

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN ACTION:
A CASE STUDY OF OUR LADY OF THE ELMS

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ABSTRACT

This case study of Our Lady of the Elms School in Akron, OH, examines the dialogic teaching practices of eight exemplar teachers representing instruction for students in grades Pre-K-12. Framed in Critical Pedagogy theory, four themes emerged related to the dialogic teaching practices used by the teachers. These themes included (1) building relationships within the classroom, (2) behavioral training for critical listening and critical thought, (3) Socratic questioning and student reflection, and (4) teacher awareness and sensitivity to the learning environment. Research included examination of the challenges faced by the teachers while engaging in dialogic instructional practices. Challenges emerged as three themes and included (1) resistant and overly enthusiastic students, (2) physical exhaustion and time constraints, and (3) a lack of support from the broader community for dialogic education. This study was designed to provide commentary and inspiration to parents, students, education and political leaders engaged in the great conversation of American educational reform.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the brave Dominican nuns of 1923, who faithfully fulfilled their call to educate children and establish a school for girls and young women. May this work be an accolade to all the parents, children, faculty and staff who continue to strive to maintain this mission of education focused on empowering young women; helping them to “read the word” and “read their world”.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Our Lady Of The Elms School	4
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	7
Critical Pedagogy	14
Dialogic Teaching	16
Research Questions	20
III. METHOD	21
Participants	21
Data Collection	22
IV. RESULTS	24
Teaching Practices	24
Building Relationships within the Classroom	24
Behavioral Training for Critical Listening and Critical Thought	31

Socratic Questioning and Student Reflection	37
Teacher Awareness and Sensitivity to the Learning Environment	45
Challenges Faced in the Dialogic Classroom	48
Challenge of Quiet and Overly Enthusiastic Students	48
Challenge of Physical Exhaustion and Time Constraints	50
Challenge of a Lack of Support	51
V DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	54
REFERENCES	60
APPENDICES.....	66
APPENDIX A INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CONSENT	73
APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT FORM	74
APPENDIX C CONSENT TO IDENTIFY FORM.....	75
APPENDIX D INTERVIEW GUIDE	76

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I became acquainted with Our Lady of the Elms school while seeking a school community for my third daughter. I had just completed my 15th year of home education having graduated my three oldest children to college. A failing family business was forcing our family to re-evaluate career choices and lifestyles. I enrolled in Graduate school to pursue a Masters degree in Communication in an effort to update my skill set and re-invent my employability with a culture unimpressed with my experience as a stay-at-home, free-lance writing, home educator. Finding work outside the home meant I could no longer educate my youngest three children in the home. Life was calling me in a different direction and I needed to find the “perfect” school for my youngest daughters and son.

Unknowingly, the design of our homeschool educational practices fell under the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy. I had no formal training in the discipline of education, but I did understand the value of communication and articulation of voice. I valued language, literature, art, history, mathematics and science and was most excited when I found ways to connect them as pieces in a puzzle for my children. Motivated with the desire to teach my children a love of learning, and hearing the words of my parents and grandparents, all former educators, our family culture became a constant state of lived educational experience. Education was not something we did as a homeschool family; it was something we lived. We celebrated cultural traditions of many peoples,

hosted foreign exchange students, traveled to museum collections and historical sites. My children studied music, visual art, dance and theater. They memorized speeches, competed in math Olympics competitions and participated on community sports teams. We wrestled with family illness, death and home construction connecting these experiences to our learning and growth as individuals and a family. The children studied independently and collectively; participating in small group discussions of history, science and literature. Our home became a living, learning community that stretched them, pushed them, taught them and loved them. I followed my inner love of education, love for my children, and studied their learning styles, talents and interests. Home education for our family was a rich, prosperous journey filled with struggle, joy and growth. It was empowering for all.

I wrestled with the reality of leaving homeschool life behind for my youngest children because my three oldest children were thriving as young adults. As young college students, my oldest daughters and son demonstrated a passion for life, a love of learning, clear direction, and a desire to fulfill their chosen vocations. Since my eldest children were the A+ grade for our homeschool report card, I worried a different choice would disadvantage my youngest. I was consumed with a heavy load of grief and anxiety for my youngest children. I worried they might not mature in the same manner as their older siblings. I spent hours researching public and private school websites in our area, talking with members of the community and praying for direction. How could my children experience a critical, holistic education, in a traditional classroom based school?

With hesitation, I suggested to our family we attend an Open House offered by Our Lady of the Elms School in Akron, OH. Having heard of its strong academic

reputation, and knowing it was small and single-gendered, I thought it might be a good school for my soon to be eighth grade daughter. The Open House was the school's last formal effort of recruitment of new students for the following academic year. I entered the Open House full of skepticism and doubt. I left full of hope and wonder.

During a brief tour offered by a high school Senior, who guided us through various classrooms and brief meetings with faculty, I heard the spoken and unspoken messages of the ideology of Our Lady of the Elms. Their strong feminist perspective coupled with a Dominican faith tradition and rigorous academics were prevalent to me in every aspect of the school. I could see how the curriculum and school culture were purposefully designed to help young women learn to speak, write and articulate their unique beliefs and desires; to help them find their place in the world. I was amazed this school appeared to hold dear the same educational practices and principles of my family's homeschool. Our family was not Catholic and when I questioned the faculty regarding how problematic this could be they simply answered that the school was built around diversity as they believed the only way to truth was through examining difference.

Engaged students encouraged to examine diversity, small intimate classrooms where teachers respected their students and taught them multiple ways to communicate with the world, a resident trained therapy dog deliberately placed on the campus to help the girls de-stress; perhaps it was possible for classroom-based education to take on the challenges of critical, holistic education. I decided to take the risk and enrolled my two youngest daughters in grades 8 and 3, and later my son for Kindergarten.

Our Lady of the Elms School, Akron, OH

On October 14, 1923, 60 nuns of the Caldwell, NJ, Dominican Sisters moved into a newly purchased residence, Elm Court, once known as the Arthur Marks estate located at 1290 West Market Street, in Akron, Ohio. Honoring the Dominican tradition, “to praise, to bless and to preach the truth of the Gospel”, the women opened a day school for 13 girls and one boy the next day in the convent. The sisters believed the “ministry of education” was the best way to live out their faith and dedication to the Gospel (ourladyoftheelms.org, 2012). Their focus was to transform youth through education. Eighty-nine years later, Our Lady of the Elms School, continues to operate in the Dominican tradition. Currently, the school operates as a co-educational school for children in Pre-school through Kindergarten, and a single gendered school for girls in grades 1 through grade 12.

St. Dominic is recognized by the Catholic Church as founding the Order of Preachers, or Dominicans, in the winter of 1216 (Butler, 1866). Dominicans believe through examination of “perennial questions asked by philosophy past and present”, and in examination of the world around them, they will come to a deeper grasp of truth, *Veritas*, “and to a personal knowledge of the One who is Truth himself, Christ Jesus Our Lord” (Our missions, studying and teaching, www.op.org, 2012). A Dominican’s vocation is to search out and preach truth with the belief that truth sets people free and leads them to abundant life. A Dominican’s passion for truth is identified as four threads - prayer, study, community and ministry or preaching. These “threads” when woven together form the fabric of Dominican life. If one of the threads is absent, it is believed “the fabric” will unravel (Ourladyoftheelms.org, 2012).

A Catholic education offered in the Dominican tradition is organized around “study and prayer shared in community” (Our Lady of the Elms.org, 2012). Additionally, a Dominican education values respect and diversity in the search for truth. Our Lady of the Elms’ rigorous academic curriculum includes the opportunity to explore social justice, peace building, and service to less fortunate individuals. It is believed this educational focus will bring young women closer to truth and help them find their voice. An Elms’ education is designed to provide an education environment for young women that will empower them to take their place in their “community, their church, and their world” (ourladyoftheelms.org, 2012). Following the 800 year tradition of the Dominican order, an Elms’ education is built on the foundation of contemplation in an effort to bring forth a deeper understanding of the world for its students.

The goal of this study is to provide a case study of a clear descriptive model of the dialogic teaching practices used to assist students in their development of contemplative thought, and critical literacy. Critical literacy is identified by Paulo Freire as being able to “read the world” (Wink, 1997). It is the focus of critical pedagogy. Dialogic teaching, in its essence, is at the heart of critical pedagogical theory. Dialogic teaching brings critical pedagogy to action.

This study will attempt to identify the dialogic teaching practices of exemplar teachers and attempt to identify the unique challenges these dialogic teaching practices may bring to educators. Our Lady of the Elms School in Akron, OH was purposefully chosen for this study because of its commitment to dialogic teaching practices, and long-standing reputation of academic excellence in the community and beyond. While our nation’s educational leaders and scholars grapple to find a reformed educational model

for the public schools, I offer this analysis of an educational model that has been successfully meeting its goals and mission for nearly a century. Eighty-nine years of educational practices deemed successful by a multitude of standards is worth studying. Because the Elms provides a co-educational teaching environment through Kindergarten, this study's purpose is to capture the voices of teachers engaged in the education of young boys and girls of varying ages at Our Lady of the Elms. The majority of the study will focus on single-gendered education; however the findings will also speak to co-educational classrooms. This study is designed to shed light on the communication strategies and practices present in a school committed to teaching students to "read their world" (Wink, 1997).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Americans love to talk about reforming the public education system. Students, parents, educators, administrators, academic scholars, political figures, and social activists across generations have spoken in favor of new or improved ways to educate the nation's children. It is a common thread found in the arguments of both liberal and conservative political campaign platforms, and the first institution under fire in times of plenty or want. It is as if every social, economic or political problem is resultant of the nation's flawed public education (Apple & Beane, 2007; McIntush, 2000; Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, U.S. Dept. of Education, 2011; Reese, 2007). Perhaps it is the onus of responsibility Americans place on their educational system, or the systematic influence of political rhetoric on the masses, but William Reese, professor of Educational Policy Studies and History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2007) contends, "No other institution in American society carries this weight on its shoulders. No other institution is so public, familiar, and exposed to such scrutiny" (p. 217).

In his essay, Reese (2007) elucidates American society's desire for educational reform with a brief historical summary of the education-focused rhetoric present in the culture. His analysis establishes three basic warrants for the hegemonic or dominant cultural discourse, pressing for educational reform throughout the nation's history. These

hegemonic messages operate to maintain the status quo of power and knowledge distribution, and whether spoken or not, drive cultural practices and values regarding education. The first message identified is the American Jeremiad, or Puritan influence on our culture. The second, the rhetoric of Thomas Jefferson, encourages an ideology of individual worth and potential. The third, the rhetoric of educational reformist Horace Mann, connects the social ills of culture with a lacking educational system.

The American Jeremiad, established through the teachings of Puritan leader John Winthrop, regarded the imperfections of youth as sinful, and placed high value on the need for reformation through education (Reese, 2007; Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001; Winthrop, 1630). The New World of the Puritans, according to Winthrop (1630), would be a “city upon a hill”, a beacon of purity and light enabling reformation of a broken and sinful world. The Puritans connected a wholesome life with economic success and placed high value on education. It was this worldview that led to the founding of Harvard College in 1636. Reese (2007) states, “...the Puritans who came to America, unlike those who stayed in England, were reformers, not revolutionaries. They did not behead kings, but they did found schools, despite their insistence that parents and the ministry were essential in children’s education” (p. 220).

The second warrant of Reese’s argument is founded on the rhetoric of Thomas Jefferson. As cited in Reese’s essay, Jefferson’s ideas of state funded free elementary schools for all white children, including girls, was first expounded in his book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, written in 1781 (Reese, 2007). This ideal fit well with the value system of the Enlightenment; the intellectual time period occurring during the founding of the United States. According to Sillars and Gronbeck (2001), “In many ways, the

United States is an Enlightenment nation, and if Enlightenment is not the predominant value system, it is surely a first among equals” (p.196). Reese (2007) contends that the ideals of the Enlightenment including democracy, individual freedom and human equality were connected to the nation’s educational system by Jefferson. This ideal was contrary to previous ideas that education was for the elite and determined one’s place in the social order. Education, in Jefferson’s view, was for every citizen regardless of gender or social class.

The final warrant of Reese’s argument is found in the rhetoric of politician and educational reformist, Horace Mann. In his famous reports on education, Mann connected social ills of the culture with a lack of quality in public education system. In the introduction of a volume published as a part of his famous reports on the educational system of the State of Massachusetts, Mann’s wife, Mary Tyler Peabody Mann (1867), writes for him, post-mortem, “The best history of a State or country is the history of its ideas. To the moralist and the legislator, therefore, this Report has an indestructible value because it yields up the secret of the strength of Massachusetts” (p. ix). Mann, in essence, was instrumental in enacting Jefferson’s ideals of a free, public education for all children living in the United States. He argued in his reports that a unification of the social classes would occur if American children shared in common childhood learning experiences. Reese (2007) contends this idyllic discourse of the power of education reinforces the American public’s desire to evaluate the system’s flaws and need for revival.

