will either be used, returned to you, or destroyed, at your option.

**Are there any risks to being in this research study?**
It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk by being in this research study.

**Are there any benefits from being in this research study?**
Because of being in this research you might have the opportunity to have your voice and opinions heard about important teaching and curriculum decisions that may impact you and/or other students. If you choose to participate in the participatory action research aspect of the study, you may have the opportunity to learn valuable research methods and practices.

**What will you get because of being in this research study?**
You will not be paid or given anything to take part in this study.

**Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?**
If you do not want to take part in this research study you may choose to simply not participate or may still take part in the activities and your data will not be used/collected, and you will not be treated any differently. You have a choice whether or not to take part in any or all activities. You also have a choice whether or not to be audio or video taped. There is a place at the end of this paper to mark your choices. Your participation choices will not affect your grade or treatment in this course in any way.

*Please note that any anonymous data such as questionnaires and course feedback will be used as data for this study. If you have any problem with this, please let me know and we can devise a solution.

**How will your research information be kept confidential?**
Information about you will be kept private, if you prefer, by: using a study ID alias name instead of your real name on the research documents; keeping the consent forms and the master list of names and study ID’s in a separate location from the research documents; and, limiting access to research data to members of the research team.

The data from this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by name unless you desire to be or are a co-author to a publication. The researcher will ask people in group discussions to keep those discussions confidential, but they might talk about them anyway. The researcher cannot promise that information sent by the internet or email will be private. Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes.

**How will the research team communicate with me?**
There is a place on the consent form to provide an email address or other contact information. This information is used so that the researcher may contact you outside of class if necessary. Email may be sent or a call made to describe study components in further depth and answer any questions you may have; to arrange for interviews; to arrange meetings of those taking part in the participatory action research portion; for sending research documents for you to verify their accuracy; and generally, to conduct whatever other communication cannot be conducted during class time or otherwise in person. You are not required to provide this information, however, if you do, the same methods of
confidentiality previously described will apply. Your information will not be used for any purposes outside this study.

**What are your legal rights in this research study?**
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

**What if you have questions about this research study?**
If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Amy Rector Aranda at (513) 898-9233, rectoray@mail.uc.edu, or Teachers College 610B, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45222. Or, you may contact Miriam Raider-Roth at (513) 556-3808, raidermm@uc.edu, or Teachers College 610P, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH 45222.

**Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?**
Again, your participation choices will not affect your grade or treatment in this course in any way. No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. You may skip any questions that you don’t want to answer. You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you should tell Amy Rector Aranda [(513) 898-9233, rectoray@mail.uc.edu, or Teachers College 610B, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio 45222].
Agreement:
I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I understand I may request a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep, either in paper or by email, at any time.

Please circle your answer to every question below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes / No</th>
<th>You may use or leave my real name on research documents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may collect written or recorded observations about my classroom activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may use my written answers to questionnaires</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may interview me up to 2 times for approximately 30-60 minutes each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may use my contributions to group interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may audiotape my group interview (for data analysis only)</td>
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<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may videotape my group interview (for data analysis only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may audiotape my personal interview (for data analysis only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may use personally created data I provide you, such as assignments, classwork, a journal, art, poetry, multi-media, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>I consent that those who are taking part as participatory action researchers may access whatever data I have agreed to provide for the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>You may contact me at a later date to follow up on data collected during my enrollment in the course and/or to verify the accuracy of the research findings</td>
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All spaces below MUST be completed:

Print Name of Participant ___________________________ Date of Birth ___________________________

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date of Signature ___________________________

PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT/ASSENT:

I have reviewed this form with the participant and/or representative. An explanation of the research was given and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject’s satisfaction. In my judgment, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

Signature and Title of Person Obtaining Consent/Assent ___________________________ Date ___________________________

*If you are reviewing a digital copy of this form, please print, sign and deliver a physical copy of the entire document to the principal investigator in order to indicate your consent/assent. You may also scan and email to: rectoray@mail.uc.edu. Return to IRB discussion*
### Appendix C—Answered: Napan’s Qualities of Co-Creative Inquiry

From Ksenija Napan, “How Do I Teach?” (2011)

