EXPLORING CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL

LEARNING

by

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction

Boise State University

August 2013

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the dissertation submitted by

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Dissertation Title: Exploring Critical Literacy Through Teachers' Professional Learning

Date of Final Oral Examination: 14 June 2013

The following individuals read and discussed the dissertation submitted by student Christina Marie Ramirez-Nava, and they evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially to my grandparents.   This dissertation is only a fraction of the hard work they have endured in this world. I can only hope they are proud of me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have supported me and guided me on my educational journey. I want to acknowledge the following people for their advice, support, and encouragement on completing my doctoral dissertation.

To my parents, Dr. Ernesto and Juanita Ramirez, who have supported my educational endeavors and for their countless sacrifices to help me reach my dreams.

To my husband, Carlos Nava, for his love, support, and patience as I pursued this degree. To my children, Mya, and Miriah Nava, who always remind me of the blessings in life. Finally to my brother, Ernest Ramirez, for without him, our family would be incomplete.

A special thanks to my committee members, Dr. Stan Steiner, Dr. Anne Gregory, Dr. Jennifer Snow, and Dr. Jim Fredricksen, for their collective wisdom and guidance. Thank you for your time and encouragement.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christina Ramirez-Nava is currently serving as the Title III/LEP Coordinator for the Idaho State Department of Education. Prior to her current role, she was a Title III/Title IC District Administrator for the Nampa School District. Christina has also taught middle school for East Valley Middle School in Nampa and at Nyssa Middle School, in Nyssa, Oregon. She also is an adjunct education professor for Northwest Nazarene University, University of Phoenix, and Treasure Valley Community College.

Christina has participated in various projects, trainings, and consultations at the state, district, and local level on various topics, including school improvement, English learners, literacy, and strategies to promote learning for all students. This past year she has worked to develop and implement a strong Title III District program for English Learners in Nampa. This work included training on timely and accurate identification of English Learners and providing best practices to work with linguistically diverse students. In addition, Christina has used data to highlight areas for district and school improvement. Another major project Christina embarked on was the ability to reorganize federal funding to create five kindergarten teacher positions in the Nampa District. These teachers were hired to provide additional language instruction to English Learners.

Christina is honored and humbled to work with amazing educators who strive to increase student learning, especially students with diverse backgrounds. Most importantly, Christina is a mother to Mya and Miriah and wife to Carlos Nava.

ABSTRACT

With a huge focus on professional development as a method to increase knowledge and skills, one-shot initiatives or flyby in-services bombard the teaching field. Moreover, with the increase of diversity, such as second language needs, children of poverty and other social issues in schools, a focus should be on implementing a critical stance through teacher collaboration

Critical literacy aims to make the unknown known and fight injustices, but many teachers are not aware of this ideology. Simply reading articles and books about critical literacy will not necessarily lead to a critical stance, pedagogical revolution, or engaging learning for students. Working on the belief of blending critical literacy in a collaborative setting with teachers, this qualitative case study investigated how middle school teachers discuss and interact around the four-dimension framework of critical literacy.

Four face-to-face focus groups and four online Edmodo sessions consisting of teachers who had varying background knowledge of critical literacy collaboratively discussed critical literacy concepts. Participants' discussions were analyzed to identify themes such as interest, support needed, and obstacles with critical literacy. These themes revealed a need to introduce and study critical literacy during pre-service training as well as the need for teachers to engage in a professional learning group to discuss critical literacy implementation in the classroom. Teachers also sought contextual examples and modeling of lessons to engage students with critical literacy. Engagement

in critical literacy activities with others has the potential to increase teachers'

understanding and classroom implementation.

Blending critical literacy in a collaborative setting with teachers could answer the

need for professional learning while also promoting social justice.

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INTRODUCTION

For more than 40 years, critical literacy has transformed from theory into classroom application. Research is brimming with teachers' attempts of critical literacy implementation in K-12 and postgraduate settings. Focus on classroom implementation has added numerous activities and approaches to the field, but additional research is still needed in critical literacy as a form of professional learning for teachers. In other words, little research exists of teachers learning with colleagues about critical literacy to improve professional practice. In the context of professional learning, how, if at all would teachers respond to and interact with critical literacy?

During the school year, time is devoted for improving teacher practices through "one-size, fits all" professional development. This implementation of professional development typically focuses teacher learning and collaboration with the latest teaching fads. Miles (1995) offers his view on professional development "…it's pedagogically naïve, a demanding exercise that often leaves its participants more cynical and no more knowledgeable, skilled, or committed than before" (p. vii). In addition, many teachers are forced to attend pedagogically naïve trainings regardless of their interest or motivation to improve their professional practice.

With years of one-day in-services, trainings, and workshops, professional development created a culture of drive-by learning. Guskey and Huberman (1995) add "To some observers this emphasis on professional development implies that practitioners

in education today are doing an inadequate job" (p. 1). Guskey (2000) later writes "Many conventional forms of professional development are seen as too top-down and too isolated from school and classroom realities to have much impact on practice" (p. 3). Top-down district and school initiates focus on improving student test scores more than improving student learning. Fullerton and Quinn (2002) believe "Professional development has been regularly criticized for its lack of continuity, its lack of connection to the daily work of teachers, and for reinforcing current practice rather than changing practice" (p. 133). It is presumptuous to believe teachers' lack skills and need large-scale reform. Teachers inherently know they must continue to refine their knowledge and skills as part of teachers' professional practice. Rather than a top-down model of providing knowledge and information to teachers, the goal of professional development should be to evoke change in learning and teaching among the participants.

More recently, Rogers, Kramer, Mosley, and Group (2009) describe professional development efforts focused on details of literacy instruction to meet state and federal regulations and compliance. "As educators, we are not accustomed to thinking of literacy instruction as having democratic aims. Rather literacy is typically associated with economic aims—with producing efficient and productive workers who can help maintain a nation's competitive edge" (Powell, Cantrell, & Adams, 2001, p. 772). Schools are accustomed at meeting the needs of high accountability with professional development that focuses on the student rather than the teacher.

Little's (2003) research establishes the possibility of an alternative approach for professional development, which engages teachers in sharing knowledge and expertise. Little believes,

If we are to theorize about the significance of professional community, or make claims regarding its benefits, we must be able to demonstrate how communities achieve their effects. This will require examining the specific interactions and dynamics by which professional communities constitute a resource for teacher learning and the formation of teaching practice. (p. 917)

Chappuis, Chappuis, and Stiggins (2009) explain, "Effective professional development is supposed to foster lasting change in the classroom when it doesn't waste valuable time, resources, and most important, our teachers' trust that time engaged in professional development is well spent" (p. 57). Moreover, most educators are hopeful in professional learning as a vehicle for meaningful change in education. Based on this notion, I propose teachers engage in professional learning focused on the topic of critical literacy. Understanding when and how to use critical literacy through professional learning is one possible solution for teachers' continuous learning and most important to meet the needs of students.

What Is Critical Literacy?

Critical literacy introduces a critical aspect of viewing and producing text. The term "critical" is often misunderstood. To be critical does not imply searching for faults. "Critical does not mean detecting only the negative sides of social interaction and processes and painting a black and white picture of societies. To be critical in this sense means, "distinguishing complexity and denying easy, dichotomous explanations. It means making contradictions transparent" (Wodak, 2000, p. 186). Brown (1987) describes critical literacy as a political act. "In a literate society, being able to read is a

necessary step toward making decisions and sharing power" (p. 215). Being literate

opens the world to full negotiation and participation. Kanpol (1999) offers:

> Critical literacy empowers individuals in the postmodern sense to analyze and
>
> synthesize the culture of the school and their own particular cultural
>
> circumstances (race, class, and gender relations as connected to policy making,
>
> curricular concerns, teacher-student and teacher-teacher relationships). Within
>
> this postmodern critical literacy, a critical pedagogue makes decisions that are
>
> consciously moral and political. (p. 54-55)

Critical literacy empowers people to uncover and to analyze school practices and policies

through new lenses focused on making ethically sound decisions. It is empowering to

discover new ideas, while critically examining transmitted information as well as

highlighting included and excluded ideas and perspectives. Critical literacy is more than

reading words. Critical literacy is the key to the known and unknown. Reading the

word/world starts with an awareness of this possibility to view and read the "word" along

with the world. Bruss and Macedo (1984) note:

> Even before that, the act of learning to read has to start from a comprehensive
>
> understanding of the act of reading the world, something which human beings do
>
> before readings words. Historically human beings first changed the world,
>
> proclaimed the world, and then wrote words. (p. 224)

With this critical view on our lives and experiences, we can begin to change or transform

the world. "You first have to invite—not impose, but invite and challenge, lovingly—

these kids or adults to express themselves, and to express the world. This is reading the

world (p. 224-225). "Reading the word enables us to read a previous reading of the

world. But reading is not purely entertainment, nor is it a mechanical exercise in memorization of certain parts of a text" (Freire, 1998, p. 18). In other words, reading the "word" is the act of decoding and encoding text, whereas reading the world encompasses an ability to see what is not always visible and allows one to act upon the unseen. Lenski (2008) simply states "Critical literacy is viewed as a way to read, analyze, and evaluate texts within a sociocultural framework" (p. 227). Critical literacy encompasses analysis and synthesis of the world and how it relations to peoples' lives.