Evidence of crisis in American public education is prevalent. Newspaper headlines of funding decreases from federal, state and local levels, poor academic student achievement, increases in student bullying, and recent attacks of teacher unions all clearly

illustrate an institution in need of renewal. On September 23, 2011, the Obama administration announced a new plan, the Education and Secondary Education Act flexibility package (ESEA), to enable flexibility in the federal mandates of “No Child Left Behind”, an educational initiative of a previous administration which some critics have blamed for stifling educational reform (Ed.gov, 2011). The urgency of concern for failing public schools is echoed in Obama’s comments recorded in a White House press release (2011).

To help states, districts and schools that are ready to move forward with education reform, our administration will provide flexibility from the law in exchange for a real commitment to undertake change. The purpose is not to give states and districts a reprieve from accountability, but rather to unleash energy to improve our schools at the local level (The White House Dept. of Education, September 23, 2011).

According to the press release, individual states are beginning to reject mandates of the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) educational model and enact a silent reformative movement toward better educational practices.

In recent months, states have led a "quiet revolution" to move beyond NCLB's vision. States have taken the lead in pursuing reform and innovations, including widespread adoption of college- and career-ready standards, development of new assessments, and other reforms in areas including teacher and principal evaluation and support, and turning around low-performing schools (The White House Dept. of Education, September 23, 2011).

Evidence of a strong commitment to educational reform efforts at a national level is present in the Obama administration’s 2013 budget. According to Cameron Brenchley, Director of Digital Development for the U.S. Department of Education, the 2013 education budget released, February 13, 2012, “includes new education investments that will give U.S. students and workers the education and training they need for the jobs of today and tomorrow” (www.whitehouse.gov, 2012). The new budget calls for an

additional 1.7 billion dollars or a 2.5% increase from the 2012 federal budget. According to Brechley, this increase of funding will provide “job training to meet the demands of the work force”, a boost to the teaching profession as monies are slated to support teacher training and salaries, and allocations to “make college affordable” ensuring greater access to higher education for all citizens (www.whitehouse.gov, 2012). Clearly, support for educational reform is present in the rhetoric of U.S. federal governmental leaders.

The solution for educational reform however, may not lie solely in more federal mandates and funding. It is time, perhaps, to examine the ideology of childhood education with a critical cultural lens. Critical cultural pedagogy theorist, Peter McLaren, contends that critical theorists view education differently from the majority of culture. Critical theorists define education as a way to empower and transform students in an effort to bring about social justice (Freire, 1997; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2010; Wink, 1997). According to McLaren (2003), mainstream culture defines childhood education as a means to provide students “with the skills and attitudes necessary for becoming patriotic, industrious, and responsible citizens” (p.70). From a critical cultural perspective, a childhood education is designed to challenge traditional ideological hegemonic constructions of knowledge to bring about equitable representations of knowledge and power (Kincheloe, 2010).

Sociologist scholar, George Sefa Dei writes in *Spiritual Knowing and Transformative Learning* (2002), “Arguably schooling in our societies today is at a crossroad....there are demands for schooling to pave the way for a transformed view of our world in which all human subjects are able to assert their agency and work collectively to achieve goal of justice, peace and harmony” (p. 4).

Educational theorist, Henry A. Giroux has challenged hegemonic interpretations of education with his critical cultural perspective since the 1980's. His arguments reflect the philosophies of earlier educational theorists John Dewey and Paulo Freire. According to Manuela Guilherme (2006), "Giroux's vision for education addresses the issues that demographically and politically changing Western societies are facing at the beginning of the 21st century" (p.163). In an interview conducted by Guilherme, Giroux describes his vision of education succinctly:

I think critical pedagogy begins with the assumption that knowledge and power should always be subject to debate, held accountable and critically engaged. Central to the very definition of critical pedagogy is a common concern for reforming schools and developing modes of pedagogical practice in which teachers and students become critical agents actively questioning and negotiating the relationship between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, and learning and social change (Giroux, 2006).

Critical scholars in the disciplines of education and communication contend yet another reason for educational change lies with cultural issues related to social justice and empowerment; racism, classism, and sexism, arguing these issues are reinforced in our nation's hegemonic educational system, designed to train a public to keep the status quo of power distribution. (Freire, 1997; Giroux, 2011; hooks, 1994; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Wink, 1997). These scholars contend reform is inadequate in expressing the need for changes in education and argue that what is necessary is a revolution; a revolution of thought, philosophy and practice. A democratic nation must educate its citizens democratically to ensure students learn to analyze their identity within the culture, or metaphorically speaking, find their voice in society (Apple & Beane, 2007; hooks, 1994; Wink, 1997). Engaged and active citizenship is integral to the successful perpetuation of a democratic republic.

Still others argue success of the democratic schooling movement, and therefore a renewed public educational system, lies not in a victorious change of curriculum, but in the methodology higher education uses in training teachers (Giroux 2007; Giroux & McLaren 1986). Giroux and McLaren (1986) contend that throughout the history of educational reform, critics have realized true reform addresses the issue of teacher education. If future teachers are directed to use their position in the classroom to transform students rather than feed information; a link would be found between “classroom pedagogy to the dynamics of citizenship” (p. 214).

The issue of teacher education is a salient one. How do teachers learn to teach? What communication practices are identified and taught to future educators to ensure a transformed classroom of the 21st century? Education scholar bell hooks (1994) identified the frustration many students experience in the learning process when led by teachers lacking in pedagogical training. She remembered her undergraduate classroom as a location of “imprisonment and punishment” (p.4) to those deviating from hegemonic thought. She says, “The vast majority of our professors lacked basic communication skills, they were not self-actualized, and they often used the classroom to enact rituals of control that were about domination and the unjust exercise of power...I wanted to become a critical thinker. Yet that longing was often seen as a threat to authority” (p. 5).

At the heart of every battle in a capitalistic society, lies the struggle for power and money. The democratic schooling movement acknowledges this reality and argues the conflicts to the movement include educational policy ideology and economic issues (Apple & Beane, 2007; Giroux 2007). Apple and Beane (2007) argue it would be wise for education leaders to heed the words of educational reformer William E.B. Dubois,

who stated in 1902, “Education must keep broad ideals before it, and never forget that it is dealing with Souls and not with Dollars” (p. 12).

Critical Pedagogy

It would seem that American education is rotten from the core without any hope of restoration. However, critical pedagogy theorist and educator, Joan Wink (1997), contends change is possible when educators embrace the theory of critical pedagogy. She says,

Most of us went into education ‘to make a difference’. For many, this phase soon became just another reason to be cynical. Critical pedagogy has not only taken this cynicism away from me, it has given me hope. It has led me to believe that I really can make a difference. Conscientization. Self and social transformation. Empowerment. Problem posing. Praxis. Action. They are no longer words to learn; they are no longer things I do; now, they are ideas I strive to live every day (p.153).

Critical pedagogy, a philosophy of education that encourages democratic learning processes, may provide the theoretical underpinnings for an educational revolution. Practically, critical pedagogy in the classroom involves teacher and student engaged in a learning community, respect of a variety knowledge sources inclusive of, but not restricted to those embraced by the status quo, and a search for truth and meaning from these sources (Kincheloe, 2007). Emphasis is placed on empowering the student, allowing them to find their voice, and connect their lived experience to knowledge acquisition, all while building a community of learning (Apple & Beane, 2007; Freire, 1997; hooks, 1994; Wink, 1997). Teaching in a critical classroom must be viewed as a sacred vocation that involves the intellectual and spiritual growth of students (hooks, 1997). Teachers must commit themselves to a process of self-actualization while guiding students toward their own empowerment. Focused effort is made to develop strong

communication skills including active listening, acknowledgement of conflict brought about through learning struggles, and acceptance of “new ways of knowing” (hooks, 1994; Wink, 1997; Kincheloe, 2007).

North American critical pedagogues build their teaching practices around the work of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. In April of 1964, Freire’s engagement in an educational project directed at teaching Brazilian peasants to read led to imprisonment. Due to a military coup that brought all progressive movements to a halt, Freire was thrown in prison for 70 days because of his work with the peasants. He remained in exile from his native Brazil for 15 years following his imprisonment. Freire taught the peasants using a dialogical pedagogy “designed to raise individuals’ consciousness of oppression” (Stevens, 2012).

Freire understood the value of gaining a critical evaluation of cultural practices and institutions. In his writings describing the experience, Freire contends the Brazilian peasants learned to read words quickly because of their previously developed critical literacy of their world (Wink, 1997). Wink (1997) says,

Freire was not jailed and exiled because he taught peasants to “read the word”, but because he taught the subordinate class to critically read the world. Freire taught the peasants to use their knowledge and their literacy to examine and reexamine the surrounding power structures of the dominant society (p. 65).

Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987) describe the importance of critical thought development in their work, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. According to Peter Mayo (1995), Paulo Freire is “synonymous with the concept of critical literacy” (Mayo, p. 363). “Reading the word” is defined as traditional literacy involving the development of basic reading skills. “Reading the world”, or critical literacy, is “an

emancipatory process whereby a person becomes empowered to be able to unveil and decode the ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices and cultural forms” in an effort to determine their influences and interests (Mayo, p.363). In essence, the student is freed and empowered through the ability to decode or comprehend ideological influences present in all aspects of culture and therefore present in knowledge acquisition. Developing critical literacy, or an ability to “read the world”, demands critical thought.

Dialogic Teaching

With roots traced back to the Socratic method of teaching through the use of questions to encourage pupil learning and thinking (Lyle, 2008), dialogic teaching can be defined as a means to promote talk in a classroom that will “create a space for multiple voices and discourses” (Lyle, p.225), “to help participants share and build meaning collaboratively” (Lyle, p. 225). Dialogic teaching promotes shared power for knowledge acquisition, or learning, within the classroom. Dialogic talk “promotes communication through authentic exchanges” (Lyle, p. 225). Dialogic teaching “holds the greatest cognitive potential for pupils” (Lyle, p. 222), yet concurrently is a demanding pedagogical practice for teachers (Lyle, 2008; Mercer, Dawes & Staarman, 2009; Wink, 1997). In a dialogic classroom teachers must understand and acknowledge that language is a powerful tool for “the creation of knowledge and justice” (Wink, 1997).

In contrast, most classrooms in the United States operate with monologic teaching practices (Lyle, 2008). Monologic teaching “focuses power on the teacher” and “stifles dialogue and interactions between pupils and their ideas” (Lyle, p. 225). Monologic

teaching is designed to aid the teacher in transmission of knowledge to students and keep control of desired learning goals (Lyle, 2008). In such an environment, students are disconnected from the opportunity to create a dialogic space, whether physical or mental, so that they can engage in “fruitful conversations that support the ability to conceive of themselves in many different ways” (Dillon, 2011, p.217). In summary, a dialogic learning environment encourages students to “read the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987) while a monologic learning environment encourages recitation of facts (Lyle, 2008).

Dialogic teaching practices are grounded in the theoretical principles established by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) (Lyle, 2008; Wink, 1997). Vygotsky’s theory of child development identifies learning as taking place in a social, cultural and historical context (Lyle, 2008; Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky established a relationship between language and thought contending language is the driving force in cognitive development (Lyle, 2008; Vygotsky, 1962). Language “joins with thought to generate meaning. As we increase our use of words, our thoughts deepen” (Wink, p.25). Dillon (2011) describes the dialogic learning process grounded in Vygotskian theory as conversations where “we take on board the opinions of others and we absorb others’ words into our own vocabularies” (p. 216). Lyle (2008) contends, “as a result of Vygotsky’s influence, there is an increasing body of research that supports the view that talk is the key to learning” (p. 223).

Dialogic teaching practice works well to assist student development of “reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). According to Wink (1997), “critical literacy recognizes that reading does not take place in a vacuum; it includes the entire social, cultural, political, and historical context” (p. 45). Vygotsky (1962) would agree. Dialogic

teaching in the classroom encourages Vygotskian learning and therefore, logically, critical literacy development.

The value of critical literacy for citizens of contemporary cultures cannot be underestimated. With the encroachment and influence of mediated messages in every aspect of our lives, the impact of globalization, and the ever increasing political and cultural need for intercultural competence (Kasten, 2012; Samovar, Porter & McDaniel, 2012), critical literacy must be viewed as the ultimate goal of education. Wink (1997) summarizes this principle best by saying:

Students of the future need to be able to access new knowledge, critically reflect upon it, interpret it, and apply it in new ways. The changing world is dragging us (kicking and screaming, in some instances) into the world of a transformative model of education. The purpose of education is to transform society into a truly democratic environment for all (p. 146).