<table>
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<th>Quality</th>
<th>Corresponding Questions</th>
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| Context | *Is my class a safe place and how do I know that?*  
It is a relatively safe space, as safe as I am capable of making it with what I know. Some students may be more shy or introverted, may still feel unsafe to share certain things, but this may be the case no matter what type of space I provide. Students in general have provided feedback that they find my class a safe space, using those words.  
*Which conscious activities do I undertake to make it a safe place?*  
From day one I convey that students are free to question—the work, my methods, the topic, etc.—and to offer suggestions. I try to approach topics being transparent about my own inclinations, but also showing that I accept that mine are not everyone’s and that’s okay. I also offer many ways for students to share their ideas inside and outside of class time. Those who are less inclined to speak about things during class have the option to reflect their ideas in private journals. Many do share very personal experiences in these journals that only I see.  
*How students contribute to it?*  
I feel like the students learn to take initiative over the course of the semester, getting more and more comfortable in believing I mean what I say when I commit to a judgment-free zone and to hearing their ideas and opinions. Students appear to be respectful of other students’ ideas and statements, probably partly because most do not speak up as much and say they prefer to listen to others’ ideas.  
*How do I convey my passion and interest for the subject I teach?*  
This is hard to put into words... I just do! Students also note this about me in their feedback. I believe my critical nature shows that things bother me, excite me, bewilder me, etc. about our education system, and students believe this shows my expertise and genuine care about the subject I am teaching.  
*Do I know my students’ names? Can I pronounce them well?*  
Yes! From first day I make a visible effort to learn their names by having them make name cards that they place on their desks, at least for the first few weeks. Once I start reading their assignments/journals, I am better able to connect names to ideas and
backgrounds because I am someone who has to see a written name in order to remember it. I also print out class lists with photos and look at the photos while reading their assignments, to, again, visually connect names to faces. Students also remark about this, since they don’t feel like most instructors bother to even know their names (which may easily be due to class size).

Am I interested in them?
Absolutely! I find it very interesting to learn the backgrounds and opinions of my students, to try to make sense of how they see the world and education. I directly ask them to explore their own experiences in early journals so that I can know where they’re coming from.

What are my most common criticisms about my students?
Some can get too comfortable with my leniency and seem to not pay enough attention during discussions, which would be remedied if they participated more, but they also tend to be a shy bunch, which is not a fault, but seems odd given their choice of profession. I would also complain that they don’t do the readings well enough, and this subtracts from our capacity to have good discussions. A main problem, then, is getting them to fully participate in substantial ways.

What are their strengths?
Openness to new ideas, desire to enjoy their learning, ability to question things together, appreciation for their opportunities. There are always a handful who are exceptionally aware and passionate, and these students give me the most faith in the future of education. Some are fantastic writers or researchers, others have innovative streaks. Most are compassionate and caring and want to do good things for students.