Giroux (1993) believes critical literacy points to pedagogical practices, which offer students' knowledge, skills, and values, they will need to negotiate critically and transform the world in which they find themselves (p. 376). "Critical literacy invites teachers and students to problematize all subjects of study, that is, to understand existing knowledge as a historical product deeply invested with the values of those who developed such knowledge" (Shor, 1987, p. 24). In other words, the classroom is a space to dissect and dialogue about knowledge and power, to determine overt and underlying beliefs.

> Critical literacy thus challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for social and self-development. This kind of literacy – words rethinking worlds, self-dissenting in society – connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for reinventing our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity. (Shor & Pari, 1999, p. 1)

Critical literacy engages participants in uncovering hidden truths and beliefs and working toward social justice. Critical literacy is an exchange between participants, not dominant

discourse imposed onto others. Critical literacy is about participating and action for social transformation.

Powell et al. (2001) describe critical literacy as the following, "Critical literacy moves beyond holistic theory in that it confronts societal issues of power and dominance head on. A primary goal of critical pedagogy is to promote democracy by working toward a more just and equitable society" (p. 773). They also describe three assumptions of critical literacy, which includes "literacy is never neutral." This implies literacy embraces a specific point of view. A second assumption provides a space for democracy and shared power among participants, and finally critical literacy empowers and transforms instruction into action. Rogers (2002) defines critical literacy as the following:

> Critical literacy learning is a socioculturally situated set of processes drawing on theories of learning that emphasize (a) that learning is mediated by language, (b) that learning cannot be separated from its context, (c) that learning occurs first on the social plane and then is internalized and (d) that learning involves more knowledgeable others, such as peers and adults. (p. 774)

This description highlights an active exchange between individuals centered in social language and context. "Most sociocultural research and theory does not attend closely to the issues of power, identity, agency…" (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007, p. 2). This statement supports the need for continued study of critical literacy in a social and interactive context.

Critical literacy is a social practice and a tool for the study of other social practices. Shannon (1995) offered this explanation for critical literacy.

Critical perspectives push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or

encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it

becomes a means for understanding one's own history and culture, to recognize

connections between one's life and the social structure, to believe that change in

one's life, and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and

to act on this new knowledge in order to foster equal and just participation in all

the decisions that affect and control our lives. (p. 83)

Rather than limited literacy learning and teaching as an isolated act, teaching needs to

encompass a sociocultural perspective. Time and context are essential for discussion and

interaction around issues, which matter to make change, in this world.

Purpose of the Study

Building on previous research employing a critical theoretical approach to

teaching (Freire, 1970; Fairbanks, 2000; Dyson, 1997; Simpson, 1996; Powell et al.,

2001; Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, 2002; Luna, et al., 2004; Singer and Shagoury,

2005), further exploration of critical literacy within professional learning is imperative

for change in educational systems. Research has focused on teachers and researchers

unpacking critical literacy with students. The work highlights teachers working in

insolation with their students on critical literacy. Research such as (Janks, 2000; Lewison

et al., 2002; Lesley, 2004; Luna et al., 2004; Singer and Shagoury, 2005) have opened the

venue for a focus on critical literacy through teacher collaboration.

This work is critical to helping teachers formulate a critical stance to problem-

posing (Freire, 1970; Morrell, 2004), collaboration through dialogue, action, and

promotion of social justice in various topics, including curriculum, text, instructional

strategies, and other issues of power. Rogers et al. (2009) describe this type of work as "engaged scholarship" the process of critical literacy education, but allows us to position our work within a tradition of scholarship about our work as knowledge builders" (p. 19). Gerono-Snow (2005) describes the importance of teacher collaboration for transformation. "Inquiry as scholarship plays a large role in the recognition of teaching as a profession through the generation of knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge" (p. 85). Rather than assuming passive roles as professional development participants, inquiry engages educators to share knowledge and create new meaning.

Behrman's (2006) review of critical literacy classroom practices revealed an inconsistent "set of instructional strategies that would mark it as a coherent curricular approach" (p. 490). His review did not focus on teacher collaboration as a means to explore critical literacy. I do not propose a standardized approach to teaching critical literacy, but I do agree with providing teachers with time to collaborate around the topic of critical literacy. Perhaps professional learning through a critical literacy lens can assist with furthering teachers' understanding and exploration of critical literacy in a collaborative setting.

In my experience as a middle school teacher, students were very capable and interested in discussing social issues and exploring viable solutions for change. I never shared my experiences with critical literacy with other colleagues. I often wondered if teachers' dialoging about critical literacy could have helped me grow in my understanding of critical literacy and strengthen classroom implementation. Following Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) work of an inquiry stance, I propose the following theoretical research questions to drive the design of this study:

1. In the context of professional learning, how do middle school teachers respond to and interact with critical literacy?

    a. What are the approaches and limitations?

2. How do critical literacy teachers use the four-dimension framework to implement critical literacy in their classrooms?

3. What support, if any do critical literary teachers need to implement the four-dimension framework in their classrooms?

4. Does knowledge and understanding of critical literacy change for teachers within the professional learning focus group?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

With the idea of merging critical literacy with professional learning, the review of literature will attempt to connect research on these two topics to reveal a path for study. This selected literature highlights research to support the notion of engaging teachers in professional learning around the topic of critical literacy and framed to show how the two subjects intersect. In addition, the literature presents critical themes. Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of how the literature is organized.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)	Critical Literacy Foundations
■ Various Forms of Professional Learning ■ Inquiry as a Stance	■ K-12 and Postsecondary Implemenation ■ Development and Use of Frameworks ■ Focus on Curriculum, Literature and Text
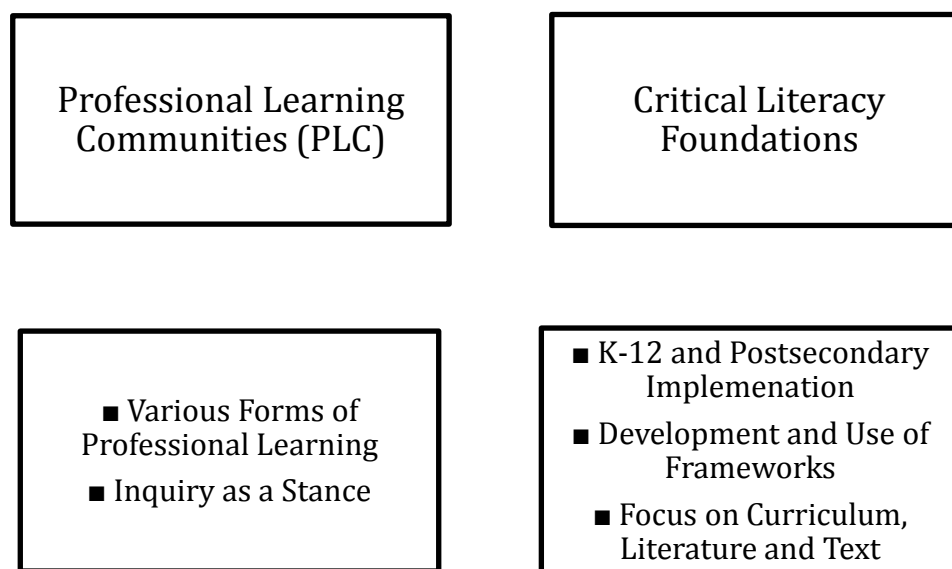
Figure 2.1   Review of the Literature

The review of literature begins with definitions of professional learning communities (PLC) and includes views of critical components for success as well as examples of inquiry as a form of teacher collaboration.

<u>Defining Professional Learning Communities</u>

PLC is an overused acronym that describes time used for professional development. Dufour, Eaker, and Dufour (2005) describe "…when schools function as PLCs, the educators within them embrace the premise that the fundamental purpose of the school is to see to it that all students learn at high levels, rather than merely be taught at high levels" (p. 2). A professional learning community focuses on student learning rather than teaching. Furthermore, Dufour (2005) explains:

> The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. (p. 36)

Monroe-Baillargeon and Shema (2010) describe professional learning communities as a "sociocultural model of teacher learning" (p. 653). In other words, teachers are learning with and from each other through dialogue and authentic experiences. "Collaborative conversations call on team members to make public what has traditionally been private…" (Dufour, 2004, p. 10). Rather than working in isolation, teachers can work in collaboration sharing both strengths and limitations in their skills and knowledge.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 2003) describe PLCs, where educators, including school leaders, work in supportive environments to improve student learning. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) define learning communities as "teachers work collaboratively to reflect on their practice, examine evidence about the relationship between practice and student outcomes and

make changes that improve teaching and learning for the particular students in their classrooms" (p. 4). In PLCs, teachers share not only classroom successes but also reveal teaching uncertainties and failures.