Recognizing the need for critical literacy brought forth through dialogic teaching practices may be the key to educational reform in the United States. A dialogic model provides a liberating education where teacher and student labor together (Freire, 1974; hooks, 1994). Dialogic teaching provides a model for “education as a practice of freedom” (Freire, 1974).

At the heart of a Dominican education lies the art of dialogic teaching. In a brochure (2003) published by Dominican Mission and Heritage (2003) and designed to inform its audience of the charism, or “gift of God’s spirit given to some for the sake of others” as identified in the Dominican tradition, the clear connection to Dominican teaching and the dialogic is revealed. It says, “the focus of Dominican preachers and teachers for nearly 800 years has been to enter in to dialogue with the changing culture wherever they are, to learn from it and then, in humility, to determine how best to

respond in serving the needs of that particular time and place” (Dominican Mission and Heritage, 2003). The goal of teaching and preaching, identified by the order as one practice, is to meet the needs of “rapidly changing demographics and geopolitics, no longer isolated by the borders and boundaries of language and culture” (Dominican Mission and Heritage, 2003). Although spiritually motivated through a Christian Worldview, Vincent de Cousseynongle, O.P., 83rd Master of the Order, once identified the Dominican teaching practices as “a contemplation of the street...an attentive looking at all that surrounds us”(Dominican Mission and Heritage, 2003).

The similarity in pedagogy between Dominican practices and Freire’s Critical Pedagogy are striking. “A democratic and collegial life” is orchestrated through the processes of dialogic teaching and contemplation in both a Dominican teaching environment and one designed around critical pedagogical theory (Dominican Mission and Heritage, 2003; Freire, 1997; Giroux & McLaren, 1986). The goals of the educational process are nearly identical. For Freire and critical pedagogues the goal is critical literacy; for the Dominican order the goal is critical literacy so as to better meet the spiritual needs of a changing world (Dominican Mission and Heritage, 2003; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux & McLaren, 1986; Wink, 1997).

With this understanding, this study will examine the dialogic teaching practices of the teachers of Our Lady of the Elms School (OLTE) in Akron, Ohio. A deeper understanding of dialogical practices used and challenges faced by teachers engaging in these practices will provide deeper insight to the value of education framed in critical pedagogy. A dialogic teaching practice can be challenging (Wink, 1997). It is not prescriptive, but creative, requiring contemplation, a desire for self-actualization, deep

engagement with students, and constant application of critical listening (Dominican Mission and Heritage, 2003; Giroux, & McLaren, 1986; Guilherme, 2006; hooks, 1994; Mercer, Dawes, & Staarman, J, 2009). Therefore, this thesis attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What specific dialogic teaching practices are present in the classrooms of OLTE that facilitate student development of critical literacy?

RQ2: What salient challenges do teachers at OLTE experience with dialogic teaching practices as they attempt to facilitate student development of critical literacy?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Participants

Upon the receipt of approval from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. After meeting with the middle/high school and elementary principals of Our Lady of the Elms School, a referral list of potential teacher participants was generated. The principals acted as a liaison for the researcher and teachers to ensure appropriate protocol was followed in granting permission to conduct the study at the school. Initial contact with participants was made through e-mail. Follow-up communication was conducted by telephone to clarify dates and times for interviews.

Based upon the recommendation of the principals, eight teachers were selected for interviews based on the quality of their pedagogical skills as perceived by their supervising principal, their gender, and the age group of students for whom they provide instruction. Careful consideration was given to ensure representation of teachers of all ages of students engaged in the Pre-K through grade 12 program and that at least one male teacher was included. The inclusion of a male teacher was important as gender influences perception and may influence teaching practices especially at a single-gendered school like OLTE. Consent to participate in the study (Appendix B) was

granted at the onset of the interviews. Information regarding the purpose and intent of the study as well as risks, discomforts and cost to participants was provided.

Mrs. Aidan, a female teacher of pre-school aged children (ages 2 1/2-5), Ms. Sierra, a female teacher of early elementary aged girls (ages 8-9), Mrs. Lane, a female teacher of religion for late elementary aged girls (ages 9-12), Ms. Sammi, a female teacher of language arts for late elementary aged girls (ages 9-12), Ms. Courtney, a female science teacher of middle school aged girls (ages 12-15), Ms. Micah, a female teacher of history and social studies to middle school aged girls and high school aged girls (ages 12-18), Mrs. Gorman, a female teacher of English to high school aged girls (ages 14-18), and Mr. Jonah, a male teacher of history and social studies to high school aged girls were selected for the sample. Teachers varied in their length of time with the institution, (9 months to 26 years) and in their careers (8 to 24 years). Though the school is named, the names of the teacher/participants have been changed to ensure anonymity in the report of this study.

Data Collection

Face-to face interviews were conducted on the school grounds at the convenience of the teacher/participants schedule. The semi-structured interviews were facilitated with the use of an interview guide (Appendix C), note paper and pen and an audio recording device. Questions in the interview guide were designed to evoke reflection of the communicative practices present in the pedagogy of the teacher. Special attention was given to stimulate thought about those practices deliberately directed at development of critical thinking and critical literacy opportunities for their students. Follow-up questions

were created and asked during the course of the individual interviews as deemed appropriate by the researcher. Interviews ranged in length from 30-60 minutes and were later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of content and data analysis.

Once fully transcribed, interviews were analyzed through the constant comparison method of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) Grounded Theory approach. First, theoretical memos (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) were recorded directly on the transcription of the interviews. Next, axial coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) was utilized to assist in the development of connections between categories emergent from the theoretical memos. Finally, categorization of themes was completed to ensure each thematic category was "theoretically saturated" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 252).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As interviews were conducted and transcribed significant themes emerged from the teachers' responses. Analysis of these themes revealed four specific categories of teaching practices or strategies used by the teachers and three categories of challenges faced by these teachers. The dialogic teaching strategies used to assist in the critical literacy development of the students fell into the following themes: (1) building relationships within the classroom, (2) behavioral training for critical listening and critical thought, (3) Socratic questioning and student reflection, and (4) teacher awareness and sensitivity to the learning environment. The challenges faced by teachers engaged in dialogic teaching practices emerged as: (1) resistant and overly enthusiastic students, (2) physical exhaustion and time constraints, and (3) a lack of support from the broader community for dialogic education. All teachers interviewed noted that Our Lady of the Elms administrators and fellow faculty encouraged and supported them in meeting these challenges.

Teaching Strategies

Building Relationships within the Classroom

The desire to build a community culture within various classrooms was consistently expressed by all the teachers. Every teacher discussed the need to build trust,

a safe space for communication, and a general sense of camaraderie amongst learners for the classroom space and learning community. Teachers consistently noted that a sense of community was the foundation of success for each of their dialogic teaching practices. Deliberate attempts to build community fit well with the goal of critical pedagogy to create a democratic learning environment where teacher and student are engaged in a learning community (Apple & Beane, 2007; Freire, 1997; Giroux, 2011; Hinchey, 2008; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2007; Wink, 1997).

Ms. Micah, the veteran educator of the group who taught for 26 years with 7 in an urban public school district and 19 at the Elms, expressed her role in creating a safe space for her students to feel comfortable in participating in the dialogic learning environment. She said,

“...in my capacity as the middle school Director, for example, having to work with the 7th and 8th graders, um, from the beginning of school, I tell them that you know, yes, I’m your teacher, but I’m also you know, someone that you need and hope you will come to if you have any problems, concerns in the school day. And I model that by being out in the hall with them before school greeting them when they come up in the hallway in the morning. I’m there after school sending them off for the day and hoping they have a good evening and did you remember this and that and I think that report builds up and um...and then having them, you know those in middle school those that continue, when I have them then possibly for a high school class, you know that relationship is hopefully still there. And I also think as a teacher, I always try to hit at least one of the extracurricular activities that the girls are in. Um, to let them know I care about them as human beings and it’s not all in the classroom. That kind of thing. And, I think that plays into the safe environment too.

Ms. Sammi, a new teacher to the Elms for the 2011-2012 school year, but with twelve years of experience teaching in another inner city private Catholic school previous to being hired by the Elms, stated that recognition of diversity was integral in her being able to facilitate a supportive dialogic environment in the classroom. She said,

Even when we have our daily prayer, I don't limit it to this has to be a Catholic or a Christian prayer, um, our student who is Hindu, I encourage her to bring in a Hindu prayer. Let's pray it, you know, we can all be open to those kinds of things. We have a 5th grader who is Jewish and she, every time she has a holiday she celebrates she brings in things to celebrate with the girls and explains, you know, this is what I'm celebrating with today and whether it's like a food that she brings in that they eat or sometimes it's some type of artifact or what not that they might use, um, candles or things like that, and so the girls learn about it and then we'll, we will practice that.

Her efforts to integrate diversity are supported by a new social curriculum being tested this year with plans for school-wide adoption beginning next school year. The curriculum is designed around a "morning meeting", and according to Sammi is designed to establish a respectful and equitable learning environment each school day. She said,

This is actually something that our whole elementary school has been focusing on. We had to read a book about it. And pretty much it's making sure that every student has a voice and it starts first thing in the morning. And, it starts with the greeting, everyone is greeted and the teacher has different ways, um, you know, we just started even today. We sat in a circle and each girl...it was the silent smile and a handshake, and you had to shake the person's hand next to you, and each girl you make eye contact with and you smile...The whole point is that everyone is acknowledged. You start your whole day off with knowing that someone has acknowledged me and made my presence known. And then when they have their share um, they have the floor and it has to be just about them, no one is allowed to make the comment as to, "Oh, well I did that" or "that reminds me of the time that I did". It has to be just about that person... When they are ready the kind of key phrase is, "I'm open for questions and comments" and they get to, you know, take up to three questions or comments from students. But again the comment cannot be negative and it cannot be personal. It has to be only for the person who's sharing...From what I've gathered coming in this year, is that the whole idea of this, is that we're making sure that every student has a voice every day to start off the day.

A similar practice of inclusion can be found in the Pre-K class directed by Mrs. Aidan. Aidan has taught for eight years as a teaching assistant for varying elementary classrooms at the Elms and for seven as the lead teacher for the Pre-K class. She said,

We have a thing on Monday mornings, it's called the "Weekly News" and we choose one child who gets to tell us what they did over the weekend and then we write it down on a big poster board and we take their picture. Um, but we do that

every week. And um, like I'll write, I'll ask them questions, like right now we're working on a Mother's Day project um, with the kids and I ask them what does your mother do that makes you really pretty and they, you know, I write that down. And I mean, it does, it shows them that when they're talking to me, it is something that I'm writing down, and they're you know, have value that way.

Aidan remarked that acknowledgement of diversity is encouraged in her classroom to instill a sense of community. She spoke repeatedly of the hands-on approach she takes to encourage diversity with pre-schoolers. Aidan believes developing awareness in this practical manner is developmentally appropriate for her very young students.

When we did Martin Luther King...First of all, I start talking to them about the color of their skin and how it doesn't matter what color your skin is, we're all friends, we can all play together. And then I said, "You know a long time ago if you had brown skin you weren't allowed to play with that person because somebody said that they weren't the same as us....I bring in a brown and a white egg and say, "What color is this egg?" and they say, "Brown" and "What color is this one?" and they say, "White". I explain to them that even though our skin isn't all one color, we're all the same on the inside. So, I break open the egg and show that they're the same...

I read them a story, it's about Dr. Martin Luther King and, and I said, "he died". And they say, "Why did he die?" and I say, "Somebody didn't like what he was saying that he wanted our world to be peaceful and all of us to get along with each other no matter what our skin was, and some man shot him. And you know, how sad that was that, you know, he couldn't let him say what he wanted to say, or feel what he wanted to feel and then on the day of Martin Luther King, or I don't know if it was the day, but, I have two African-American children in my classroom and when they came in that morning I told them they could only play over here and when the other kids came in, the lighter skinned or whatever, I said, "You can't play with them. You have to play over here". To make the concept that they understood that at one time you could not do that. And they said, to me, "But we want to play with them!" And I said, "That's what I want you to say" and I'll cry, sorry, but... they understood. They got it.

Because, they kept saying, throughout the day, we kept listening to them and they were like, "Well, your skin's brown, but it's okay and we're still friends", you know. I mean you hear them say little things like that because they do, you know, they will repeat what you say, you may not, if you ask them they might totally say, "I don't know what you're talking about?" But, to listen to them play, that's where you hear it.