Do students appear to enjoy learning?
Yes, with the exception that they do not seem to do the reading very well. Although most report that they do it, I don’t see much of that reflected in their participation and other work. To me, if you enjoy learning, you will at least skim the readings and have a good idea of our topics, then you will want to contribute more. Many say they enjoy listening and learn that way, and I know this is true for me as well, so I know participation is not everything, but it is unfortunately an easier way to gauge their interest and level of learning.
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<th><strong>Quality</strong></th>
<th><strong>Corresponding Questions</strong></th>
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<td><strong>What do I think they like the most about my class?</strong></td>
<td>The “chill” environment. They look forward to it because it is not stressful like other classes. They like the freedom to think for themselves and have their own ideas rather than be told what to think.</td>
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<td><strong>What is interesting about my class? How is it special?</strong></td>
<td>Ditto. They find most things about my methods to be novel and “refreshing.” They also find my care for them to be significant and different than what they are used to. They like the things we study because they never thought about most of these topics before.</td>
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<td><strong>What students remember at the end of it?</strong></td>
<td>They remember feeling cared for, being less stressed, and learning about important things they had never considered before. They seem to understand inequity and injustice, etc. in particular, which is my main goal.</td>
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<td><strong>Which processes contribute to creating a learning community in my classroom?</strong></td>
<td>Lots of group work and discussion time. Learning names, constantly changing group assignments, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>How many students do their best? How come?</strong></td>
<td>Most seem to do their best. Very few seem to be half-assing it, even if their work is not of the highest “quality,” they all do what is for them their best work according to what they believe they are supposed to be doing. Because I do not judge their work according to a standardized rubric, I look at their work only in relation to their own growth and improvement over time, I can say most are putting in effort to grow. There are always some who slack and have to play catch up toward the end, but this is because I have given them that license and openly stated I know that puts me at the bottom of the list when it comes time to choose coursework priorities.</td>
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<td><strong>How students contribute to make it their own?</strong></td>
<td>They seem to forge friendship networks, they interpret assignments as they make most sense for them personally, they take my offer to be creative and do run with it.</td>
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<td><strong>Is my course challenging enough? Do my students appear to be bored?</strong></td>
<td>I can sometimes find they are too comfortable with my laidback attitude toward their participation. I think the assignments themselves are challenging, but again, doing the readings would make it more so and since I don’t quiz them or otherwise hold them</td>
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<td>accountable, this can be a problem. Bored? I wouldn’t say that, I think most students are intrigued by our topics and listening to discussions about them.</td>
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<td><em>Would I like to be a student in my class? Why or why not?</em></td>
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<td>Yes! I love discussion-based classes, and I love teachers who expect us to think for ourselves. However, if I was the type of student who learns better through visuals and lectures, then the lack of prepared lessons/presentations would probably hinder my learning. This is something I feel I would dedicate more time to remedying if I weren’t a starving student instructor! I also find that even students who think they need a lot of structure and external motivation discover that they actually like the way I do things just as well. They make it their own, so it still works for them.</td>
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<td>Flow*</td>
<td><em>Have I ever noticed the flow in my classroom? What happened? Did anybody else notice it?</em></td>
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<td>I think we have the most flow when we are doing the deeper, more physical activities like the privilege walk, the fishbowl discussion about the Precious Knowledge film, and other sort of controversial activities around privilege and injustice. I think these are the types of things students are naturally drawn into, they speak to their souls in some way that feels more intense than the average lesson. Students consistently cite these activities as the most influential and engaging. I agree that they bring out the most thoughtfulness in their journals, etc., but I don’t always feel it at the exact moment, because they can still be pretty quiet and it’s then hard to know what’s going through their minds.</td>
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<td><em>How do I manage and encourage curiosity in the classroom?</em></td>
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<td>I welcome it, invite it! I ask them to question and be curious. I encourage them to ask me questions in and out of the classroom. I give them permission to forego my assignments and suggest alternatives they think would be more useful to them personally. I want them to think about every little “why” in the course of their experience with me.</td>
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<td><em>What brainstorm activities do I enjoy?</em></td>
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<td>I don’t consider myself a big brainstormer, but when I am in discussion and collaborating with others, that is when I feel the most productive in this vein.</td>
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<td><em>What activities do my students enjoy the most?</em></td>
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<td>Hands-on activities, where they physically move about and work with each other, such as the Marshmallow Challenge, creating lessons as groups, other times we move into new positions and approach topics in new ways.</td>
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<td>Quality</td>
<td>Corresponding Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How do we engender curiosity?</strong></td>
<td>Constantly asking “why?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the most interesting part of the subject I teach?</strong></td>
<td>The hidden aspects of education that no one thinks about. It’s a real eye opener for students who have only ever really considered education from the perspective of the student, not the teacher, admins, community, society, and globally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What excites me?</strong></td>
<td>Student awakening and growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When am I most creative?</strong></td>
<td>When students don’t do the reading, actually! It forces me to think outside the box to find ways to engage them with the material through activities. Since I don’t lecture, that is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do I express my creativity?</strong></td>
<td>By coming up with as many options for students as I can muster, trying to always mix up what we do from class to class, to keep them from getting bored or complacent, I must be creative. This has been interesting because I don’t consider myself creative in this way. I’ve had to learn it’s okay to look for outside resources for ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do students express their creativity in classroom discussions, assignments and presentations?</strong></td>