Promising evidence of professional development as an antecedent to success in teaching and student learning has increased the need for more opportunities. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon's (2001) large-scale empirical study found "sustained and intensive professional development is more likely to have an impact, as reported by teachers, than is shorter professional development" (p. 935). Similar to learning new content, people need time and experience for knowledge to grow into application and evaluation. In addition, results indicate professional development focused on content positioned teachers for active learning. Moreover, professional development embedded in real-life school experiences was more likely to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills.

<u>Various Forms of Professional Learning</u>

Hughes, Mits Cash, Ahwee and Klingner (2002) present a case for nontraditional forms of professional development. Some examples include coaching, mentoring, time for reflection, choice of involvement, teacher-led action research, and book clubs. Borko (2004) proposes research using situated frameworks to study teacher learning in multiple contexts as workshop participant and in his or her classroom. Borko describes teachers, as learners in the system, a facilitator, who guides participants as they construct new knowledge and practice the context.

Lambert (2002) shares the work of several districts in shared leadership. One example includes a school who designed study groups to focus on creating learning

communities, teaching for understanding, and examining student achievement through

assessment data. Another district formed action research teams and vertical-learning

communities to focus on improving student learning. Lieberman (1995) believes,

"networks, collaboratives, and partnerships provide teachers with professional learning

communities that support changes in teaching practices" (p. 596). Borko (2004) contends

researchers are only beginning to learn "what and how teachers learn from professional

development or about the impact of teacher change on student outcomes" (p. 3). The

need for future research on the effect professional development for teacher and student

change and outcomes is evident.

Guskey (2003) further highlights how teacher collaboration can also "block

change" if clear goals to improve student learning and structure are not evident (p. 749).

In other words, Guskey proposes a structured approach or a focus for the group. Simply

meeting regularly to discuss issues in teaching and education will not lead to

transformation in a professional learning community. Some examples for creating

structure for a group include ideas such as norms, agendas, minutes, and a focus for

discussion. Rodgers and Pinnell (2002) support the need for integration of research with

practice and long-term professional development with clear parameters. They also

suggest a clear design for professional development guided by questions to answer the

district and school needs.

Inquiry as a Stance

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) describe inquiry as a stance within professional

learning communities "to theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger

social, cultural, and political issues" (p. 250). Teaching against the grain describes

teachers in learning communities going beyond traditional collegial collaboration by questioning mainstream curriculum and challenging status quo.

Lewison et al. (2002) worked with teachers by exposing them to critical literacy in ongoing study sessions. The researchers employed a four-dimension framework to describe critical literacy. Luna et al. (2004) also implemented a teacher inquiry group focused on critical literacy and professional development. The authors did not give implications or recommendations for further study, as they described their study as a journey rather than a destination. Their work supports the idea of learning about critical literacy through professional learning communities. These studies were instrumental in shaping this current study as their research has potential to further and deepen teacher understanding, in addition to helping teachers implement critical literacy in classrooms.

The second part of the review begins with a broad view of theoretical foundations for critical literacy and expands through classroom implementation. There is specific research on the development of critical literacy frameworks, curriculum, and use of text. The selected research revealed themes, which were also influential, to forming this research study.

Critical Literacy Theoretical Foundations

- Defining Critical Literacy
- K-12 & Postsecondary Implementation
- Development and Use of Frameworks
- Focus on Text
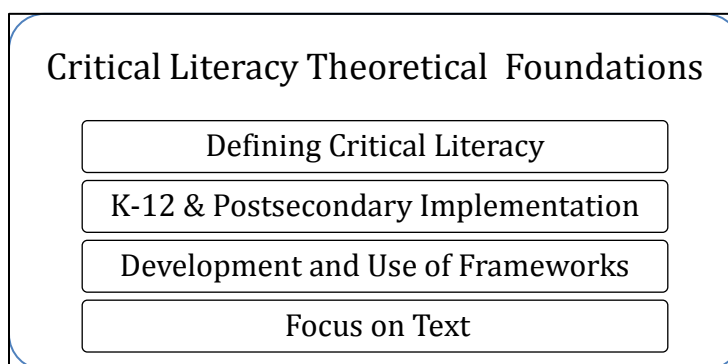
Figure 2.2   Review of the Literature: Critical Literacy

Critical Literacy Theoretical Framework

> Knowledge does not accumulate in an absolute sense; rather, it grows and
> changes through a dialectical process of historical revision that continuously
> erodes ignorance and misapprehensions and enlarges more informed insights
> (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114).

Clearly articulating a theoretical framework is a task viewed or approached from

different lenses or perspectives. We draw upon experiences and beliefs, to view,

position, and understand our world. "From a critical perspective this act of judgment is

an interpretive act. The interpretation of theory…involves understanding the relationship

between the particular and the whole and between the subject and the object of analysis"

(Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p. 145). This position challenges absolute truth of any

issue.

Freirean Theory

With Freire's emancipatory literacy, he provided a practical model expressing

literacy as fundamental to "constructing one's voice as a part of a wider project of

possibility and empowerment" (Giroux, 1987, p. 7). This process does not merely

include how to read and write critically, it involved how people analyze their own social

experiences with issues of power. Freire believed institutional change could occur

through change in social and political structures. This pedagogy provides a 'language of

possibility' to challenge the compounding injustices in the world. Freirean theory

focuses on change of social and political issues for humanization. "For Freire, the

educational system plays a major role in this process of dehumanization" (Morrell, 2008,

p. 53). In other words, the current educational system is not set up to empower students,

but rather the system replicates dominant discourse and instills power over the

unprivileged.

The Freirean model for learning encompasses critical elements for implementation. Shor (1987) offers the following model:

1. *Dialogue Teaching.* Dialogue teaching replaces the teacher directed format where students are mere recipients of knowledge. This active involvement leads to more student participation and an exchange to learn from one another.

2. *Critical literacy.* A conceptual shift for students from merely memorizing facts to building a critical awareness of self and society within the schooled curriculum. This involves problematizing knowledge they encounter and moving toward change.

3. *Situated Pedagogy.* This refers to situating "learning in students' cultures and lives…" Learning occurs through meaningful dialogue of meaningful topics. Teachers and students embed learning with their interests and experiences.

4. *Ethnography and Cross-Cultural Communications.* In connection with situated pedagogy, a teacher must be knowledgeable of cultures and experiences present in classrooms. Teachers must embrace and value the collective culture found in their classrooms.

5. *Change-Agency*. Change-Agency is the act of studying the past and present structures of community and school organizations. Teachers need to be aware of the existing structures and how to operate with and against them.

6. *Inequality in School and Society.* There must also be awareness of inequalities found in our society among different class, gender, and race

groups. In addition, teachers must be aware of these inequalities in the school and community.

7. *Performing Skills.* The last Freirean model refers to performing skills of an educator. Teachers must be willing to share, present, and discuss issues and topics with others in an engaging manner. (p. 23-25)

These components are in contrast of traditional teaching and learning. With this model, teachers work with others as active participants and contributors in learning.

A few years later Lankshear and McLaren (1993) introduced six learning principles based on Freire's views:

1. The world must be approached as an object to be understood and known by the efforts of learners themselves. Moreover, their acts of knowing are to be stimulated and grounded in their own being, experiences, needs, circumstances, and destinies.

2. The historical and cultural world must be approached as a created, transformable reality which, like humans themselves, is constantly in the process of being shaped and made by human deed in accordance with ideological representations of reality.

3. Learners must learn how to actively make connections between their own lived conditions and being and the making of reality that has occurred to date.

4. They must consider the possibility for "new makings" of reality, the new possibilities for being that emerge from new makings, and become committed to shaping a new enabling and regenerative history. New makings are a

collective, shared, social enterprise in which the voices of all participants must be heard.

5. In the literacy phase learners come to see the importance of print for this shared project. By achieving print competence within the process of bringing their experience and meanings to bear on the world in active construction and reconstruction (of lived relations and practice), learners will actually experience their own potency in the very act of understanding what is means to be a human subject. In the post literacy phase, the basis for action is print-assisted exploration of generative themes. Addressing the theme of "Western culture" as conceived by people like Hirsch and reified in prevailing curricula and pedagogies, and seeking to transcend this conception…involves exactly the kind of praxis Freire intends.

6. Learners must come to understand how the myths of dominant discourses are, precisely, myths which oppress and marginalize them—but which can be transcended through transformative action. (p. 44-45)

These learning principles allow learners to participate in learning rather than taking a passive role. The principles also explain how grounding learning in experiences and needs based on what students and teacher negotiate is necessary. Students need to make connections of information to their lives and experiences and stand up against power and other injustices.