Mrs. Lane, a teacher for 16 years including three years as a teacher of special education in Anderson, South Carolina and one year in Alpharetta, Georgia has served the Elms as the Director of Religious Education and religion teacher for the 4th-6th grade girls for the past 11 years. She discussed her deliberate efforts to assist the girls in building relationships beyond the typical classroom. She said

I, I try to get them to um, I encourage them to open themselves up to other people and this isn't just within their own classrooms..... 'cause I think girls are more like this than boys anyway, tend to be very clique-ish. I know that seems simple, but it is in their world right now. And so, I try to get them to sit with someone different at lunch and things like that. That's also why when I do group activities, I never allow them to choose a group. I always do that, because there's always going to be ones who are left out, and I can't see that. I never let someone sit by themselves, if there's an odd number of desks, they always have to be sitting with someone else....So, I always encourage them. When they go out, you know, always include. Just be inclusive, by getting to know someone different, and trying to encourage that. I'm not always successful, but I'm still trying.

Acknowledgement and encouragement of acceptance of diversity is recognized throughout the school day in Sammi's language arts classrooms. She commented on the importance of diversity recognition in building a sense of community within the classroom by speaking once again of the Hindu student enrolled in her 6th grade class,

I sat down with her one day and I, I just asked her, "Tell me a little bit about your religion". I knew, you know, some about it, even taking like World Studies in college and what not, but it's different too, again to read about it and to have a professor tell you, "Well here's the fundamentals", or to have someone who actually practices say, "Well, here's what we do". And, you know, she told me how she has this prayer corner in her room and she has to get up, before she comes to the Elms. She gets up an extra hour and a half early every day so she can, and I can't remember what she calls her prayers, there's a term for them, so she can do this whole set of prayers. And that to me was, especially for a young, you know a young girl to have that kind of, you know, that devotion to say, "I could be sleeping in another hour", you know, "before I have to be here at 7:45, but I'm, I'm getting up and I'm doing these prayers". And so, I learned a lot about it and then I've kind of pulled that in, in little ways. Like, I said even for today when they said, "Well what's polytheism"? I could have just said, "Well, here's the definition". Instead, I said, "Well, (she's) polytheistic and let's talk about that"

and she told the girls a little bit about it and they're like, "Oh my gosh! That's really cool!"

Ms. Courtney teaches middle school science and on occasion a semester long course, Earth/Space science, for 9th grade students. She has taught for eight years, all of them at the Elms. She echoed the need to embrace diversity in her classroom in order to successfully facilitate a democratic space for honest and open dialogue. She said, "Whenever we are working in groups or whenever we are discussing there cannot be absolutely no inappropriate behavior or inappropriate remarks; just because that doesn't promote diversity. If you're putting down someone else's opinion, you know or someone's comment, I think that's the main hallmark there."

Courtney stated she monitors student behavior regularly when they work in small groups to ensure this standard is in place. In addition, this policy translates to her 9th grade students when they use "Moodle", an internet based discussion format. "One of the main things I put on there is "netiquette". I just...you have to be polite; you have to be respectful, even in the internet world when you are communicating."

Mrs. Gorman, a teacher of 9th, 10th, and 11th grade English, 9th and 10th grade Honors English, and Speech for 9th-12th grades, has taught for 24 years, all at the Elms. Gorman also spoke of the need to detail classroom behavior guidelines with students to ensure diverse thoughts are welcomed in the learning process. She said, "I have some guidelines as far as, I know they aren't going to like everything we do and everything we read and I always make sure they know there are ways to express that in a dignified, polite manner. You know, 'this really isn't my cup of tea' or you know, 'this really isn't what I would normally read, however, I understand why it's a classic or why lots of other

people like it', so that no one's coming in saying, "I really hate this" or influencing what everyone else thinks.

Mr. Jonah, a teacher for 16 years of which 11 have been at the Elms and the other five in a variety of urban and suburban public schools, teaches sophomore Modern American History, AP European History, Government, AP Government, Economics and AP Comparative Politics. Jonah has a distinctly direct approach to building relationships in his classrooms of high school girls. He said,

Well, I badger them. I guess you could say that's my style. I try to make them comfortable. They know that mistakes are fine as long as they can back them up. I'm also the debate coach here, so they know I like to dialogue back and forth... They all know my practices, they know how I feel, they know how, you know, my opinions on things and behavior wise. So, I will literally like, I, I use the podium sophomore years, I move around the room, Junior year, while I sit at one of the desks Senior year....

We literally compete for information to see who has the most knowledge. And they will attempt to read things I don't so they can quote it to see if I haven't read it yet. Like, last year, oh no, this was two years ago. I was making a joke and some girl started telling the joke as I was saying it. I was like, "Oh my gosh!" She goes, "Well, I was bored so I tried to figure out where you got your jokes all from". And I go, "and you did?" And she goes, "yeah, you steal a lot of them from Andrew Sullivan at *The Atlantic*". I was like, "Holy....How did you figure that out?" I-I looked at her and I was like, "I hate you" (laughter). I go, "come on, play along. I steal, okay....Yes, I do steal from Andrew Sullivan".... They love to compete, and they do. And they're so aggressive in their competition. And it's good, you know, they have all that energy being young women. So, it's good that they want to pummel me. So, I don't mind the competition. ..I value them having their own opinions as long as they're backed up and I affirm their rights to have opinions and especially, you know, nerd culture is embraced in my classroom, so I like it when they do ultra nerdy things.

Mrs. Gorman echoed the comments of others when she spoke of the importance of creating a safe environment for diverse thought and knowledge acquisition. She said,

I think that from the first day of class I try to reassure students that this is a classroom where they should feel safe that they can express what they want to express as long as it is polite and considerate of everyone else. I think you can establish that atmosphere right away. I'm, I can't say, most years I felt very

successful in that. Sometimes, maybe I'm not. Sometimes there are some factors of which I have no control. But, usually, I think there is a comfort, and I have to base this on some of the evaluations over the years written by students that they do feel, um, from the beginning there are things they can talk about here. And especially, I think in a small school like ours, by nature, I assure students, especially my freshman that uh, um, they're starting anew. I typically don't really know our 8th graders very well. I mean, by sight, and here and there. But, I don't get to know them on a personal level, because I want to be sure and let the girls who are new know that there is no favoritism, that the teachers don't favor the Elms girls over the others....so that there is an equal playing field; that they get to start over. And really that should be the case every year in school; that you get to start fresh, and um, and I think an English class only works when students can say things about what they are reading and how they feel....Um, they have to feel comfortable. They have to feel like they can express how much they love something, because sometimes I think, there is some peer pressure to not even say that. And I really would like my classroom to be a place where if you really like to read, and you really like what you read, then you can come in and talk about it. If it's something you're not crazy about; just say it in an intelligent manner and we're fine.

Behavioral Training for Critical Listening and Critical Thought

Remarkably all the participants, regardless of age of students taught, described teaching strategies used designed to train student behaviors for development of critical listening, thought and subsequently critical literacy. These strategies tie in well with the focused efforts of a critical pedagogical classroom; to develop strong communication skills including active listening, acknowledgement of conflict brought about through learning struggles, and acceptance of "new ways of knowing" (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 2011; Hinchey, 2008; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2007; Wink, 1997) . Ms. Sammi identified a "hands down" policy held by all teachers at the Elementary Elms. The policy is designed to help the students become active listeners rather than be distracted by their own speaking intentions. Ms. Sierra, Mrs. Aidan and Mrs. Lane confirmed the use of this policy in their classrooms. "We have to show we are listening, so if someone else is talking you're not allowed to have your hand up to ask a question", said Sammi. Mrs.

Lane spoke to the “hands down policy” of the school. She said, “I am constantly reminding them to put their hands down.... (laughter), because it’s so hard. They want to talk, which is good! And again, being respectful and listening, you know, to others and really listening.”

Both Lane and Sammi shared that they often utilize the strategy of having students repeat back directions or testing student’s listening by prodding them with questioning. Sammi says, “Someone will say, you know, something in class that they shared and I’ll say, ‘So what exactly was she saying here?’ And then we’ll go back and talk about that. And even with our morning prayer....sometimes I think, maybe they’re not fully listening so then I have them say, ‘What does this prayer mean? What are we supposed to take away from it?’”

Ms. Sierra has taught the third grade, 2nd grade religion and social studies at the Elms for five years. She spent the previous 10 years teaching for a variety of age groups and institutions including, undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Akron, pre-schoolers at Akron Public Schools HeadStart program, elementary aged students at Washington, D.C’s public school The Marie Reid Learning Center, and also the D.C. public school district’s Garrison Elementary. She has consistently taught from a dialogic perspective in every classroom and believes behavioral training is at the heart of critical skill development. She said,

Like, how is it that you shake someone’s hand and what are we looking for? Body language and verbal as well, so you need to have your voice a certain volume you need to look eye to eye, you need to shake hands to something that’s um, more silly fun....For sharing, you can have formal sharing where I’ll give a dictated topic or they’ll bring something in to share and the expectation is that you speak in complete sentences, you have the correct tone and volume um, and that you’re

actively listening and what does that mean to be actively listening? And um, we make a chart about what does active listening look like, what does it sound like? And then, when we need to reinforce that we focus and look at that and those particular issues.

Sierra stated sometimes this training takes on the form of a fun activity so students can learn through their play.

I do these silly sentences, where that I will say a silly sentence, I will kind of dictate it, and they will actually have to write the sentence down and I don't repeat it. And so, at the beginning of the year, it's usually a two or three word sentence. At the end of the year, it's like, you know, depending on the class, it can be 10 words; um, or several sentences for them to write it down. It's not graded, um, but after they've written it down, I say it again and they're shocked at you know, what I've done.....Things like "Concentration" or a recall kind of things game. "Telephone" (a listening game) can be an example, um other things that reinforce them being observers, being good listeners, um and giving them practice with that short term recall and also long term recall kind of activities.

Mrs. Lane reiterates the necessity of teaching behavioral skills to establish a respect for diversity and awareness. She said, "...speaking to someone, eye to eye contact, encouraging them (students) to do that. Just to do that.... I think as adults looking at them eye to eye because there are some girls who are very shy or they think that by looking away that you don't see them. I teach them that when somebody comes into our building as a guest, you need to say, "Hello" and greet them. So, something that basic, I know. But, yeah, I think it's important."

Ms. Courtney spoke of the importance of detailing behavior guidelines for her middle school aged students before assigning them small group work. She said,

...since I have them two years in a row that I focus more on that at the beginning of the 7th grade and then kind of pull back and hope that they're doing that throughout the year. Um, this year, I did do more of, uh, focus more on the cooperative learning things and um, each day, I forget which project they were working on, but each day we went over different skills. And I have a list of different skills and I'm sure listening was probably on there. And so, I wrote it on the board and I said, "Today I'm going to be looking for this so make sure that

you're doing this with your group". Um, often, if I start seeing them, you know, not listening to one another or one person taking the lead, um not listening to others feedback and contributions, I will chime in and remind them of that. But, I hope that develops.

Courtney revealed various teaching strategies she uses to practically guide critical listening skill development in her middle school science classes. These strategies include taking notes while fellow students present class projects so questions can be asked of the presenter, and providing opportunities for peer evaluation and feedback on classroom work. "I have them give feedback to one or two other students....that is called, 'two stars and a wish'. So, you tell them two things they did well and one thing you wish they would have done".

Mrs. Gorman noted her insistence on student's developing note taking skills as integral to critical listening skill development for her high school English students. She said,

I think it's a very important part of my class, um, directions, assignments...I'm still a very verbal teacher. I'm maybe a little behind the times in that respect, but they really do have to listen or they will miss an assignment. I don't have a smart board. I write things on the board, but a lot of times, you have to listen and process and um, it, what we do, what we do in discussion they have to also take notes, and it's probably one of the most difficult things.

For a freshman, especially to listen, participate and write down important things. I often signpost things and say, "Now that's really important, let's write that down". Or "Did you write that down, or "Are you writing things down?" Because they really do have to multi-task; there is no guarantee that what we are talking about will then be given to them in typed up notes or a study guide or something. It's still a really important part of my class. Um, and um, honestly they, they do not have to listen critically as much, certainly as much as we did. It's less and less emphasized as a skill. Um, and it, it sometimes startles them when they realize that we say that listening is important, but I don't think we're doing as much to make students accountable for their listening. We offer them a lot of reasons to not listen.

The focus on behavior training at the elementary and middle school level appears to be beneficial because, according to Mr. Jonah, his high school social studies students need very few reminders of behavior designed to aid critical listening. He says, “I don’t have discipline problems. I haven’t had one ever. I mean, people find that odd. Like, you know, I have friends that teach in the inner city, and that’s originally what I wanted to do, and when I was at Akron Public I had discipline problems, not a lot, but some. But here, never had one..I think it has to do with the parents”.