<td>They just do—they come up with ways of thinking and doing things that I wouldn’t have, and this is why I offer them freedom in interpreting assignments, etc. because I want to see what they come up with when no one tells them how to do something.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th><strong>What academic requirements, proposed by my academic institution are non-negotiable?</strong></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Most of our assignments are required for compliance with program standards, accreditation, licensing, etc. However, I do have the freedom to interpret the assignments to my students and I allow them flexibility in how they interpret them back to me, as much as possible. I explicitly state when I need them to do something in an exact way, such as with final portfolios, and offer them very clear instructions and examples.</td>
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<td><strong>What academic requirements, proposed by my academic integrity are non-negotiable?</strong></td>
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<td>Respect for students and their freedom to think and act for themselves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Corresponding Questions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is negotiable about my course?</strong></td>
<td>How students do things is very negotiable, except for those certain requirements of what they must do. How they show participation, how they attend, etc.—all very negotiable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How is flexibility manifested in my course?</strong></td>
<td>Clearly stated and written in assignment instructions and policies. Through my openness to, and even requests for students to make assignments their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Which choices do I make to make the course different each year?</strong></td>
<td>I am constantly trying to find readings that they will like better and ways to get them to read more! Beyond that, I ask for their feedback at several points in the semester and take their suggestions into account moving forward and into the next course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do I believe about choices in academic work?</strong></td>
<td>They are crucial for students to take ownership of their work, and do their best, most meaningful work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Which choices do students have in terms of process, content and assessment in my course?</strong></td>
<td>They have a lot of choices about process, how they do things. They have less choice in content, since I must cover a lot of content by requirement. Assessment is again, very flexible. I explain my stance against grades, but I also offer them the choice to receive them. At the end of the course, we negotiate their grades based on their self-assessment of their efforts and work quality. Importantly, my students’ final portfolios are completely comparable in quality with those from another instructor’s class when compared, so I know that my evaluation methods are equally valid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How important is the ability to make a choice in my students’ future profession?</strong></td>
<td>I feel it is very important, though the policy climate is increasingly limiting their ability to choose. They should be making constant choices about students, adjusting their pedagogy and practice. Unfortunately, they are being reduced to technicians who do what others require of them in a bunch of top-down reforms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>How does trust manifest in my class?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I trust students to take responsibility for their performance by giving them a lot of options, and very few consequences that I impose. I trust them to be respectful of this freedom and me. I trust them by sharing my own vulnerabilities and hoping for their respect and compassion. They trust me to show I care in ways beyond grading and the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Corresponding Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usual. They trust me with sensitive personal information in their journaling. They trust that I mean what I say and that they won’t end up failing the class, for example, because I wasn’t really as flexible as I claimed to be.</td>
<td><strong>Does the content of my course require a level of trust between students themselves and between students and lecturers in order to learn better?</strong> Yes, in most aspects. Trust for good discussions, journals, other work; trust for grading and feedback; trust in being responsible for our own actions; trust for helping others and doing one’s part; trust in the content to tell the whole story...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students trust instructors to give them a fair shot, and are often disappointed because instructors are too busy or not invested enough in the student experience. We also tend toward a false neutrality and put too much faith in standards as measures of fairness, instead of treating people as individuals. Furthermore, trust in instructors is demeaned if we are expected to conform to others’ standards rather than trusted to enact our own visions of how we educate.</td>
<td><strong>How can trust be ignored in academic environments?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of group work and time to interact. It’s easier to trust people you know well and care about, and who you feel care about you.</td>
<td><strong>How can trust between students be encouraged?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think this is unfortunately the case in most departments, and this would be another way trust is ignored. If we were more willing to do things democratically and to be partners with students, the trust would be stronger and students would feel valued and able to return that trust. When we hold everything to our own standards without consulting students, we are automatically creating an “us vs. them” culture.</td>
<td><strong>Do we have an “us and them” culture within my department? How does it manifest?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the best students are, but not students in general. I have been that student, the star student, and that’s who gets treated like their ideas matter. I want all my students to feel this way, not just the most outgoing, the best writers, the most creative, etc. This is why I offer so many choices and invite so much feedback and group critique of processes.</td>
<td><strong>Are students treated as colleagues? Do they need to do something to deserve this status?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my department, particularly in the graduate studies, it is getting increasingly regulated and surveilled, and I don’t think this supports trust.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Corresponding Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How is respect manifested within my department? How do I do it? Do I see my colleagues doing it? Do I notice when students show trust?</strong>&lt;br&gt;Depends on the department. In ECAR, most of what I do is based on my faculty’s wonderful example. In some other parts of the School of Ed, I think there is unfortunately a lot less respect and trust, and a lot more regulation and harsh consequences. This is based on talking with students from other areas, so I can only speak from that. Their faculty might see things differently.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Relevance | <strong>How will learnings from this particular course shape my students’ future practice?</strong>&lt;br&gt;Hopefully it will immensely influence how they choose to view their students and student “achievement” given the social, cultural, political climate. It is hugely relevant to the kinds of teachers they become and the values they hold as professionals. | |