Critical Theory

"In the critical theory view, the traditional positivist scientific process ultimately creates knowledge that is used to maintain (justify, fortify, reconstruct) the status quo in

which minorities are oppressed through the reproduction of dominant ideology" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 21). Often this view is misunderstood as highlighting inequities among groups or criticisms of systems. While critical theory does offer a view into injustices and abuse of power within systems and society. Few are aware of the change-agent position needed to fulfill this theoretical stance. Critical theorists highlight oppression against groups, and they seek to transform. They reveal existing injustices, but they also combat against the systems of power and oppression. "Knowledge that does not go beyond contemplating the world and observing it objectively without transcending given social conditions merely affirms what already exists" (McLaren, 2003, p. 197). In other words, critical theory cannot merely highlight issues of power; it must work to change inequities.

Seven Criticalists Assumptions

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) expand on Kincheloe and McLaren's seven criticalists' assumptions and describe the underlying beliefs of critical theory and a connection to possible interest for future research.

1. Every society gives power and privilege over another group. Within the oppressed group, an internalized struggle often occurs that often leads to inadvertently participating in their subjugation.

2. Experienced oppression is often an "interactive combination" of multiple oppressive acts from underprivileged identities. Individuals must grapple with their identities and identities created for them by those in positions of power.

3. All forms of text, including language are a powerful way of conveying and sustaining hegemonic practices.

4. Continuing with the power of multiple texts, critical theorists believe that the values and beliefs of the dominant culture are explicitly or implicitly stated. Thus critical theorists encourage continual questioning and deconstruction of these textual acts.

5. All beliefs comprise from social and historical positions of power. In other words, our experiences in the context of education will give us a different viewpoint to analyze a situation. Whether those experiences are positive or negative, they construct a historic experience related to power.

6. Critical theorists believe experiences and actions are constructed socially, thus objectivity is non-existent. Socially constructed experiences can have multiple interpretations and can change through our actions.

7. Critical theory highlights mainstream practices that reproduce the status quo among underprivileged groups. In addition, this view seeks a transformative approach to contexts of power. (p. 382-385)

The authors have synthesized these assumptions into clear and understandable statements. Matching these statements with practical examples would be helpful to critical literacy implementation.

Defining Critical Literacy

Finding a succinct definition for critical literacy has proved difficult for many researchers. Understanding and definitions of this theoretical topic fall on a wide continuum. The range includes the definition of critical literacy as higher order or critical thinking skills to the critical examination of multiple texts.

Cervetti, Pardales, and Damico (2001) posit "critical literacy goes beyond a skills-based approach based on higher level comprehension and interpretation of complex issues by introducing a decidedly sociopolitical and ideological dimension" (p. 192). Others contend critical literacy does not fall on a continuum but rather is a comprehensive definition to introduce complicated issues and enacts people to seek change in the world. Lankshear and McLaren (1993) recognize the varying differences of understanding in critical literacy typically based on different world views as well as a personal preference toward sociological or psychological backgrounds. To further this idea, many researchers have focused on finding ways to contextualize the idea of critical literacy for deeper understanding.

Critical Literacy in Classrooms

Over the last 40 years, critical literacy research has emerged into clearer and more structured concepts for others to implement in their K -12 classrooms or with pre-service education courses. The literature reveals a need for further research with teachers working in professional learning communities to grapple with the critical literacy concepts. Luna et al. (2004) describe their work as K-12 and university educators, who formed a teacher inquiry group to investigate critical literacy as a form of professional development.

<u>Elementary Critical Literacy</u>

Allen (1997) describes his critical literacy approach with second-grade students. He helps students recognize bias in classroom material through discussion and read-alouds. Activities include time for discussion to highlight biases in text, finding ways to

change biases, and empowering students to voice their views again the injustices. Allen also addresses challenges, such as students unaware of bias in curriculum. Sweeney's (1997) study with fourth graders also expands the possibilities for critical literacy as students write and produce a play exemplifying the conditions of apartheid and resistance in South Africa.

Tyson's (1999) small group interaction with seven young fifth grade male students and contemporary realistic fiction revealed how students responded to enact change for the issues. Although not all the boys could relate to the issues, Tyson describes how the young boys, "began to respond to the issues raised in the texts in ways that organized their understanding of how to initiate and effect change in a broader context" (p. 157). With this qualitative study, Tyson revealed a promising solution to engage reluctant young male students with contemporary realistic fiction and social action. Unfortunately, students were privy to her purpose of this study, one participant commented on helping her with her homework. This notion thus questions students' underlying commitment to the study.

Comber, Thomson, and Wells (2001) describe critical literacy in a second and third grade classroom. Students took on a critical literacy project embedded with multi-literacies in their neighborhood while learning how people use language as power. They used a critical literacy stance to problematize, combat, and change injustices. Another example highlights students in a fourth-grade classroom who choose to stand up against a mining company to save a historical mountain in their area. This movement was not conjured up instantaneously, in fact they were simply learning about a local issue. After conducting research on the mining industry, the findings led them to fight for

preservation. Students presented their research to the mining company and demanded a response to the findings. Later in the school year, students, the company, and the state of Kentucky entered a compromise (Powell et al. 2001). This study exemplifies the power of critical literacy and social justice.

Bourke (2008) reflects on his implementation of critical literacy with his first grade classroom. They approached traditional fairytale texts with a problematizing stance. He urges other educators to employ critical literate practices in all classrooms to transform current curriculum from the traditional focus of reading as basic skills, but does not offer a solid framework for classroom execution.

Secondary Critical Literacy

Young (2000) describes critical literacies exchanges with four adolescent boys in a home school setting. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), she interpreted the results to reveal how critical literacy can maintain or change the boys' awareness of gender and inequities in text. She reveals a strong connection with the young boys' but does not explain any connection to the positive outcomes of the study.

Foss (2002) describes "the various levels of meaning of books while recognizing and exploring ways in which a single person approaches a text from different identities…" (p. 394). Foss' classroom responded, analyzed, and explored books and identified three concepts to foster powerful reflections and discussions:

1. Examination of the institution of school and how it functions in our lives. The examination of an institution, including the effect of an institution on diverse cultures.

2. Identification of multiple positions and development of an understanding from experiences. Clearly building awareness of various lifestyles, cultures, and points of view of the world.

3. Recognition and problematization of privilege that permeates our lives. The ability to recognize existing privilege and becoming cognizant of how privilege affects us. Understanding that privilege does not just appear in skin color, other classifiers of power include gender, and level of education, and class.

It is powerful to share, create, and examine issues through socially constructed experiences. As people discuss issues of power, they must also be cognizant of not imposing their privilege or thinking onto others.

Johnson and Ciancio (2003) study revealed three ways of developing critical literacy with high school at-risk students and Julius Lester's adaptation of *Othello*. The three ways included the use of young adult literature, engaging students with the arts and creating a space to address complex and uncomfortable issues. Regardless of the students' "at-risk" label, the researchers encouraged students to go beyond surface level questioning of the text. They guided students to pose questions, discuss, and analyze positions in the text, and share how their lives' connected with the text. It is unclear how much influence the researchers had on the students, meaning how long had the researchers, and the students been working with critical literacy. The answer would help in developing a timeframe for future studies. The researchers' completed their work in six weeks but is the time frame feasible for students with no exposure to critical literacy?

Singer and Shagoury's (2005) work with high school students in an urban public school in Portland, Oregon. The teachers created a writing curriculum to support students' in promoting social change in the community. The class engaged in the *Stirring up Justice* project to help students understand multiple viewpoints and move toward action. Students were also presented with multiple examples of activism through classroom workshops embedded with state content standards and multi-genre literature. When time came to implement their own activist project, students expressed their interests through dialogue, writing, and art. At the end of the study, students observed their project in a culminating celebration. This study serves as a worthy example of meeting state standards while implementing critical literacy with an activist component.

Wilson and Laman (2007) describe the value of student discussion about text in a sixth grade social studies classroom. The researchers analyzed student discussions using a particular set of questions to "craft curricular our curricular decisions…and the process of meaning making" (p. 45). The questions include how students were connecting the text to their lives, how they negotiated exchanges in the discussion and what questions they asked of each other. Although promising, the questions lack the critical literacy stance and move toward social justice. Lalik and Oliver (2007) describe their work with a critical literacy context and adolescent girls. The researchers focused on supporting girls with a critical stance against societal messages about female bodies. The study sought to answer: What differences and tensions arose from the work between researcher and students and how they interacted with those differences? The results from the year-long study, one-hour sessions revealed six differences.

They were (a) differences in topic preferences, (b) differences in the breadth of

topic consideration, (c) differences in commitment to resisting heteronormativity,

(d) differences in knowledge about inquiry processes and teen language, (e)

differences in commitment to transformative processes, and (f) differences in

preferences for participation. (p. 55)

The researchers remained transparent in acknowledging struggles with implementation of

critical literacy, yet they encouraged future critical literacy research. "…not because it is

unproblematic, but because efforts to critique ourselves and our societies remain potential

means for creating a more just society in spite of its difficulties" (p. 67). I would agree

with their summation of continuing to research critical literacy. The messiness only leads

to further knowledge and understanding of the critical issues.