Freed from the need to direct behavior, Jonah’s goal is to utilize the student’s critical listening skills to develop them into skilled conversationalists. Although, the students demonstrate strong critical listening from the onset, he does provide continued direction for appropriate behaviors when necessary.

I don’t want them raising their hands at all. I want them to learn how to converse in an orderly society. And, I will stop them if they’re wrong. But, if there’s gaps, no, I mean, and especially.....every year, I find, starting with Sophomore year I get less strict on those rules. Sophomore year, have to raise their hand have to be very, very formal, Junior year, a little less formal. Senior year, it is literally us just sitting around talking....Basically, they have to sit with proper posture; sit and listen. And actively listen to what somebody is saying which means finding the right time to discuss with them, how to work things out again, because being the debate coach, I teach them how to debate in class where everyone has to stop and listen to someone else’s truth. And then, I let them know that if somebody just rambles on, how to, you know, move the conversation along. That happens all the time too. You know, how not to be rude about it, but how just to jab them in a certain direction,you know, people get hung up on what their saying. So, they’re (the Elms students) very good listeners, very good listeners.

Ms. Micah supports Jonah’s comments of Elms’ high school students’ consistent demonstration of strong critical listening skills and believes student behavioral training supports this initiative.

We’re at the point, because the classes are smaller where they don’t necessarily have to raise their hands. We’re in communication; we’re having a conversation

all the time. Um, I like running my class that way, you know, the girls are very respectful of each other and of me in allowing that and there's always great discussion.....it's something that develops. In the beginning with my middle schoolers, yes they have to raise their hand and so forth, but by the time I'm dealing with my Juniors and Seniors, it's more, I would say, more of a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. However, if I have a group of girls in the classroom who aren't respectful or whatever, then we're back to let's raise our hand and that type of thing.

Ms. Sierra identified specific teaching practices focused on behavioral development for her third graders arguing these behaviors lead to analytical thought development. According to Sierra, focusing on social and cultural skill behavior teaches young students to "read their environment". She says,

...part of that is learning to read body language and what does that mean to third graders? And so, focusing in on, you laugh with someone, not at someone, so you need to look at their eyes, are they putting their head down? Um, you need to look at the environment. What is going on? If I'm meeting with a small group and you have a question it doesn't mean that you yell across the room to me, or you don't loudly talk to your neighbor. It's that you have the signal and if I don't see your hand, then you quietly ask your neighbor. If you're in the hallway and somebody's coming, what do you need to do? And, that yes, you're in third grade, but in third grade what you know is very different from what you know in first grade or pre-K, and when we go over to the high school, what's going on over there that you need to be aware of? So, always being aware of your environment. And we do a lot, again that kind of ties in to the responsive classroom in the fact that I do the three R's; being respectful, responsible and ready, and being respectful of your materials, being ready; those kinds of things, um. And, you know, being responsible for those things and what does that mean, you know. And so, we talk about that a lot. We talk a lot in class...(laughter)....So that's important to me, we will kind of, you know, we have our tea (The First Ladies Tea event) here and we embed those social skills within our classroom with not only during lunch and special events, but in the morning, like you have to say, "Hello" to someone or "please pass this" or "please pass that". Um, and again reading the environment.

Socratic Questioning and Student Reflection

Critical pedagogy differs from many contemporary teaching theories in that teachers are commissioned to guide students to higher understanding through dialogue

and questioning rather than through the transmission of knowledge by acting as the sole voice in the classroom (Giroux, 2011; Hinchey, 2008; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2010; Wink, 1997). Every teacher interviewed was able to identify teaching practices that reflected guiding students through dialogue. Even more so, these dialogic practices were consistently the focus of daily classroom behavior. Although, only one teacher, Ms. Sierra, was able to identify higher education training that prepared her for dialogic teaching, many of the teachers spoke to an inner sense of knowing that dialogic instruction was the most effective for all students or provided a more authentic, organic learning experience for diverse needs and interests. Mrs. Gorman stated she had no formal educational training for dialogic teaching; however she believed she grew into the experience by calling on memories of her favorite high school English teachers.

Ms. Sammi spoke to her experience of ill-preparedness and overcoming this challenge when desiring to become a teacher who guides rather than transmits knowledge in her classroom. She said,

You know it, a lot of things I think I learned in college do not feel very....real world to me. It was like, you know, in a bubble these would be great things to do, but, especially in my experience before I came here, even though it was a private school it was very inner city, so..um, most of our students weren't even Catholic and it was a Catholic school. So, even, even the, you know the idea that it's a Catholic school we take religion for granted and we're going to teach it, that was a real struggle because the students didn't have those backgrounds at all and a lot of them didn't care to learn religion. So, um, I guess you know, looking at college when they say, "Well, these are the things you are going to experience" and "here's the things you are going to put to use" I really think becoming a teacher you adapt that and, and it really becomes your own style. And I don't think I was quite prepared for that.

You know, even being a student myself I could see the teachers I had that loved what they were doing. And even if I wasn't ...I am not a math person. I can

do it. I did great in it. But I do not like it. And, you know I had some math teachers that really helped me get through some of that because they were just so excited about math and, I was like, “All right, I guess I’ll give it a shot”. (laugh) And they would find different ways to engage you. And I’m very enthusiastic and I do it with my students. If we’re doing projects I’ll be on the floor with them, helping them and I don’t just say “you know, I’m going to step back and you’re going to do this and I’m going to grade this” type of thing.....

Mrs. Gorman stated she had no formal educational training for dialogic teaching; however believes she grew into the experience by re-calling memories of favorite high school English teachers. She said, “ I suppose as a younger teacher, I probably did or felt the need to do more of the monologue...I often found myself reflecting back to things that I had done in my own classes and what things I wanted to do and what things I didn’t want to do. And I gradually, I think, evolved into a more, um, dialogue approach to classes”.

Many of the teachers revealed utilizing Socratic questioning methods to engage students and stimulate student discovery. Mrs. Gorman discussed her method of questioning to guide students to deeper understandings of literature. She said,

In discussion setting, forming the discussion with lots of questions from whatever it is that we’re talking about. For instance, when we started talking about *Romeo and Juliet* we were talking about “love at first sight”. Is this possible? Is it not possible? Starting with the simple raising of hands. Who believes that this happens and doesn’t believe, and then asking the students in the two different camps to speak. Most did. Probably not everyone, but most almost everyone had something to say about that. Starting with a topic, um, with which they have some connection or an opinion. Um, and then gradually leading to the piece of literature or whatever it is we are talking about.

Gorman, as an English teacher, makes use of diverse pieces of literature to question students encouraging discussion designed to guide examination of power relations and hegemony present in contemporary culture. She says,

We talk for instance about censorship, because of *Fahrenheit 451* and um, what government censorship means or when and where has that occurred. Um, there's a story we haven't actually studied yet, but, it's called "The Yellow Wall paper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and it's a piece of fiction, but very much based on her experiences with a nervous breakdown and her post-partum depression. Which at the time, the term didn't exist and the girls are always sort of horrified to find out how women and women's illnesses, any of those things were categorized and ignored and belittled and that uh, her story, though just a story, actually paved the way for some changes in the way for treatment for some mental illness, but specifically for women. You know, the attitude for women as a weaker species prone to nervousness and that um, that it was just to be expected, or that it would pass, but that, um, a women with what we call post-partum depression is not a "good mother". You know that was the attitude. That the only cure then is that she needs to spend all of her time with the baby, even though she is depressed. You know things that, just completely different from what we know now, to be true. And they're just shocked that it wasn't that long ago.

Mr. Jonah, with a self-professed sense of Socratic style, says he uses questioning to keep classroom discussion lively and moving forward. He said,

So, I mean I do a lot of Socratic where I go around the room and I pepper the kids quickly because I was raised where things happen quickly; in a generation where things started to speed up. And they're even faster for them. So they like that buh, buh, buh, buh, buh, boom. I'm traveling around all the time. I think my classes are really dialogue between the kids and I. They always act like my classroom is a discussion.

Ms. Micah admits to using Socratic questioning as a method to force student's to find their voice. She described one method as "maybe, pretty diabolical" as she purposely answers a question posed incorrectly to challenge the middle school students to speak up. She says,

I'm not into the rote especially with history, the dates and that type of thing. When I, I mean, dates are important, but I think the higher level is, ok, chronologically what came first through here and how did it impact. So, that's what I'm talking about the higher level questioning, techniques and so forth, and the other thing.... I purposefully will answer a question wrong and I want to see if the girls will pick up on it and challenge me, by finding their voice and saying,

“Ms. Micah, I’m not sure if that was right”. You know, and then I’ll play dumb and say, “Well, what are you talking about? Of course it’s right”. And then maybe one or two others will come in and try to support that student and then, you know, I’ll give up and say, yeah, you’re right. But, there are times when they don’t catch me and I’m thinking ok well, how do I make sure they get the right information? (laughter) So, right before we leave I say, “Oh, and by the way, when I said, blah, blah, blah, it was not correct. What is the correct answer?” And then, they’ll say, “Really”, but you know I think they’ve caught on to me and my reputation has now proceeded me so, um, there, there pretty good at immediately challenging me... when I’m purposefully fooling them and trying to make them stand up and say, “No, that’s not right” I’m always stressing to them that knowledge is power and the more knowledge they have, you know, the more powerful they’ll be in their day to day activities and just living their lives successfully and so forth.

Ms. Sierra identified using Socratic questioning as integral to guiding her third grade students in their development of critical literacy. Focusing on topics the students can relate to, she questions them to model their own questioning of power structures and hegemony. She said,

So, we’ll use the First Ladies and when we do the First Ladies and we talk about uh, the timeline and the fact that some first ladies went to college and some, um, have a Masters degree like Hilary Clinton and some never went to school like Martha Washington. And why didn’t they go to school? And the fact that why didn’t women have the vote? Why didn’t women have certain jobs? We do famous women scientists, um, and not to say, okay, well we’ve been oppressed and you know, beyond just women’s lib that piece of it, but looking at the fact that things in society change and you have a voice to change it.

And I tell the students if you think I’m saying something wrong, I’ve accused you something you haven’t done, um, you don’t understand something, you have the right to raise your hand and say, “Ms. Sierra, I think you’re wrong”. But, I’m going to say to you, “Why?” and you have to back it up. Um, and we talk specifically about opinion and I’ll say to them, this is your opinion and if it’s your opinion you can say, “I like it. I don’t like it. I really don’t care”. But you have to back it up. You can’t just say, “Oh, I like it”. Well, why do you like it? Um, so, in having that right to speak up, you have the responsibility to do it in a respectful manner um, and we tie it in through our readings through our social studies, certainly through religion being a parochial school um, through everything... You know, even though they’re young they can learn to do that. And they learn to question things. And if they know how to do it respectfully at this age, then it’s my hope that when they’re in 9th grade and 12th grade and they’re in college that

they can have the hard conversations and voice an opposing position if they're in the minority or the majority.

Mrs. Aidan combines Socratic questioning with hands-on work to guide her pre-school students to deeper understanding. This powerful combination enables the children to develop a deeper understanding of abstract concepts including areas of social justice. She identified two clear examples of Socratic questioning coupled with hands-on exploration.

I think they understand it better when you have some example to show, especially at this age because they don't really know all the...we did, we did the earth. They had to cut paper and glue on to a paper and I said, "Well what does the earth look like?" and "What colors are on the earth?" and "What shape is the earth?", and that kind of thing, and you show them. Like, we'll get on the Smartboard and show them outer space and the earth so they get an idea of what it's supposed to look like. Rather than just saying, that's what it is and just, just, you know, believe it...And then, I'll go back and say now, "What did we, when we looked at that picture what shape was the earth?" and they'll say "circle" and "What colors did you see? And what was the part that was blue? and What was the part that was green?" And you know some of them right off the bat get it and some of they don't quite get it at all, but. And, I mean that's okay. I think the more you show them the faster they're going to learn it.

We did the Haiti thing. We talked to them about Haiti. We showed them pictures of...we had a student teacher, she brought pictures in. We showed them, you know like how the earthquake, they had the tsunami and what happened, how it destroyed all their homes and their houses. They really loved that, I mean, they were really into the pictures, the video. I mean, how they had to build tents to live in afterward....talked to the kids about, "They need help! So, how can we help them?" What can we do to help them?" and...One little boy said we could send them tea. And, I was like, well that's a great idea, but, you know, you have to have water. So, we talked about how we could bring bottles of water, but then we would have to send them and one little boy said or "or everybody could bring a dollar in" and it was like, "Oh my gosh!" And I mean, we had a whole thing, umm, him and I were in the paper and it was just crazy. But you know, then, that was awesome and you know, I was crying....we just went all out with it. But, you know all it started out to be was the day after it happened I, it was during circle time, I was talking to them about, you know, this terrible thing happened to all

these people and a lot of people died and you know, their houses are gone and I mean it just from that to... it does tell them that there are other places and other things in the world and not everybody can come to school and go home and everything's fine, you know.