| --------- | <strong>How is the content of my course related to what students do or are planning to do?</strong>&lt;br&gt;It is immediately related, required for degree/licensing. Only exception is for non-education majors, but even these students tend to find learning all this about education very interesting and helpful for their seeing their own experiences in a new light. | |
|          | <strong>How much of my and students’ practice is integrated in the course?</strong>&lt;br&gt;It is very practice-based, from the activities like creating lessons, to the field experience, to my own reflexivity and inviting them to reflect on my practice with me. | |
|          | <strong>How often do practitioners contribute to my course?</strong>&lt;br&gt;Since it is an education course, we are all practitioners. They also do work outside the classroom in schools with current practitioners. I would like to have more guests in, but students are often so quiet that I don’t really like making the guests do all the work or feel their visit is unappreciated, so I end up not doing as much inviting. | |
|          | <strong>How is mutual learning promoted – how much do students learn from one another?</strong>&lt;br&gt;Very promoted, through lots of small and large group discussion, activities, and assignments. | |
|          | <strong>What are my students’ special skills and abilities and how do they manifest them in the classroom and in their work environment?</strong>&lt;br&gt;These students can be very creative thinkers when it comes to finding ways to teach children. | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Corresponding Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are students aware of the relevance of this course?</td>
<td>Yes, I believe they are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>How do I see education having a transformational potential?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students must have the information in order to act on it. I believe being educated in new ideas gives them this power to see more clearly and act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are the values, skills, knowledge and beliefs integrated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>These are at the core of my teaching, and I make it explicit because I am teaching teachers. They need to understand that what I do is both my practice and a sample of one way they might decide to do or not do something in their own practice. I am very transparent, which is different than the usual belief in remaining neutral as an instructor. I don’t believe we are capable of removing our biases, and that recognizing and owning them is more responsible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do I cater for diversity in my classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I offer choices, again. Students can use their personal strengths more fully and avoid showing their learning only by the mainstream or prescribed modes. We discuss learning styles, and I encourage them to embrace their own styles in their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is students’ prior knowledge acknowledged and utilised?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ditto, it is integrated as part of the learning we are doing about diverse learners. We examine how people are each different, with different backgrounds, experiences, worldviews, strengths, weaknesses, interests, and so on. Then we discuss how teachers can find ways to respect and support these differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are theory, practice and experience integrated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theory is what we learn about, practice is what I model, what they do in their field experiences, and what they do in our projects, and their own experiences are vital components of making sense of all these learning opportunities. They are expected and encouraged to connect ideas to their own experiences of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do we talk about purpose and meaning of what we learn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absolutely. We know that as educators, everything we do in an education course has a dual purpose—it is both the topic and how we do it is an example of the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Corresponding Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td><strong>How do I act with integrity and how do I teach my students to do so?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I believe that by holding to and modeling my own convictions, transparently, I am upholding my own integrity, since I believe certain things are important and I am explicit when something I must do does not align with my values, as well as why what I do is based in those values. I offer this with respect that not everyone has the same values as me, which is why it is important to be clear about their influence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Is integrity teachable?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think so. I think modeling integrity is the best way to teach it. Showing students it is possible to do what you need to do and still uphold your values. There are always ways to align the two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Is the course I teach compatible with my personal beliefs?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly, and this is because of the way I am clear about my own positions on topics and what we do with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Are beliefs something people should talk about? Why or why not?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely. We cannot understand why we do what we do unless we understand our beliefs and motivations. And we cannot change/improve our beliefs without exploring where they come from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>How do personal beliefs influence professional practice?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For me, they influence everything we do. We have to own this and stop pretending we can be neutral “on a moving train.” In owning them, we can also be more fair and account for their influence, rather than trying to pretend they have no influence. It is easier to avoid harmful effects of bias when we admit it exists in the first place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>With whom can I talk when having an ethical dilemma?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My peers and advisors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>How can I manage my power and not impose my beliefs on students?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By being explicit and transparent about it while assuring them they are still free to be just as explicit and transparent about their own beliefs. I ask them to explore their beliefs, and, in journals, for example, when they express a belief I do not agree with, I ask probing questions to invite them to think from a new perspective. When they express a belief I do agree with, I do the same, for that matter! They know what I think, and because I still ask what they think, they seem to feel safe to think it. They are not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corresponding Questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>penalized for their beliefs. In discussions, I try to leave the talking to the students, who will likely challenge each other’s beliefs so I do not need to. Rather than offer ideas and beliefs, I ask them questions and expect them to come up with their own answers through discussion, so the beliefs remain in their control, not mine.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) flow is the optimal experience which often involves painful, risky, difficult activities that stretches the person’s capacity and involved an element of novelty and discovery and in his research respondents described it as a feeling when things were going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness.*