Maples and Groenke (2009) developed a unit based upon the question "Who is an

American?" Using literature and fictional profiles, middle school students were asked to

rate the profiles based on least to most American. The activity led to rich discussion of

the continuum as well as their beliefs about patriotism. The authors hoped to "find ways

to open lines of communication…that might encourage them [students] to reconsider

their perception of people different from themselves" (p. 29). Their work is an excellent

example of theory developed into action. Using literature, the authors engaged students

by sharing and challenging personal beliefs in lively discussions.

Van Sluys' (2010) study with eighth grade students presented four overarching

categories of social practice: redefining reading, writing, and research.

In the first category, Van Sluys reveals a shift in student understanding of reading,

writing, and research practices. This change was a result of small group discussion and

probing of students' initial comments and understanding. The shift included an uncovering of students' ideas, as they began to include their lives and histories into their work. They gained a better understanding of writing as a way to communicate and express themselves. An interesting note was that many students viewed their use of Spanish as a, "…home language used to read magazines and communicate with parents, and English as their language of learning" (p. 146). Throughout the study, students started to reconsider the position of their home language and understand the value and need for equal development of both languages. Students' rethinking of literacy practices occurred as they engaged with multiple texts and created and contributed to their own literary works.

In addition, students also made connections on how to use particular literary practices in other classroom activities. For example, one student proposed the use of a specific discussion technique in literature circles. As the study continued Van Sluys' assisted students in repositioning themselves within the classroom. For example, one student who wanted to draw rather than write began to see how his drawings incorporated into the work. As students experienced success, they repositioned themselves to include more challenging work. Van Sluys' study highlights the possibilities with critical literacy and student engagement and repositioning her role in the classroom.

Critical Literacy and Post-Secondary Students

Lesley's (1997) reflection of infusing critical literacy in her college reading composition courses highlighted students' uneasy dispositions toward critical literacy. With further reflection, Lesley noted student voices were not equally represented, and she realized her authority did not allow students to question or challenge her. Lesley believes

"through the teacher's authority, the students' voices become secondary" (p. 423).

Lesley highlights her own limitations with this experience shows a deep understanding of

what she failed to do to enact a true critical literate stance.

Lesley's (2001) second attempt at incorporating critical literacy into a remedial

reading course at the postsecondary level revealed positive results to increasing

developmental reading skills. Lesley posits, "critical literacy fosters critical questioning

and thinking and thus enhances students' comprehension skills in reading" (p. 189). In

this mixed method study, Lesley was content with the pre-post data that showed an

increase in students' reading scores on the Nelson-Denny test from an average ninth-

grade reading equivalency to a twelfth-grade reading level.

In 2004, Lesley weaved critical literacy into a required content-area literacy

course for post baccalaureate students. Through an approach of critical questioning,

students explored diverse perspectives and a passion for advocacy in their own content

and classrooms.

Critical Literacy and Teachers

In the last decade, critical literacy practices have surfaced with tremendous

promise for future studies.

Lewison et al. (2002) focused on working with teachers with critical literacy

concepts. They organized teacher-participants into three categories based on their

experience or knowledge of critical literacy.

The first group of six consisted of newcomers. This category described teachers

"who joined the project not knowing what a critical literacy curriculum might look like

(p. 382). The second group depicted as "novices, who had some prior background with critical literacy and had recently begun classroom implementation (p. 382). The third group consisted of only two experienced teachers. This label denoted teachers who created refined visions of critical theory and practice. "Spaces for critical conversation and action permeated different subject areas throughout the days" (p. 385). Once critical discussions begin a new way of viewing the world occurs.

The study focused mainly on the novices and newcomers and the four components of critical literacy. The four parts included: "(1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice" (p. 382).

The researchers found teachers were beginning to understand how to use literature to engage in social justice issues. Through workshops and personal attesting, the authors could see how the teachers were moving from one stage to the other. They also stated how teachers encouraged students using texts to "interrogate everyday beliefs and practices" (p. 391). The novice teachers could move beyond the surface structure or personal level of the text to "challenged them to better understand the ways in which larger sociopolitical structures position people in the world." (p. 391). The authors were also able to critique their efforts to help mentor and facilitate this knowledge to others.

Daniel and Lenski (2007) worked with pre-service teachers with lessons focused on critical literacy. The lessons included content and language objects to maintain a focus on language acquisition. Through this context, teachers can become cultural brokers in assisting students learn about the new culture. The work revealed empowering strategies to teaching English Language Learners (ELL) as well as offering a set of

specific questions for teachers for reflection as they choose books to use with ELL students. Although the study revealed strategies for classroom teachers, it lacked to mention any positive effect on students.

Critical Literacy Frameworks

While some researchers have struggled with defining critical literacy, others have looked at finding critical components to contextual critical literacy. The following section highlights work in this area.

Four Conceptualizations

Janks (2000) describes her work as a constant redefining and reinventing of critical literacy. The synthesis describes the use of the four elements with Australian teachers. Janks argues against a unified critical literacy definition because people are not operating in all four conceptualizations, which include domination, access, diversity, and design.

Domination includes the idea of uncovering power through critical discourse analysis (CDA). In other words, participants focus on power found in symbolic forms and language.

The second area focused on the paradox of providing and withholding access of dominant forms. By providing access, educators risk devaluing or promoting students' diverse forms of power.

The third area included diversity. Diversity is inclusive of language and literacies and "creative resources that students can draw on" (p. 177). This is the idea, which

defines diversity as identity. In addition, diversity is a way of exploring various modalities to reading and writing text.

The final conceptualization was design. This part of critical literacy involves "multimodal production and reconstruction using a range of media" (p. 178). In other words, more than just problematizing or deconstructing text, participants are recreating, or producing to promote critical literacy.

These four conceptualizations must work interchangeably to achieve the goals of critical literacy with the aim of social justice.

<u>Dimensions Framework</u>

Lewison et al. (2002) study with newcomers and novices found negotiating critical literacy understanding with other teachers was critical and supporting teachers with selections of books on social issues for classroom use. Their work included synthesizing 30 years of critical literacy research definitions into four-dimensions:

1. Disrupting the commonplace.

2. Interrogating multiple viewpoints.

3. Focusing on sociopolitical issues and

4. Taking action and promoting social justice.

Although the dimensions appear simple, each area includes sophisticated and multiple layers to define and implement critical literacy.

The first stage begins with disrupting the commonplace. It is a way to problematize and understand existing knowledge, question the influences of texts, and analyze popular culture and media in TV, Movies, magazines, toys, etc… At this stage,

teachers begin to develop a "language of critique" and hope (p. 383). Also studying how language can create barriers and marginalizes voices. This dimension is "historically a radical stance for elementary teachers to adopt" (p. 383). Typically, elementary teachers are not aware of critical pedagogy and conditioned to transfer knowledge to students, not teach students how to thinking critically.

The second stage involved interrogating multiple viewpoints. This requires participants to envision texts and experiences not only through their experience but also through varying points of view. There is a continuous questioning of texts to find dominant and inferior voices. There is also a need for awareness of the unrepresented voices in texts or experiences. One application in this stage involved "writing counter narratives to dominant discourses" (p. 383). By having participants complete an assignment, which forces them to view life through the experiences of another they can begin to understand the idea of power and privilege.

Focusing on sociopolitical gives attention to "how sociopolitical system, power relationships, and language are intertwined" (p. 383). People must examine and question differences globally, in sociopolitical ranks, and systems. The final level of critical literacy involves taking action and promoting social justice. It involves continuous reflection, the use of language as power, questioning of privileges and injustices. Challenging dominant discourse with privilege and building an understanding of other cultures.

Principles of Critical Literacy

Rather than merely defining critical literacy, McLaughlin, and DeVoogd (2004) identified four principles:

1. Critical literacy focuses on issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action.

2. Critical literacy focuses on the problem and its complexity.

3. Techniques to promote critical literacy are dynamic and adapt to the social context.

4. Examining multiple perspectives is an important aspect of critical literacy.

The first principle illustrates how readers use multiple perspectives to question text. In addition, readers may reflect on the silenced or omitted voices from text. "Good intentions or awareness of an unjust situation will not transform it. We must act on our knowledge" (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 54). In other words, simply highlighting or noticing oppressed voices will not bring about the needed change to undo the injustice. Readers must use their own knowledge of power structures for transformation.

The second principle engages participants in problematizing. Often misunderstood, problematizing does not infer problem finding, but rather to seek information to understand problems through questioning. This principle also sheds light on issues of power often unnoticed by those with privilege.

The third principle describes adapting critical literacy to fit the classroom context. Teachers must reflect continually on the goals of critical literacy. "There is a sense of empowerment and confidence in the act of creation that cannot be achieved by copying" (p. 55). Even with the same intentions, duplicating a critical literate event is impossible. This is the beauty of an ever-changing classroom environment.

The last principle is similar to the first, which calls for an examination of multiple perspectives. Participants are viewing texts through multiple lenses to gain additional understanding about peoples' values and beliefs.

The principles provide a framework or structure to understand what critical literacy is and created in multiple contexts. Classrooms use text to dialogue, reflect, and ultimately transform oppressive situations.