Teaching practices to promote student reflection were identified as connected to Socratic teaching by most of the teachers. Many remarked on the use of writing as a tool to guide student reflection. Mrs. Lane said, "We do a lot of writing believe it or not. We do a lot of reflecting in their journals and so then it's just like guiding them giving them the open phrase and letting them kind of go with it and reflect upon it whatever it is we're talking about." Lane identified using writing as a method for guiding students in critical listening development as well. She said, "The girls know that when we have masses...the priests coming into our school, they create those homilies just for us...I say, that's not something they have written down, because oftentimes they'll talk about students here or this, and I often will have them come back and reflect, because I said, it's so important for us to be able to listen."

Ms. Sierra identified several teaching strategies designed to encourage dialogue and reflection for her third grade students. She said,

We have reflection journals, um, we do, uh, "three, two, one sharing" where uh, there may be a topic and the first person um, the first person shares the second person listens, they're partners, and then they have one minute to ask questions or make comments to their partner and then they flip it and then the second partner has a minute to share and then a minute to recall and then they have a minute where they can engage each other in conversation. Um, we do a lot of just ah, just open-ended conversations um when we have discussions where I'll pose a topic and I'll say "Does anyone have any thoughts?", so that a lot of the open-ended questions; verbally and written. Um, we do lots of projects and presentations, lots of projects and presentations. Um, where the students are guided with a rubric, um, there's a lot of wiggle room, you know, for creativity. Um, a lot of opportunities for differentiated instruction. Um, we do conferencing, we do small

group, we do whole group, um, we do lots of hands on manipulative kind of things, um, the scaffolding type of activities. Where you might model an activity um, using the materials and then you give them guided practice with it and then they're allowed to do personal investigation on it. Um, and depending on what you see is how much support you give a student. Whether it's that you lend a hand because they're unable to support a manipulative physically, or if it's giving them guided questions to help them kind of dig deeper into it. Um, or you're questioning them to say, "Why do you think this is happening?" or, or "Why does yours look different than mine?" uh, or "What do you think is going on here in someone else's?"

Ms. Courtney uses guided problem-solving in her middle school classes to guide student questioning and reflection while engaging in a dialogic learning environment. Courtney contends guiding is needed as the students are just beginning to come to terms with dialoging through questioning. She provided two clear examples of successful implementation of these strategies in her classroom. She said,

I have a discussion web, and it's kind of like a graphic organizer, and you know if they're discussing um, a topic that might be a little controversial or might have some ethical implications, um, they have to brainstorm, okay, they come up with a question for the middle of the discussion, like what is the main question we are trying to solve, you know what's the problem here. I remember a few years back there was an article, you know about a community killing deer; you know to thin the population. So they come up with the middle question and then they have a column for yes and a column for No. And so they brainstorm all the reasons "yes" and all the reasons "no" and then as a group they kind of have to discuss and come up well, now that we have our, you know, pros and cons, you know, what do you think we come up with at the end. And sometimes the groups maybe didn't come up with a consensus at the end. So, I think that definitely at the middle school level instead of just telling them, "Here discuss this" they need a format. Give them a guide.

One I did just recently, there was an article in, I think the *Parade Magazine* a couple of years ago, it was about the "toyger" because we are studying genetics and this was a cat that they are genetically engineering to look like a tiger. And so, in the article it has some pros and cons and so, I had the girls use, it's a strategy called, "Save the Last Word for Me" and so they read the article themselves, they highlight some points that really speak to them and then when

they get in their group, the first person in their group reads one of their statements and then each person has to comment on the statement and then she would get to respond last. So it kind of forces them, and again, I think definitely at the middle school they need a format, they need that structure to help them.

Courtney said that even during teaching moments that require a traditional monologic, lecture format, she successfully incorporates student dialogue and questioning to guide them in reflective thought. She said,

Something I do quite a bit, if I am doing some lecturing if I want to know if they're understanding, and I don't want just one student to answer the question, I often say, "Turn to your neighbor". The strategy is called "Think pair/share". So they think about it first. I ask the question I kind of pause, "Ok, tell your neighbor what you think. And so it forces them to talk to each other. And then I call on any group of student whether they had their hand up or not. And I think that um, asking them often why? Or, or getting them, you know, even in that lecture scenario to talk about it rather than just one person answering the question.

Mr. Jonah also spoke to the use of writing as a means to stimulate student reflection on classroom dialogic. He said, "Oh yeah, we do a lot of writing, a lot of essay writing which is a pain to grade, a lot of reactions, and I have them drawing political cartoons. I love political cartoons. I'm always putting up political cartoons trying to get them to figure them out; um, and, um pictures. But yeah, they do a lot of writing. Probably at least one 5 page paper every six weeks, at least."

Teacher Awareness and Sensitivity to the Learning Environment

The classroom framed in critical pedagogical theory demands a democratic learning environment where student and teacher have equal voice and power. Actualizing this equity is problematic if a teacher does not maintain sensitivity to their own power within the classroom. The teacher must be willing to share their power and remain

vigilantly aware of student needs and leading (Ellsworth, 1992; Freire, 1997; Hinchey, 2008; Kincheloe, 2010; Luke & Gore, 1992; Wink, 1997). Several of the participant teachers spoke to the need to remain sensitive to the power structures in the classroom in order to successfully guide students through their learning process. Ms. Sierra spoke to her training in higher education which prepared her for this teaching strategy. She said,

I would say that um, one of my first experiences and one of my clearest memories was that I had a college professor who handed us a leaf the first day of our education class. And he told us, “You are to take this home and you are to come up with as many different ideas for teaching a lesson based on this leaf”. And so then we, came back, that was all the guidance we were given. People were mortified. They were like you’ve got to be kidding me and running to the library to look up leaves and themes with leaves and things like that, but his idea was much simpler. It was just take it and go with it. Then he explained what his purpose was and the idea that, um, you know you can have all the resources in the classroom, all the teaching guides, all the manipulatives that you want, you can even have computers, but what would happen if a tornado wiped it all out and you still have to teach? And, what tools do you have to teach? And, um, so I think that was the beginning of it, the foundation part of it.

Then I had a couple other uh, teachers or professors who were very much about taking um, materials that you have and using them in a traditional way and how do you transfer them to become something much bigger than what they were intended for and how do you allow children to take those materials and manipulate them in a way that helps them to learn? So it’s not just this is your intended purpose, but what’s outside the box, the idea of what’s outside the box? And that it’s transformational and um, that they’ll be teachable moments and some of the, some of the lessons you think are failing, um, you may not be teaching the concept that you want to teach, but a greater concept and a greater lesson may emerge from that horrible lesson. And to be okay with that, that you just have to be totally be by the seat of your pants. And that good teachers don’t get freaked out when something doesn’t work or something happens, and you’re like ok, you know.

Sierra spoke directly to the necessity for teachers to share control in the classroom in order to facilitate dialogic teaching. She said,

I think that there's an element of control that um, if you are very much that lecture person you're the one controlling the flow and it's the flow of information, it's the flow of the discussion it's the flow of the access to the materials and sometimes that pace, what your pacing is, is not the pace that the student needs. It's you control slowing it down by maybe body language or um, by discussion if you're open to the discussion or moving it much more quickly again depending on body language and things like that. But, if you're very much here I am and I need to, here's my introduction and it's going to take five minutes and I'm going to say this in five minutes and you see the kids zoning out or you see the kids getting really excited, but you're still tied to that five minutes, then you're losing opportunities, You know, that part of it. And I also think that you sometimes um, don't use memory and in or connections um, when you just do that. You know, you're not letting the dialogue take place so you can figure out, okay, that's a connection I didn't see.

Sierra also said she works hard wherever she teaches to remain sensitive to who is in the classroom and what their specific needs might be. She said,

I've always tried to find role models within whatever group I've been working with.... but by the same token depending on the curriculum and looking at the curriculum finding where those gaps are. So, for example, here, my class does not have any, well has one student who is African-American. So, I try to find strong African-American women models for her. Not only for her to identify with but, for the other students to be exposed to because maybe they haven't been able to identify with. So, I really do try to make that conscious effort to look at people; to look at my demographics and say, okay, here's this. Um, and also look at student's diversity socio-economically as well.

Ms. Sammi spoke of remaining sensitive to student interests and needs in an effort to engage quiet or shy students in the dialogic learning environment. She recounted working with a reluctant reader in her classroom whose mother had asked Sammi to assist in developing a love of reading. Faced with the challenge, Sammi was able to remain sensitive to student leading to facilitate an outstanding memorable learning experience for the entire class.

I sat down with her and said, "What interests you?" and she wasn't even sure what interests her and I said, "I'm not talking about books, just in the world, what

interests you?” And, you know we kind of talked about that and we picked out a couple of books that she might like and I could just tell that she wasn’t going to read them just because she had made up her mind that “I’m just not a reader and I’m not going to do it”. So, I was really trying to think of something and then that’s when the *Hunger Games* had come about. So, I told her, I said, your friends are reading this book, they seem to think it’s very interesting, why don’t you just try it, because you’ll have something to talk about with them. And I thought maybe if she had peers to discuss it with it might make it more exciting for her and sure enough, she got through all three books in a few weeks and the girls started talking about it, so I actually talked about it with them, because there’s a lot of...there’s a lot of violence and like you said, power struggles between good and evil and right and wrong and I wasn’t sure if they were getting it, so we ended up having a pretty deep discussion several times about the book and they got more than I thought they did really from it. Um, but it was kind of neat to take, even the fact, you know, that Katnis, the, you know the, kind of heroine in the story is a female and a lot of times, Harry Potter and everything else, it’s not. It’s a man. And so, we talked about that and the fact that we’re in an all girls school and we can be empowered and that she was, she came from nothing and rose to really change the world as she knew it and so we kind of went from there and just kind of talked about that whole an individual making a difference and it kind of took off from there. And the girls have really...we’re planning the yearbook this year, and that’s kind of become their theme is that “individuals make a difference in the world” and, and, that we all are diverse...

Mrs. Gorman discussed the need to remain sensitive to diversity within the student’s present when guiding conversation in a dialogic classroom. She said,

I’m a believer in some diversity within my students too. Some people are quiet. I was a quiet person, I spoke, I participated when I felt like it. And I know there are some students like that. Who think, they’re processing. They might be fully engaged and then they’ll speak when they want to. And then there are others their hands are up all the time and they’ve got a lot of things to say. So, I think we have to honor that diversity. I don’t like to make students feel uncomfortable. Sometimes you can sense when someone’s prepared or not prepared, or not having a good day; leave her alone. Let her talk when she’s ready.

Challenges Faced in the Dialogic Classroom

Teaching in a dialogic classroom has great benefits to students, yet presents unique challenges to teachers. Giving up the role of transmitter of all knowledge means re-distribution of power and expectations. The participant teachers identified three

major challenges to their experiences with dialogic teaching, but unanimously agreed it was worth the struggle to meeting these challenges. Encouraged by evidence of tremendous benefits to students engaged in dialogic learning, the teachers also spoke to a sense of great satisfaction and fulfillment when acting as co-learner in their classrooms. Ms. Micah said, “I would say I feel more comfortable with the transmitting. I think that’s my background growing up that you know, I know what they need to know, copy this down, make sure that you’ve got this. I’m very structured as a teacher, but I think I have more fun and there’s definitely more interaction when I do the other type (guiding)....but, you know, I had to grow into the guiding aspect of it.”

The Challenge of Quiet and Overly Enthusiastic Students

Mrs. Aidan, Mrs. Lane, Ms. Micah, Mrs. Gorman, and Ms. Micah all identified balancing the needs of overly enthusiastic students while encouraging shy or quiet students as a challenge for their dialogic classrooms. Delicately managing the need to encourage articulation of voice with the need for equity of opportunity can become very challenging when dealing with a student who loves to monopolize conversations. In contrast, the student reluctant to contribute orally to dialogue presents its own unique challenges. Mrs. Aidan said she tells her students to put their ideas “in their memory” to share at a later time when needing to move the conversation forward, but not wanting to stifle enthusiasm.

Ms. Micah spoke of the challenges each extreme type of student delivered. She said, “With the shy student I think, you know, my biggest challenge is how to build the

student's confidence to feel that she can share her opinion because it is valuable. For the overzealous student, you know, how can I teach her to be um, you know, less dominating and to, I think, or learn more how to listen instead of talk, talk, talk kind of thing." She also commented on her constant desire to monitor classroom equity as challenging, but important to her. She said, "When I am asking questions, or we're talking, I'm mentally doing a check to make sure that every period I have called on my students at least one time, if not more. Each person, I do not miss a person. And if Miss Massello (school principal) has been in to observe me I ask, 'cause she's always asked, 'Is there anything that you want me to look for?' I've said, 'Yes, let me know, keep track if I've missed anyone during the course of the class.'"