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**Return to Coding discussion**

**Return to Findings discussion**
Appendix D—Official Course Evaluations Example

Course: EDST 1001 002 S INTRO EDUCATION (Spring Semester 2015)  
Instructor: Rector-Aranda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Avg</th>
<th>Std Dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Given the inherent challenges involved in teaching any particular class,</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rate this course in terms of its ability to meet the stated course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>objectives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Please rate your amount of learning in this class.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Please rate the clarity and fairness of the evaluation procedures for</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Please rate the overall quality and usefulness of textbooks and readings</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for this class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Please rate the general organization of the course, including all activities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>within this class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Please rate the appropriateness of the length and the content of various course assignments.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Please rate the overall quality of the method of instruction involved in</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teaching this course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Please rate the professor’s knowledge of the areas of expertise required</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>within the purview of this class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Please rate the professor’s responsiveness to student questions and</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>concerns.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Please rate the professor’s awareness of and attention to gender,</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multicultural, and other types of individual differences among students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in this class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Please rate the professor’s concern for the welfare and learning of each</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>individual student in this class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Please indicate your own involvement in this class (i.e., the amount of</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>your own personal investment of time and energy in learning the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>material covered in this course).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Computed Course Value</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Computed Instructor Value</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

COURSE EVALUATION

Title of Course: Intro Education

Course Number: EDST 1001 002 S

Semester: Spring 2015

Instructor: Amy Rector-Aranda

1. What did you like most about this course?
   - Discussions.
   - I liked the structure and the opportunity we had to discuss class topics in large group settings. I liked that there were multiple means of learning about course content.
   - I really enjoyed how flexible and open the course was. I liked the focus on content rather than grades. I enjoyed open discussion.
   - I liked the variation of assignments used in this class.
   - I liked the class discussions.
   - I liked the lax atmosphere and group discussions.
   - I liked how relaxed it was and how there was little pressure on us.
   - I loved her teaching style and the way she focused on discussion/learning the material, not just grades and busy work.
   - The thinking journals, group discussions, and projects.
   - I liked that the course was discussion based. I also really enjoyed the projects we did in this class.
   - I loved all of the time for reflection and discussion.
   - Open discussion about everything and how students were treated as equals in the classroom.
   - How she gave us freedom on all assignments.
   - I liked how the class was set up. For example, we had discussions every time. I also liked how she grades.
   - The amount of class discussions. It allowed me to develop my ideas further.
   - I really liked the readings and the discussions we had throughout the semester. I also really liked the field experience that we did.

2. What suggestions do you have to improve this course?
   - Do more projects instead of reading about a topic and writing a journal.
   - New textbook- very dense/very research article based.
   - A different book.
   - Find ways to make the textbook more exciting.
   - Put due dates for some of the journals.
   - I don't have any except it'd be nice if a different book was used.
   - Different book that it isn't so intimidating.
   - I did not like the textbook, it was too dense and not very effective.
   - Better textbook and less readings.
   - A better textbook!
   - A better, more appealing textbook.
   - Pick a book that is less dense.
   - No textbook.
   - Change the book.
   - I do not have any suggestions to improve this course, it was great.

3. Please add any additional comments relative to this class. Make your comments as specific as possible. Your comments will be of great value to your instructor in revising this class for the next time it will be taught.

   School of Education
University of Cincinnati
College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services

- I loved the discussions and the journals but I believe if we can express one of our journals in class will be great.
- I really enjoyed this class and felt like I got to express my thoughts a lot. I also feel like Amy was very involved with the students learning and facilitating a good teacher-student relationship.
- I really enjoyed her openness and flexibility. I felt like I could be open and up front if there was an issue.
- The teacher did a great job getting us to participate. She participated as well, creating a better learning environment.
- You should focus on time management more.
- Loved the instructor, very helpful! Appreciated this course and all its aspects.
- Excellent professor.
- The teacher did a very great job teaching this course. She was very clear, understanding, and organized. I would definitely recommend this class to anyone going into an education major.