Critical Response Framework (CRF)

Knickerbocker and Rycik (2006) constructed a Critical Response Framework for middle level teachers to use to scaffold critical literacy teaching. Basically the handout lists the critical components such as author's intent, interpretation, and other pre/post activities for students to follow as they engage with text. Although the authors do not propose the use of the framework in a linear fashion, it is difficult to avoid filling in the answers to complete the assignment. The authors made a worthy attempt at trying to contextualize how teachers would lead students through critical literacy activities and lessons. The framework is very rigid for the daily unpredictable instances found in schools.

Tenets of Critical Literacy

Jones (2006) proposes three tenets: Deconstruction, Reconstruction, and Social Action. These tenets describe the processes involved in a critical literate environment. Jones is quick to note the "messiness" or multiple layers within these tenets include perspective, positioning, and power. "Thinking and acting through the tenets and layers of critical literacy is one way educators can begin to ask the difficult questions about

texts and what kinds of tools their students need to critically read their worlds" (p. 85).
Jones' work is similar to Lewison et al. (2002) four-dimension framework. The three
tenets are concise but still encompass the complexities of critical literacy.

Literacy Learning Through a Multiliteracies Approach

The New London Group (1996) proposed four complex components: situated
practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. These components
can serve as a path for critical literacy. The four components approach literacy learning
from a nontraditional stance by not limiting critical literacy to a one-size fits all approach.

Kalantzis and Cope (2004) built upon The New London Group's (2000) four
components, their four tenets engage teachers with theory and practical classroom
application. Kalantzis and Cope (2005) changed the four tenets into a framework known
as "knowledge of processes" which include experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and
applying. These terms are very traditional and may be more appealing for educators.

Henderson (2008) takes an interesting look at Cope and Kalantzis' work by
focusing on the challenging task of designing literacy curriculum for mobile students.
His work explores a problem-based multiliteracies project focused on an Australian water
shortage and how this project may enhance learning and engage learners.

Cope and Kalantzis (2009) developed a pedagogy of multiliteracies. The new
design encompasses three aspects: available designs, designing, and the redesigned.
They propose designing learning experiences where inquirers use and develop ways to
read the known and unknown. Although their work is comprehensive, it is not explicit
enough for teachers to understand and implement. This design requires more research.

Framework for Literature Discussions

Bean and Moni (2003) draw upon critical discourse analysis and posing discussion prompts within critical literacy as a framework for young adult literature discussion. The four categories "serve as a framework for reading and discussing young adult novels" (p. 644). The categories include structural prompts, subject, and reader positioning, and gaps, silences, and classroom transformations.

A structural prompt begins by building awareness of the origin and the purpose of the novel. Reader positioning allows the reader to question who the book is written for and to take a position for or against an author. Recognizing the gaps and silences in a novel refers to the embraced and omitted voices. The final category questions how to change a novel to include omitted voices and cultures. The probing questions allow structure and clarity many teachers long for when attempting to implement critical literacy in the classroom.

Ciardiello's (2004) work concentrates critical literacy to the use of five practices, "Examining multiple perspectives, finding one's authentic voice, recognizing social barriers and crossing borders of separation, regaining one's identity, and listening, and responding to the call of service'' (p. 138). She suggests the use of a linear protocol for the five critical literacy practices. Although well intended, simply selecting a social justice issue and following the protocol is not an example of critical literacy. In 2010, Soares and Wood explored the use of Ciardiello's five themes and constructed an instructional model of critical literacy practices for elementary social studies material.

<u>A Framework for Multiple Perspectives Text</u>

Clarke and Whitney (2009) also combine the use of a framework and multiple-perspectives text to present critical literacy in the classroom. They reference Jones' (2006) three-part framework: deconstruction, reconstruction, and social action.

The classroom deconstructs text to reveal multiple views, voices, and meanings, using familiar reading strategies, such as reader's theater, and organizing information in a graphic representation. With reconstruction, the class devotes time to creating new thinking, through rewriting familiar stories and dialoguing with others in journals. "It is not enough to deconstruct a text, but we also have to give the students an opportunity to use this knowledge to create new ways of thinking" (Clark & Whitney, 2009, p. 533). The final component of the framework is social action. They describe acts of social action as both big and small, which include sharing of the new rewritten stories to creating school wide campaigns for issues. Jones' (2006) three-part framework streamlines critical literacy into understandable and practical steps.

Teaching Critical Literacy with Literature/Text

Many researchers have exemplified the use of text and other media as a necessary component for critical literacy. There is no limit to the type of texts used to exemplify critical literacy. Galda and Cullinan (2002) focused on the need for culturally diverse literature, which portrayed traditions, beliefs, and ethics rather than focusing on differences in race, status, and gender. Wolk (2003) advocates the use of children's literature, such as fiction, nonfiction, poems, and picture books. He states how teachers can "pull critical elements out of books and have the students' debate and write about them and connect them to their lives" (p. 105). When choosing literature to promote

critical literacy Newling (2001) offers these guidelines: general accuracy, stereotyping, language, author's authenticity, balance, and multidimensionality, and integration of cultural information, and illustrations. Literature should be accurate when portraying cultures and historical events. Is the literature stereotypical of races and cultures? Does the language in the book exemplify the true language of the group? If an author is writing about a culture different from his or her own, how accurate is the information?

Balance and multidimensionality in literature allows the reader to empathize with the characters as they struggle through the novel. Does the novel include traditions and customs, which resemble the culture? Are illustrations representative of the culture? Do illustrations stereotype or offer a false assumption of people? "Texts that have a critical perspective to an original text can help students become critically aware" (McLaughlin & Devoogd, 2004, p. 56). One must remember that sharing literature is only part of the solution the other part includes developing a critical view. It takes time to choose the right texts to promote critical literacy and social action. The use of literature and varied text is necessary for the critical literacy classroom. Of course the selection and use of materials must be purposeful. The following section focuses on the use of literature, critical questions, and curriculum for classroom use.

<u>Multi-perspectives Literature and Text</u>

Souto-Manning's (2009) use of multicultural children's literature is an example of learning and social action in a first grade classroom. The study highlighted the use of multicultural children's literature and how first grade students' problematized racially and socioeconomically segregated nature of pull-out programs in their school. "Using young adult literature is one of the most meaningful and enjoyable ways for students to

inquire into social responsibility because we can situate this content in the wonderful

stories" (Wolk, 2009, p. 667). Literature is a critical component to critical literacy. With

the advancement in technology, high quality books are readily available more than ever.

Wolk (2009) offers his views on the use of young adult literature to teach social

responsibility. "Teaching for social responsibility with good books does far more than

encourage civic participation; it redefines the purpose of school and empowers all of

us…to be better people and live more fulfilling lives" (p. 672). Wolk's article is

inspiring and hopeful of implementing the use of inquiry and teaching for social

responsibility with young adult literature. He offers suggestions on how to create an

inquiry unit based on creating questions to go beyond the surface of "single correct

answers" (p. 679). He also suggests incorporating various activities and exposure of

other texts to connect to the themes in the inquiry unit. Although Wolk writes about

social responsibility, he does not give examples of how he has completed this with

inquiry and the young adult literature.

Phelps (2010) suggests the use of nonfiction texts in adolescent classrooms to

offset stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. He believes the use of critical literacy and

nonfiction text can "help students reconceptualize their views of Islam, their

understanding of what it means to be Muslim in the United States, and their appreciation

of what it means to be bicultural" (p. 192). With current political issues, Phelp's work is

timely and needed in classrooms before the formation of new biases and prejudices with

young students. Glazier and Seo (2005) remind us that merely exposing students to

literature will not create an awareness or respect for others. The use of critical literacy

with text, rich discussion, and reflection will help others grow more aware of social issues and move toward social action.

Questioning the Text

Simpson (1996) shares her guiding questions and interpretations of critical literacy combined with her interest in children's literature. Her focus on how authors intentionally and unintentionally leave voices and cultures out of stories. She believes readers' replace gaps in stories based on their beliefs and experiences and authors use specific language and views to include or exclude readers.

She also presents the possibility to challenge and resist reading and invite readers to look for assumptions within texts and question the material. Knowing authors write for certain audiences is an advantage of reading content with a critical eye. Simpson's purpose is to help children, "…become more conscious of how texts work upon them and less susceptible to manipulation by what they read and view (p. 119). Although Simpson suggests questions are not the only method of reaching criticalness, questions are a powerful way to start.

Nussbaum's (2002) small case study highlights two 6th grade classroom teachers' attempt to invoke and develop critical discourse with language-minority students. The teacher used reciprocal teaching and a published social studies curriculum for an entire school year. The study highlighted the importance of questioning and engagement of language-minority students.

Curricular Cautions

Just as Freire (1970) denounces a banking education, we must be cognizant of not employing critical literacy in a step-by-step manner. Simply creating a lesson plan with a critical literacy goal lacks a theoretical understanding of critical literacy. Planning the outcome of a critical journey is hypocritical. Luke (2000) explains, "Educators have attempted to actively combat distillation of critical literacy into a single-step method or a commodity for publishers" (p. 454). However, many researchers will agree critical literacy operates with overarching principles.