Mrs. Gorman reiterated the unique challenge of maintaining a dialogic classroom with students who simply do not want to talk or talk too much. She provided examples of several tactics used over the years to meet these challenges. She said,

When there are students who just for whatever reason don't want to talk, um, it's a fairly rare occurrence here, but sometimes it does happen. Where you have a handful of students who monopolize a discussion because they want to talk and others don't and it's very awkward. Um, and sometimes it's the simple dynamics of a class that it's very difficult to change, and then you as the teacher have to manipulate the dialogue. And I hate to do that. I like it to be natural and free and everyone wants to say something or, at least most of the time. But there is sometimes a break down. There is a mix of students sometimes where they will just allow someone to talk for whatever reason and it's a variety of reasons I suppose. Then you really have to steer the conversation, specific questions for specific people.

Or groups and I do love to do this. I love to do informal group discussions. Put people together, here some questions for you guys to answer and then everyone has to speak. And it works really well, and it's reasonably authentic. It's not the same as a whole group, but you can sometimes go from that to a really good whole group discussion. So, that's my first tactic and it works pretty well.

And then, you know, sometimes working more with writing a paper brainstorming, rather than with the dialogue, if that seems to be the way to go. If you have a lot of processors in the room, who they really like to hear the other people talk and they're just not going to. You prod them gently. Let them do the writing, everyone, everyone will have a turn. Everyone will do it. There are ways around it.

The Challenge of Physical Exhaustion and Time Constraints

It is easy to understand how a teacher can feel the challenges of exhaustion and time constraints when engaged in guiding students through the dialogic. Constantly monitoring classroom activity, remaining sensitive to power structures and student needs within the classroom and remaining open to frequent shifts in student interest and goals all while managing specific standards and mandates can be a tiring juggling act. When asked to identify challenges as a teacher of dialogic teaching practices, Mr. Jonah quickly commented, "Exhaustion". He further detailed the challenge by stating,

It is hard, I. You know, I, again I chose my career and I chose to teach like this but I have to research constantly. I'll go home and read everything. I come in, turn on my computer and attempt to read everything. But, I've got to have 15 blogs bookmarked because I read them all before I come to school the next day. That's current events, just trends and going on. Because there are people I respect that I can bring up, and I'm the current event guy, so I like stuff like that. We've talked about maybe adding a current events class and I'm like, you know, I really can't. I'm at six classes I can't teach one more.

Ms. Courtney was quick to reiterate similar challenges, but placed the onus of blame on constrictions of time. She said balancing time with the needs of the dialogic classroom is a dialectical certainty.

Teaching Science, there's so many different things you have to do. You have to do labs, you have to know, you have to be able to measure, you have to use equipment, you have to be able to do inquiry, you know they have to be able to

come up with conclusions from the results, plus there are all these different things the State says you have to make sure you get in and different topics to teach them. So, in different cases, this book probably has four or five of those, “Science and Society” activities. Do I do them all? No, Why? TIME! ... when I think about time and I think about the standards, I try to remind myself it’s better to go in depth over something than to cover something real very thin and just kind skim the top of it.

I really think they can make more connections. I think they are able to learn it at a deeper level than just, you know, if I rush at the end of the year. Sometimes at the end of the year I catch myself, and uh, I’m doing the, transmitting the knowledge, because we have to do, you know, the atmosphere... so I find myself up in front of the classroom more and then I have to remind myself, “OK, this is not the best teaching, you know, strategies for them to learn the information”. That’s not the best way for them to learn the information. So, I have to slow myself down and then check that.

The Challenge of a Lack of Support

Although all the teachers expressed a perception of support from the Elms administration, faculty and staff in meeting the challenges of the dialogic classroom some identified a lack of support on a broader context as an additional challenge to master.

Mrs. Lane commented on occasional parental ignorance of the value placed on student behavior training. She said this lack of consistency often times translates in mixed messages to students. She said, “Sometimes when we put so much effort into teaching the girls manners and being respectful and at the end of the day when family comes to pick them up parents whoever and you see that, “No wait a minute” or you hear that, “No, wait a minute” or from the student to the parent it is so frustrating because we know that that is not what they would say in front of us, but then to them it is.”

Ms. Sierra also commented on parent ignorance of the dialogic learning process and its unique challenges as adding complications to the learning environment. She

commented on this challenge concluding with a solution often used to develop awareness and understanding. She said,

Parents understanding that um, it's not about grades, and it's about the process of learning. It's not that ending product and that um, they need to talk with their children not at their children in order to facilitate the continued learning at home.. Not say, "oh, what did you learn today"? and then that be the end of it. But then, "Oh, I didn't know that"! Or, "Did you know that"? Adding to it, to that discussion. For parents to understand it's not busy work when we do projects, that children are not being disrespectful when they ask questions or they offer their opinions that are different, um, from their own. Um, and that, they do have a voice and you have to give them a time for a voice, um, you know, I always encourage parents that if there is something going on at home to give their child a journal and that, let their child now that this is a journal they can share, and so if they want to write something, and then pass it to their parent, and their parent can write something and pass it back and have that dialogue journal.

Ms. Sierra and Mr. Jonah spoke to the challenges of a lack of support from the State government. Jonah was succinct and direct stating, "I don't like the State requirements because you have bureaucrats in Ohio deciding what I should teach. I don't like that. Because, if I had to go through all this education, to jump through all these hoops I'm really resentful of the fact that I have to get 150 C.E.U's (continuing education credits), 150 hours every five years and I have to pay for it. Plus, they tripled the price of my teacher license." Sierra spoke in broader terms in regards to an unsupportive culture that disrespects teachers as intellectuals. She said,

As a teacher in an elementary school, society itself doesn't appreciate what we have to say, they don't validate what we have to say, and even other educators don't validate what elementary school teachers have to say, um, yeah, I mean, I look at publishers and I have to say, "you, you have a product that you're selling and I understand that, and yes it does make things easier at times, but you're not in the classroom. And if our job is to create lifelong learners, which truthfully should be our job, it shouldn't be that we want the next astronaut. It shouldn't be that we want a Dr. It shouldn't be that we want a new tech specialist. It should be that we want a lifelong learner, because then if you get into a job you don't like, you can feel comfortable finding something else. And that you realize that you

have other tools and skills that you have to offer that are of value. It's that fine line um, that piece of it.... And you know, and I think that's the hardest thing that Superintendents and the government, they think they're having a conversation. They're not. We're the bad child and they're the angry parent, and here, I'll scold you. No, we know what's going wrong, but it's not that easy to fix.

It is true that problems in American education are not easily fixed. However, evidence of transformative education resounds in the voices of these teachers and their descriptions of dialogic teaching practices. It is important to ask teachers how we should teach the nation's children. They are the ones working daily side by side the student, and can readily attest to the positive and negative attributes of theoretical principles in action. Could the incorporation of dialogic teaching practices provide a solution to America's ailing school system? It is uncertain if every American school teacher and student has the means to engage in dialogic teaching practices. It is evident, however, that the teachers recorded in this study truly believe the challenges of facilitating the dialogic are overshadowed by its benefits to everyone in the classroom.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

What specific dialogic teaching practices are present in the classrooms of OLTE that facilitate student development of critical literacy? What salient challenges do teachers at OLTE experience with dialogic teaching practices as they attempt to facilitate student development of critical literacy? The questions are asked. The answers are recorded, examined and analyzed. As Fasset and Warren (2007) note in their text *Critical Communication Pedagogy*, the challenge remains to elucidate a fresh “understanding of how communication creates and may, therefore, challenge sociocultural oppressions...”; even within the walls of a K-12 classroom (p.3). Examining communication through dialogic teaching practices with a critical cultural lens is, as eloquently stated by Fasset and Warren (2007), problematic because it brings together “critical theory, educational studies, and communication (and the particular and often contradictory sub disciplines within” them and it is “like merging very different bodies of literature together to make one story” (p.3).

It is my hope and contention that the voices of these eight exemplar teachers have provided a clear and distinct argument for educational reform. Their words describe the dedication, commitment to, and practical application of deliberate communicative choices represented in dialogic teaching practices in the classrooms of the children enrolled at Our Lady of the Elms School in grades Pre-K-12. Remarkably, these strategic acts of communication transcend decades of education, and are applicable to nearly any

American educational environment with little monetary investment. Teaching practices, such as the ones detailed by these teachers, create a democratic dialogic space for education resulting in a unique freedom for student and teacher. Ms. Sierra spoke of this freedom at the onset of her interview before the first question was asked. She said, “The culture here is very different than the norm of a girls’ school, the norm of a parochial school, or a private school, or any school because there’s a freedom that our students are given, and there’s a freedom the teachers have to engage the students in a way that um, sometimes is formal and sometimes is informal; um, that you don’t necessarily get at another school. You might get in an individual classroom or a grade, but it’s not systemic.”

As Ms. Sierra shared her perspective of Elms culture, I instantly understood her comment. It was precisely this “practice of freedom” (Freire, 1974), or unique culture and central focus on communication expressed in the pedagogy of the Elms’ classroom, that instantly resonated with my querying heart and mind as I first experienced it. This open, welcoming, and subsequently empowering learning culture permeated even the simple interactions of my family’s Open House visit several years ago. During that visit, as I watched non-verbal behaviors and listened to verbal exchanges between our Senior status student and her teachers, it was evident that the Elms was a school of caring relationships and respect built through a focus on listening, reflection, contemplation, oral and written communicative practices. My initial impressions were later confirmed at a new parent orientation with the middle school/ high school principal before the start of the next school year. The principal shared the mission, desires and qualities of an Elms education. It was true, she said, that this educational environment was unique and that many in the

broader community often said, “There is just something special about an Elms girl”. That special something, I have come to understand, is a confident, articulate, empowered young woman strengthened by her classroom experiences. These experiences enable her to practice communication skills through critical analysis, self-reflection and discussion. This type of pedagogy, a critical pedagogy, is described by Tiece, Hill, Clark, Lin and Spiker (2002) as challenging “mainstream integration through a language of possibility, the envisioning and articulation of new and more just ways of being, living, and working” (p.59). It is “something special”. It is transformative.

Although it was anticipated that all eight teachers would identify themselves as instructors engaged in guiding students rather than transmitting knowledge, several educators revealed the necessity of utilizing transmission practices when large amounts of content needed to be covered. This especially was the case for teachers of Advanced Placement (AP) classes, organized to meet a national standard for preparing high school students to take a standardized AP exam. High scores on an AP exam allow students to earn college credit for their coursework. Teachers shared that a shift in teaching practice occurred as a time management solution when meeting the challenge of required AP content and standards. Despite recognizing that a dialogic teaching environment ensures a deeper and higher level of understanding, the teachers yielded to the requirement to “cover the material” quickly and shallowly. The teachers confessed to yielding to a default monologic model even though they knew it would “stifle dialogue and interactions between pupils and their ideas” (Lyle, p.225).

The need to balance content and standards against time is a practical consideration for educators desiring to engage in dialogic teaching practices. Because, as Lyle (2008)

states, dialogic talk “promotes communication through authentic exchanges” (p.225), and therefore enhances critical thought. A deeper examination of American educational standards and goals should be analyzed against the dialectical tension faced by teachers choosing to focus their communicative instructional practices on a dialogic rather than monologic model. If the goal of American education truly is to develop a competent, engaged citizenry then standards should be set to encourage democratic communication within classroom learning environments rather than limiting it.

Several benefits of dialogic education were mentioned by the teachers throughout the interviews. Of particular interest was the impact the environment had for empowering developing young women. According to the teachers, the girls of the Elms historically stand apart from peers educated in co-educational classroom environments because of the school’s focus on feminist issues allowing the classroom to be rid of patriarchal hegemony. This consistent critical cultural focus allows the Elms’ students to consistently challenge the status quo and provides a classroom culture where a potentially silenced voice can be articulated and heard (Chuang, 2008; Cooks, 2002; Tiece et al, 2002). Mr. Jonah addressed this benefit the school provides.

In social studies, I’d say, having a voice. I’d say that society’s teaching young women to dumb themselves down to attract men. I, you know, I don’t get it. Like I don’t think...I tell them all the time that as men get older they appreciate it. I don’t know if 17 year-old boys are terrified of smart women, I say, but 25 year old boys are NOT terrified of smart women. I said, I remember being 25, and I personally like strong women now, so I said, I don’t know why...you know because I see you guys when you’re around boys suddenly you get the head bob going and it just drives me nuts! Because they, I, I, I, maybe I’m protective of them and so on and so forth but, I, I just think it’s they, they push themselves down around males. And society teaches you that in a way... they teach women to be basically sex objects these days, which we’re more advanced than that.