Return to Data discussion
Return to Findings discussion
Appendix E—Group Level Assessment Questions

The following phrases/charts are printed on separate pages (one for each *) and taped on walls or placed on desks around the room (chart paper is traditionally used, but is too cost-prohibitive for a graduate student!). Students walk around and answer them anonymously. We then get into small groups to analyze sets of 3-4 pages and come back together to discuss themes and actions for improving the course. This set of questions was used in the second half of the Fall 2015 semester.

*The field experience is/has been…
*The most important issue in the history of education has been…
*Diversity in education is ______________.
*For me, the journals are…
* __________ really makes me optimistic about education.
* __________ really makes me angry about education.
*If this course was an animal, it would be a… (draw or write)
*This class makes me _______________________

*In our work together in this class…
  We value __________________ (check your top choices) [From a list of SER-type values]
  Accuracy
  Adaptability
  Authenticity
  Caring
  Commitment
  Common Sense
  Communication
  Community Spirit
  Compassion
  Conscientiousness [...etc.]

*In my work in this class…
  I personally value ____________ (check your top choices) [same list of SER values]
*I wish we could or would have…
*My most important personal takeaway from this class so far is…
*I have found the following readings to be useful/relevant/inspiring…
*I have found the following videos to be useful/relevant/inspiring…
*We need to do more…
*We need to do less…
*Flexible deadlines and similar policies in this class have been…
*The thing I have learned in this class that I’d most like to take into my own teaching would be…
*I think we are meeting these goals...*

Articulating a critical understanding of important organizational and legal structures of schooling in the history of the U.S. that challenge and reinforce democratic ideals, with reference to the public versus private purposes of education in a pluralistic society. *Place a check next to your answer.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure / Not yet</td>
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</table>

*I think we are meeting these goals...*

Researching events in American history with primary and secondary resources, analyzing the contexts of these sources, and interpreting their political, economic, social, legal and competing impacts on current educational practices and policies in regards to meeting diverse student and societal needs. *Place a check next to your answer.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
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<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Really well</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not sure / Not yet</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
*I think we are meeting these goals...*

Articulating a critical understanding of diversity in the context of race, culture, class, ability, language and lifestyle as it relates to the structural nature of opportunities, inequalities, and student identities; and what it means to create culturally sensitive and appropriate learning environments. *Place a check next to your answer.*

| Not at all |       |
| A little   |       |
| Somewhat   |       |
| Really well|       |
| *Not sure / Not yet* |       |

*I think we are meeting these goals...*

Developing relevant questions concerning the political, social, historical, and legal aspects of schooling and debating their significance for current and future education and teaching in a diverse society. *Place a check next to your answer.*

| Not at all |       |
| A little   |       |
| Somewhat   |       |
| Really well|       |
| *Not sure / Not yet* |       |

*I think we are meeting these goals...*

Demonstrating an understanding of democratic, social, and other purposes of education, including contemporary issues related to educational inequality and social justice. 
*Place a check next to your answer.*

| Not at all |       |
*I think we are meeting these goals...
Analyzing social, political, and cultural institutional constraints and expectations involved in the profession of teaching in diverse communities. *Place a check next to your answer.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Really well</th>
<th>Unsure / Not yet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*I think that in this class, I personally…
Demonstrate an understanding of the development of the American education system with a focus on democratic, social, and other purposes of education including contemporary issues related to schools as institutions for educational equality and social justice. *Place a check next to your answer.*

| Not at all | A little | Somewhat | Really well |
|------------|----------|----------|-------------|--------------|

*I think that in this class, I personally…
Actively participate in class activities, discussions, and cooperative learning groups, and
demonstrate a willingness to learn with and from others. Place a check next to your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Really well</th>
<th>Unsure / Not yet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*I think that in this class, I personally…
Develop coherent, reflective questions and responses to and about readings by examining
claims, evidence and contexts as well as making connections between my personal
experiences or beliefs and foundational perspectives, educational theory, practice, and
current educational issues. Place a check next to your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Really well</th>
<th>Unsure / Not yet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Return to GLA discussion
Appendix F—Sample of Coding on an End-of-Course Questionnaire

1. How did the relationship with your peers help or hinder your learning in this class?
   a. The relationship with my peers helped my learning a lot in this class I must say, because oftent times I have very conservative ideas about many things and hearing some of my other classmates ideas it really helped me see the other side.