Comber and Nixon (2005) do not provide a proposed critical literacy curriculum, but they support a critical curriculum with activities to highlight issues of power and language. Not only do students need to recognize these issues in multiple texts, they must also know how to produce text to combat these issues.   In addition to help with future implementation, Van Sluys, Lewison, and Flint (2006) advocate for transparent research to highlight how researchers engage in the study of critical literacies.

Beach and National Writing Project (2010) describe a critical stance and their opinion on curriculum as the following:

> A critical inquiry stance toward curriculum study involves continually posing and exploring questions about texts, issues, and experiences. It is a process that reveals new views and new ideas that when turned into social actions transforms relationships, shape spaces, and thus change how students experience, understand, and act in the world of the classroom and beyond the walls of the schools. (p. 33)

A critical stance is more than revamping a curriculum, but rather it involves bringing in hope and change into a classroom, which perhaps was not there.

Furthermore, Cadiero-Kaplan (2002) believes "As teachers and teacher educators, it is imperative that we understand not only our own ideology toward literacy but that of the curriculum materials and processes that are utilized and promoted in our schools" (p. 373). With overwhelming curriculum materials in classrooms, teachers must highlight messages found in typical classroom lessons as well as how to critically counter these messages.

Without a clear definition of critical literacy and moreover criticism of the use of critical literacy curriculum, how can teachers and students engage in critical literacy from a theoretical framework without a practical framework? This question does not promote the need for a singular method or way of creating a critical literate environment, but rather evokes a call for more work in turning critical literacy theory into action.

Morrell's (2009) calls for more critical research to highlight the effects of critical literacy on high-stakes measurable outcomes. Morrell suggests studies "that are focused on a model of pedagogy that privileges attention to critique and to social justice as much as it does the development of sanctioned academic skills" (p. 99). Many oppose the idea of a standard approach to critical literacy. Implementing criticalness in classrooms with a clear understanding is needed.

Although teachers may stumble upon critical literacy, this ideology is typically unknown or quickly set aside when teachers enter the classrooms. Fear of not meeting standards and literacy initiatives may be paralyzing teachers from implementing critical literacy. Teachers discussing and interacting about critical literacy is essential to exposing fear and overcoming obstacles.

Classroom Challenges with Critical Literacy

With the review of literature, a number of challenges exist with critical literacy implementation. Understanding these challenges is vital to continuing the work to move toward social justice. Uncovering issues can lead to constructing a plan to address each concern.

A key finding from the literature review was the varying definitions and methods of implementing critical literacy. Without critical literacy experience and knowledge, the first obstacle is to understand critical literacy and how to implement this theory in a practical and viable manner. "Part of this struggle relates to the absence of a single, widely accepted definition of critical literacy or a template for bringing critical literacy to pedagogical practice" (Beck, 2005, p. 395). Perhaps because of the variances in understanding and definition came the differences in classroom implementation.

Often teachers misunderstand critical literacy for critical thinking skills. Classrooms, which focus on critical thinking, have students analyzing and evaluating texts. Although this notion is admirable, analysis, and evaluation is only one part of a critical literacy classroom. Other classrooms introduce students to varied perspectives using multiple texts focused on social issues but never engage students in rewriting the world through social justice.

Unfamiliar Territory

Another challenge includes the instability students may experience in an unfamiliar environment. Students' may find discomfort in their social status and how it can either dominate or dominated against others. True emotions can run deep in this type of environment and teachers may not be ready to counsel or console students. Those in

privilege may find it difficult to hear or discuss how their power intentionally or unintentionally oppresses others.

Foss (2002) discusses her struggles of finding balance in her classroom. She defines her classroom as "too serious" and a huge focus on sober issues. I wonder if the balance comes with the implementation of social justice. Foss does not go beyond challenging students with texts to disrupt the familiar. Foss faults the students' privilege for not engaging in conversations, which highlight issues of power. Although privilege may have some bearing on ignoring the issues, critically literate teachers must help students go beyond this paralyzing fear of privilege and guilt to make change.

Juxtaposing the issues Foss experienced, Hagood (2002) poses the question: "How do good intentions to examine texts produce particular formations of the self in critical literacy become problematic and dangerous too?" (p. 248). While critical literacy is about highlighting and combating injustices, the teacher must be cognizant on how these assumptions of injustice are not so assuming. We must be cautious as introduce sensitive issues and topics. In addition, we must not assume students are aware of these injustices.

Jenkins, Kramer, Labadie, Mosley, Pole, and Yavitz (2009) comment on how teachers are unsure of where to start with critical literacy. Teachers begin with voicing their concerns of possible hazards in a critically literate environment. Such hazards include uninterested students, limited time to work on projects, upset or resistant students, peers, or parents in implementing critical literacy.

The beauty of a critically literate space encompasses an unknown outcome of the classroom lesson or unit. Some teachers do not see this notion as a positive attribute, and

other teachers have reported uneasiness in responding to students' disparaging comments and questions. Jenkins et al. (2009) adds growing concerns among teachers about finding a balance between implementing critical literacy and meeting district and state mandated standards.

Working with Diverse Students

Alford (2001) stresses a clear initiative when working with diverse groups of students. She highlights the following issues to position diverse learners as disengaged or at-risk. The issues include background information to analyze text and resistance critically. Students not part of mainstream culture may have issues with background knowledge of text. Alford does not suggest replacing text with other types of text, but rather she offers strategies to help activate and build background knowledge. She calls for the use of other forms of text and media to fill in missing or disparaging information. Gregory and Cahill (2009) describe a different approach, "In order to have a meaningful, critical conversation about issues of social justice, a pathway must be built using explicit connections between issues of power and the role of power in the lives of the readers" (p. 10). Alford also brings awareness to students from cultures, which do not defy or question authority. This is similar to Delpit's (1988) work on silence. Authority may silence students unaccustomed to rising above or against power structures.

Discovering Power and Discourse

Without critical consciousness to students' perceptions and reactions to how critical literacy positions them, silence is a natural defense mechanism. Teachers must be cognizant of their own power, class, and privilege, and authorities to situate learners

(Delpit, 1988; Allen, 1997). "Teachers must become aware of their cultural and class-bound perceptions of students to appreciate how their students interpret their school experiences, especially when students do not respond to schooling in ways that teachers expect" (Allen, 1997, p. 520). "It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours" (Freire, 1970, pg. 96). A dialogic approach rather than an authoritarian approach gives the power to the individual, which allows them to construct their own understanding of the information and discussion.

Gee (1996) would further this definition to include types of language or Discourse used as a form of power. Discourse is an identity kit we all carry. We must learn to unpack this kit and learn the power the each element contains in varying situations. Freire (1970) reminds us "We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears—programs which…increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness" (pg. 96). A highly controversial subject because this stance positions educators to fight against mainstream ideology and dominant discourses. While some believe highlighting these issues is risky, others do not believe such power struggles exist.

Emerging Critical Themes

My goal for this review was to organize past and current research on professional learning communities and critical literacy into themes. The themes were not preplanned, but rather they emerged into the following: defining critical literacy, frameworks for implementation, classroom applications, use of multiple viewpoints texts and a focus on

social justice. These themes were found in elementary to post-secondary settings. The final theme for this review includes counterpoints on the use and implementation of critical literacy in schools.

Using themes to code the literature helped to highlight areas for further research. In the critical literacy field, limited examples exist of teachers interacting and discussing their understanding of critical literacy. Teachers' insights of critical literacy understanding include their ideas about what critical literacy is and classroom implementation. In addition, after the literature review the following questions emerged: What is critical literacy? How have practitioners implemented critical literacy in classrooms? How do we know if there is a need for critical literacy? Finally, where is the research on teachers working collaboratively with critical literacy?

With changing literacies, teachers will need a different approach to teaching and engaging students in learning. "If school-based, traditional literacies have not changed, then the children of this new century certainly have" (Evans, 2005, p. 7). This study seeks to engage teachers in professional learning around the topic of critical literacy for further classroom implementation.

A commonality in critical literacy definitions is the need to ground curriculum in experiences students can relate to as well as valuing and respecting students' experiences and backgrounds. Classroom activities should promote questioning and move toward social justice. Students should be part of decision-making of class content and curriculum and feel safe when taking risks. Students must also be aware of historical and present implications of society either through activities, literature, and discussions. Involving parents and other educators can lead to an awareness and promotion of critical

literacy, which extends beyond the classroom and continues toward change. There are many options to promoting critical literacy at any classroom level. Although the classrooms differed, many of the examples of critical literacy had similar themes and components. The following guidelines constructed from reviewing the research may assist teachers with creating a critical literate environment. The guidelines are my interpretation of critical components to implementing critical literacy.

Meaningful and Relevant

Education must be meaningful and should relate to students' backgrounds and interests. Students become more engaged in their learning, when they can relate to the classroom content. In addition, teachers may need to help students make connections or juxtapositions with their experiences.