These findings parallel the theoretical principles of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1974; Giroux & McLaren, 1986; Hinchey, 2008; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2010; Tiece et al, 2002, Wink, 1997). As argued previously by communication scholars Johnson and Bhatt (2003), “researchers of communication education have rarely addressed power from a critical-cultural perspective” (p.232). Further investigation by communication scholars of the value of dialogic teaching practices grounded in a critical cultural perspective, like feminist critical pedagogy theory, coupled with single-gendered educational environments for young girls and women is warranted.

Ms. Courtney noted the benefit of critical thinking skill development resulting from student experience in a dialogic classroom. Critical thinking is an integral component to communication competence (Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984). Courtney said, “I think it’s, it’s, just different for them when they go off to college. You know... as you’re developing that critical thinking, as you’re developing these skills as a student, as you’re developing as a writer, the more practice, the more you do it, the better you’re going to get at it. And I think they have more opportunities here to practice it. So I think, when they get off to college, some of their other peers may just be learning some of these things.”

Communication scholars argue that critical thinking is integral to communication competence (Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984). It is suggested that future quantitative studies test the differences of samples of student achievement organized around differing K-12 learning environments. In an effort to determine a relationship between dialogic teaching practices, communication competence and superior critical thinking development,

samples of college freshmen, educated in both dialogic and monologic teaching environments during their K-12 experience, could be measured and compared.

Ms. Sierra noted that an important benefit to the dialogic classroom is its provision for students to develop the ability to share their unique perspectives, values and beliefs; to articulate their voice and form a greater sense of self. This benefit is directly tied to critical pedagogical theory as well as the argument for incorporating more democratic teaching practices in American education. Many advocates of democratic education argue we cannot anticipate a future generation of engaged, democratic citizens if the practices in childhood classrooms remain consistently undemocratic (Apple & Beane, 2007; Hinchey, 2008; Kincheloe, 2008; Wink, 1997). If students are not given the opportunity to share power and knowledge in their childhood experiences then they will not come to understand the empowerment of their own voice. They will not learn to challenge hegemonic ideology and never fully realize how to speak against it as collective agents of change (Triece et al, 2002). It is argued that students who find their voice in education will as adults, be engaged and active citizens helping to further our democratic nation (Apple & Beane, 2007; Hinchey, 2008; Wink, 1997). Ms. Sierra describes her observations of students to connect the dialogic to this important benefit.

Not only do they have a stronger voice, and so they speak up more, they're participating more, um, they feel comfortable making mistakes in the classroom, but also they see themselves as a learner. It's not just that I'm a student and I have to do what you say, it's I'm learning and I'm investigating and I see myself as the scientist. I see myself as the anthropologist. I see myself as the writer and the reader. And they see those roles that they play. You know, it's not just about I'm going to give this information to you and you're going to spit it out.

All the teachers interviewed were strong advocates and proponents of dialogic teaching. Ms. Sammi, Mr. Jonah, Ms. Sierra, Mrs. Lane, and Ms. Micah previously

taught in co-educational environments and all, but Ms. Sammi taught in traditional public schools. These teachers shared their opinion of the practicality of incorporating dialogic teaching in a typical co-educational, public school environment. Interestingly, all female teachers but Ms. Sierra stated they would adjust their teaching practices in a co-educational environment since boys traditionally do not enjoy discussion, especially discussion framed in a feminist perspective. Mr. Jonah, however, said he would not change his methods. He said, “I would like to challenge the boys and you know, to me, if you give the minority a leg up it will make the conversation more interesting. I-I like controversy and I like that going on”. Mr. Jonah deliberately chooses to organize his classroom communication around counter hegemonic discourse. This communicative choice mixes up power structures within the classroom promoting diversity of thought and critical analysis otherwise undisclosed.

Based on his teaching experience in a high achieving academic inner city school and at the Elms, Mr. Jonah, revealed yet another interesting concept regarding classroom management for dialogic teachers. His comments focused on the “self-policing” behaviors of highly engaged academic students and how this behavior impacts the learning environment. He said,

I think they want to do this. You know, and they self-police so well here (The Elms). I mean it’s like a herd mentality. If you come in and you don’t fit in, they take care of it. I don’t have to. You don’t take up their time....disruptive kids from other schools, they either tow the line or they don’t last long. I mean, honestly, so. I find it a lot.

Early in my career, I was at Ellet as an extra teacher for a year. So they sent me anywhere in Ellet every day. And I was always fascinated because the way Akron Public does it in the middle school, if you get expelled from one middle school you go to another one and do the circle. But the odd thing was that whenever one kid ended up at Hyer, which was the best middle school in Akron

Public, if they didn't fit they'd be gone in a couple of days...there would be some sort of fight. There would be jawing back and forth. The kid who was the disciplinary problem would react violently and they'd be gone. I don't know if the kids were consciously doing it, but it just...they had pride culturally in where they were at and they didn't want anyone messing that up. And I find it more extreme here. Not in the violence wise, but the kids are more extreme in that, "This is my school. This is my education. You will not mess it up!"

Educational pride for students and engaging students in the educational process is a prominent argument of debate surrounding educational reform. How is school pride, or student pride fostered? How do students come to value their educational experience and engage freely in educational pursuits? Are students engaged, and therefore, invested in their education more freely through dialogic teaching practices? Using this case study as a reference, one would have to answer yes. Dialogic teaching effectively and economically accomplishes the goal of student engagement and subsequent school and educational pride. Since arguments of educational reform for American schools most assuredly are measured with a monetary cost analysis, it is refreshing to consider that dialogic teaching, and subsequent student engagement, require nothing more than a thoughtful teacher. This teacher however, must teach with a critical cultural perspective and be willing to reflect, patiently guide and surrender power within her classroom. She must remain focused on a goal of transforming the student through questioning, dialogue and eventual discovery (Chuang, 2008; Cooks, 2002; Hinchey, 2008; hooks, 1994; Tiece et al, 2002; Wink, 1997).

The debate surrounding educational reform will continue as politicians create policy and parents and teachers desire changes for their students. A common solution will remain a mystery, according to Mr. Jonah, because no matter how many studies are conducted; teachers are not "quantifiable". He said, "Because, you know, you can be the

most popular teacher at the Elms or the least popular teacher at the Elms, but somebody's going to hate you and somebody's going to love you no matter who you are. This is so not quantifiable. I mean, to me, it's like I told my student teacher, if you have a passion for the job, you have a passion for your subject, and you really like kids, you'll be fine. But if you don't have those three things this career is not for you."

This case study provides evidence of how specific communicative acts play out in a real world K-12 classroom. Greater than any critical theoretical assumption, these exemplar teachers deliberately choose communicative practices designed to have lasting educational value and transformative power. Bringing forth a critical cultural discussion of communication in education engages scholars in the examination of "communications role in the persistence and maintenance of institutional power" (Fasset & Warren, p.4). It provides a new way of examining the role education plays in social and cultural issues.

Whether we quantify teachers, teacher's communicative choices or student achievement; one truth remains. The passion and mission to serve humanity identified as dialogic teaching by St. Dominic some 800 years ago, is alive and well at Our Lady of the Elms School. The school is a treasure in the sea of educational choices, options, and practices providing transformative education to its students. It is critical pedagogy in action.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CONSENT

Institutional Review Board Consent Document



Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

Akron, OH 44325-2102
(330) 972-7666 Office

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

March 30, 2012

Regenia Spoerndle
8640 Markley Drive
Wadsworth, Ohio 44281

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20120334 "Critical Pedagogy in Action: A Case Study of Our Lady of the Elms"

Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects for the referenced project. Your application was approved on March 30, 2012. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

- ☐ **Exemption 1** – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.
- ☒ **Exemption 2** – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.
- ☐ **Exemption 3** – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.
- ☐ **Exemption 4** – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.
- ☐ **Exemption 5** – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.
- ☐ **Exemption 6** – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

☒ Approved consent form/s enclosed

Cc: Kathleen Clark - Advisor
Cc: Stephanie Woods – IRB Chair

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Critical Pedagogy in Action: A Case Study of Our Lady of the Elms

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Regenia Spoerndle, a graduate student in the School of Communication at The University of Akron. Regenia is under the direction of Dr. Kathleen Clark, Associate Professor in the School of Communication at The University of Akron.

The goal of this study is to provide a case study of a clear descriptive model of the dialogic teaching practices that bring critical pedagogy to action as well as identify the unique challenges dialogic teaching brings to educators. Our Lady of the Elms School in Akron, OH was purposefully chosen as an exemplar of an educational institution dedicated to critical pedagogy.

Face to face interviews will be conducted on the school grounds or at a mutually agreed upon location at the convenience of the teacher/participants schedule. The semi-structured interviews will be facilitated with the use of an interview guide, note paper and pen and an audio recording device. Questions in the interview guide are designed to evoke reflection of the communicative practices present in the pedagogy of the teacher. Follow-up questions will be developed and asked during the course of the individual interviews as deemed appropriate by the researcher. The interviews are anticipated to last between 45 mins. to one hour in length.

There are no inherent risks or discomforts (current and potential) to you as a participant resulting from participation in this study.

You will receive no direct benefit from your participation in this study, but your participation may help us better understand the value of dialogic teaching practices as they relate to teaching children to critically evaluate their culture and world.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

Personal identification of participants and data collection will be confidential. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation of results and no one will be able to link your responses to you. The name of the school, Our Lady of the Elms, will be identified in the study to allow scholars and leaders in the field of education and educational reform a viable exemplar school to converse with for future endeavors.

If you have any questions, concerns, suggestions or complaints at a later date, please contact the researcher at res46@ziips.uakron.edu or the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs (ORSSP) at The University of Akron. The mailing address of the ORSSP is: The University of Akron, 302 Buchtel Common, Akron, OH 44325-2102. The office phone number for is: (330)972-7666.

Please indicate your agreement to participate in this study as explained above by signing below:

(Participant signature)

(Date of Consent)

(Researcher signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX C

CONSENT TO IDENTIFY FORM



School of Communication

College of Fine and Applied Arts
Akron, OH 44325-1003

(330) 972-7954 Office

<http://www.uakron.edu/ech/comm>

Consent to Identify

This document will serve as permission for Regenia Spoerndle, Graduate Student at the University of Akron, to identify Our Lady of the Elms school by name as an exemplar for her master thesis study. With this cooperation, Our Lady of the Elms School, 1375 W. Exchange Street, Akron, OH, 44313, will receive a copy of the written study to use for promotional or advertising purposes.

(Authorized signature)

Don K. Massella, Principal

3/27/12

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How would you describe your religious background?
- 3) What grades do you teach?
- 4) How many years have you been a teacher?
- 5) How many years have you taught at the Elms?
- 6) As a student did you attend a private or public school or both?
- 7) Do you believe either of these settings had any impact on you as a teacher?
- 8) Would you say your teaching practices reflect guiding students or transmitting knowledge?
- 9) Dialogic teaching is a foundational principle of a Dominican education. Did you prepare in any way through your higher education training to help you be ready for dialogic teaching, or teaching practices that promote learning through talk and expression of voice? If so, how?
- 10) How do you perceive dialogic teaching differs from monologic teaching?
- 11) What specific teaching practices do you use to encourage students to use/ find their voice or articulation of their beliefs/worldview?

- 12) In what ways do you encourage students to use communication, or their language to create new knowledge?
- 13) What specific teaching practices do you use to encourage critical listening skill development in students?
- 14) What specific teaching practices do you perceive provide the greatest impact on the development of your students' critical literacy, or ability to critically comprehend the world and its power structures?
- 15) What specific teaching practices do you believe encourage students to challenge existing power structures, especially those interpreted as hegemonic or oppressive to women?
- 16) How do you encourage diversity of thought in your classroom?
- 17) What language/teaching practices do you use on a regular basis to ensure individual voices/ articulation of beliefs/worldviews are heard within the classroom on a regular basis?
- 18) Family involvement is critical to a child's success in education. How do you include the voices/articulation of beliefs/worldviews of student families in the educational process?
- 19) What challenges do you face as a teacher facilitating dialogic teaching practices in your classroom?
- 20) How have you overcome these challenges?
- 21) Do you feel supported in your efforts to meet the challenges of dialogic teaching in the school community? In a broader context?

22) What benefits do you think the little boys/ girls receive having been taught in a dialogic teaching/learning environment?

23) *Do you notice a difference in the girls that come to the school, say in 9th grade vs. those in K or early Elementary, in how they perceive learning or knowledge acquisition? If so, what are those differences?

*This question will only be asked to teachers of students in grades 9 and beyond.

24) Is there anything I didn't ask you that you would like to share at this time?