2. How did the relationship with your instructor help or hinder your learning in this class?
   a. My instructor was very informed about this class and made it a great learning environment, leading lots of discussions and helped keep the conversations going. This really helped the class as a whole I believe.

3. How was your experience in this course different or similar to other courses?
   a. This was way different than most of my other courses because there was not a grading scale per say. Which in a way is very nice but at the same time a little confusing for someone like me who is so use to grades.

4. What ONE THING about this course do you wish all courses had?
   a. Open ended discussions, because sometimes it just the teachers ranting the entirety of the period and by the end everyone just has the same views as the prof. which doesn’t make for the greatest thing.

5. Did you feel comfortable communicating with your instructor for this course? Please explain.
   a. I think I did, it was very easy to communicate and she was very understanding in all situations.
## 2. How did the relationship with your instructor help or hinder your learning in this class?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluations</th>
<th>positive, mixed, (negative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V: academic support, “alleviate pressure”, instructor expertise/qualification, positive learning environment, helpful, not stressful, calm instructor, fun instructor, understands students’ lives, open, respectful, understanding, relationship w/ instructor, flexible, encouraging, instructor participated, “approachable”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: helpful instructors are engaged in the topic themselves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appreciation, relief, grateful, motivated, adjustment, quieter, valued, calm, without fear, without hesitation, comfortable, respect, respected, more interested, prepared to learn, favorite, “so happy”, “why I liked this class so much”, trust, not intimidated, not overwhelmed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provisional</strong></td>
<td>Relational Dynamics, Power-With, Growth-in-Connection, Co-Empowerment, Voice, (Banking), Mutuality, Mutual Empathy, Authenticity, Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Ability/Attitudes toward Subject</td>
<td>instructor expertise/qualification, instructor’s own perspective, instructor engaged with topics, great “pursuit of knowledge” attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes</td>
<td>“calm”, “fun”, flexible, accessible communication, honest, “trustworthy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward Students</td>
<td>instructor understands students’ lives, open, respectful, encouraging, welcoming, caring, genuine, “good intentions”, ease of relationship, personal but not too personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>positive learning environment, small class size, discussion, teaching style, safe space, instructor participated, organized, projects, facilitator, self-evaluation, constructive feedback, answers in understandable way, “level with us”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Student Response to Attitudes/Attributes</td>
<td>ease of relationship, “refreshing”, less stressful, motivation, respectful relationship, connection w/ professor, overcoming language barriers/fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Response to Learning Environment</td>
<td>safe space, “made me want to learn”, fun to learn, “pushed my thoughts MORE outside the box”, “turn in my best work”, “looked forward to”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quotes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-She was giving me knowledge that I needed for my future as a teacher, yet I didn’t know how to ask, so she basically answered a lot of unasked questions that I had.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-I usually never have professor who cares of what I think or believe in. This instructor was different. She showed me how she really respects me, and this made me respect her and what she teaches in class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-What makes an instructor helpful is when you know they are there to help you and they are interested in the topic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- It always felt very genuine and well thought out. I think this made me more interested because after hearing your opinion on a topic I wanted to form my own and learn more about the subject.
- It was evident that the students well-being were her top priority.
- My instructor was extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the topics being taught. She was very understanding and relatable which helped me be more attentive in class and made me care about the class much more.
- I truly believe I tried my hardest in this class because I knew the instructor cared about my learning which made me care about my growth as a learner.
- Having such a level relationship without fear of always being told I was wrong really helped me be more honest with myself which helped me figure out more about who I want to be as a teacher one day.
- Her feedback allowed me to evaluate myself and the assignment I had just completed.
- Overall, my relationship with my instructor I think was built on mutual trust that we would both complete our work and put effort into learning together, and I think this really helped my learning throughout the course.

My thoughts…

Some explanation…

- Values Coding: Pretty early on I realized there was a lot of overlap between these and the structural codes. I thought it must either be redundancy or that I was being too loose with what I was considering worthy of being coded as a “value.” I stopped and decided to look for these after all coding was done as a part of making meaning of the other codes.
- Parentheses denote a mixed or negative evaluation associated with the theme. They often also denote when students are talking about other classes, not this one.
- Terms in quotes are In Vivo codes in students’ own words (Saldaña, 2016, p. 105).
- 2: and 3: in Structural Coding section refer to which research question these codes fall under.

Return to Coding discussion