Choose text or other media to promote critical literacy. The purpose of the materials can vary from exemplifying dominant discourses marginalize people or to problem pose and challenge the status quo. Using text and media, without stating the purpose could be sending the wrong message.

Community of Learners

The classroom can no longer exist as a forum for one-way learning. Students must be active participants of the curriculum and content. The role of the teacher is no longer the supplier of knowledge, but rather he or she becomes a learner too.

Classroom discussion should focus on issues important to students and society. During discussions, respect is given to individual voices while challenging them to push past underlying assumptions. Students must know their voices and thoughts are valued

and shared with others. With dialogue, the classroom must also promote a pedagogy of question rather than of answer. Students must find more interest in formulating the "right" question rather than formulating the "right" answer.

The classroom atmosphere should promote a safe place where people are willing to take risks without fear of ridicule and humiliation. It should be a welcoming and engaging place for people to participate in learning.

Supportive Conversations

Form a collaboration group with other colleagues interested in critical literacy. Seek the support of building administration and parents, inform them of the curriculum and ease their concerns. Gathering support and informing people of your actions is a far better solution to promote critical literacy than having people misinterpret your intentions. Similar to support, teachers will need to engage in deep conversation and reflection on critical literacy and examples of implementation with others. These conversations can focus on methods of classroom implementation to supporting each other with students, other colleagues, and the educational system.

My understanding of critical literacy includes the ability to reveal inequities found in society and creating change. "This means, in critical terms, that actions and knowledge must be directed at eliminating pain, oppression, and inequality, and at promoting justice and freedom (McLaren, 2003, p. 210). The principles stated above are not static or linear but are a practical ways to promote critical literacy in various settings. Each individual must make a choice to ignore social cues, perpetuate them, or actively fight against issues.

Collaboration as a Form of Professional Development (PD)

The purpose of this study is to understand how, if at all, teachers collaborate around critical literacy. Picower (2007) believes, "Without a space in which to critically examine their daily experiences within schools, many well-intentioned teachers find themselves unwittingly reproducing existing social inequities" (p. 1). Does teacher collaboration provide time to dialogue and develop a critical stance on social issues? What strengths or challenges, if any do teachers endure? Lewison et al. (2002) study suggests ongoing support, through workshops, and professional development may help with implementation of critical literacy in classrooms. In addition, Apol (1998) describes

> The starting point for helping students to be critical readers is for teachers themselves to be critical readers, able to immerse themselves in the experience of literature while at the same time distancing themselves in order to recognize and evaluate the values and hidden messages implicit in the text. (p. 36-37)

As teachers learn about critical literacy, they should have the collaborative support of colleagues and administration.

As I attempt to construct my own journey, I draw from the PLC concept as well as incorporating a critical stance. "Teacher leaders understand that the work of teaching is far too complex and the work of learning is far too important for us to confine student achievement within the limitations of our personal expertise" (Erkens, 2008, p. 13). Rather than working in isolation or attending large-scale professional development, a learning community provides structure for focusing on improving teaching and student learning. Research by Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon and Birman (2002) and Garet et al. (2001) believe professional development can change teachers' practice thus positively

affecting student outcomes. Borko (2004) describes how professional development is critical to improving schools.

Furthermore, Freire and Macedo (1987) ask for teacher collaboration "…to invent and create methods in which they maximize the limited space for possible change that is available to them" (p. 127). They call for conscious educators "…who live part of their dream within their educational space" (p. 127). This space uses a critical lens and stance to problematize, question, and transform sociopolitical issues. Lewison et al. (2002) four-dimensions: (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple view-points, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice will serve as a guide for teachers' development of a critical stance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the purpose of the study and research questions. Another goal of this chapter is to define the methodology and research design. The research design includes information on the setting, participant selection, data collection, timeline, and data analysis, including interpretation, and validation. The last section addresses ethics of the study, including trustworthiness, bias, and transferability.

Design of the Research Study

The purpose of this research, using a qualitative case study, was an attempt to examine how middle school teachers discuss and interact around the four-dimension framework of critical literacy.

Figure 3.1   Critical Literacy Framework for research study

Data was collected using qualitative methods based on their potential for understanding participants' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Questionnaires, audio-recorded focus group discussions, and activities provided rich and descriptive data of participants' experiences and ideas. Other ongoing data included observations and a researcher's journal, which provided additional insight into teachers' perceptions of critical literacy. Because data was collected and analyzed throughout the study, I could adjust focus group topics and clarify information.

Participants were led through guided sessions of the four-dimensions of critical literacy and had opportunities for independent application. Additionally, the teachers in this study, embarked in a critical examination of their beliefs and pedagogy to develop a more consciously view of critical literacy. The following questions guided my study:

1. In the context of professional learning, how, if at all, do middle school teachers respond to and interact with critical literacy?

    a. What are the approaches and limitations?

2. How do critical literacy teachers use the four-dimension framework to implement critical literacy in their classrooms?

3. What support, if any do critical literary teachers need to implement the four-dimension framework in their classrooms?

4. Does knowledge and understanding of critical literacy change for teachers within the professional learning focus group?

Case Study

This research will use qualitative methods with attempts to conduct sound methodological practices (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 2009) with an effort to

follow teacher research approaches (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). My study followed

Stake's (2000) case study outline:

> 1) bound the case by conceptualizing the object of study, 2) select the themes or
>
> Issues, 3) seek patterns of data to develop the issues, 4) triangulate key
>
> observations and bases for interpretations, 5) select alternative interpretations to
>
> pursue, and 6) develop assertions about the case. (p. 448)

The clear descriptions helped define my case-study research.

Richardson and Placier (2001) propose qualitative methodologies as an effective

mode of inquiry into teacher education. Descriptive case studies describe detailed social

phenomena. Case studies are "An exploration of a 'bounded system' of a case or

multiple cases over time through detail data collection involving multiple sources of

information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Gall et al. (2005) describe case

studies as a means to "describe, explain, or evaluate particular social phenomena" (p.

306). A case study allows researchers to begin with a wide focus and over time narrow

and shape their study. "From broad exploratory beginnings, they move to more directed

data collection and analysis" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59). A case study approach for

this study will allow me to explore understand, describe, and evaluate the interactions and

experiences of this study.

Also a case study allows an in-depth understanding and description of a situation.

Case study research provides a complete picture of what is happening with and between

three middle school teachers as well as a picture of how these educators perceive critical

literacy and learning experiences. A case study takes a picture of the situation and

participants, giving a "holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or phenomenon within

its social context" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 256). This image can be especially valuable to critical literacy educators and researchers as the literature review offers no clear research of middle school teachers collaborating around the topic of critical literacy.

Setting

This study took place in Sky High School District, (all names are pseudonyms) in a mid-sized urban setting with 16 elementary schools, including one K-5 Dual Language Immersion School, four middle schools, three high schools, and two alternative high school. The district employs approximately 870 certified teachers. The district selected for the study was influenced heavily because of my connections and access to teachers across the district.

The middle school where we met for the focus sessions was also the school where all participants taught. Because all participants were from the same school, access to them was easy. Originally, I proposed holding all focus groups at the district office, but decided to meet participants at the school for a variety of reasons. The reasons ranged from starting the focus sessions immediately after their workday as well as easing the burden of travel for the participants. In addition, by holding the focus groups at their school, the likelihood that they would miss a session was lowered.

The school has approximately 970 students in grades six to eighth. The school is also marked as a high poverty school with over 66% free and reduced lunch population. The district built the school in 2003 and is one of four middle schools in the district. Of the 50 teachers, the average years of experience is 11 and more than 30% have earned advanced degrees.

Collaborative Culture

Teachers across the district participate in site-based book studies, content area meetings, team meetings, and Professional Learning Communities. Topics of these meetings vary and typically led by the principal. The leadership team at each school consists of four to five people. The team includes the principal, an instructional coach (if the school has one), and classroom teachers.   Some book studies are optional and others are mandatory.   For book studies, participants receive a book and can obtain continuing education credits. Teachers in the district are accustomed to meeting with other teachers to discuss educational issues as a professional development activity.

Gaining Entrance

My connection with the district assisted with gaining entrance for this research study. At the time of the study, I worked for the district for 4 years. My role as a district office administrator granted me access to building leaders across the district. Although, I had many colleagues in various building, I shared my research study with my immediate supervisor. In August 2012, I spoke with the deputy superintendent of the district about the possibility of conducting research with classroom teachers around the topic of critical literacy. The district has been introducing teachers to Marzano, Pickering, and Heflebower's (2011) *Highly Engaged Classroom.* Marzano's latest book for teachers discusses the importance of student engagement to learning. I shared my ideas of critical literacy as well as the idea of co-production in the classroom. My research study and the topic of critical would not conflict with the districts' focus on Marzano's research. In fact, I believe this study strengthens the notion of student engagement.

Participant Selection

In early September, I sent e-mail to 143 certified middle school (6-8 grade) teachers in four middle schools of the district. The e-mail had a link to an online survey (see Appendix A). The three point Likert survey asked teachers through a series of questions, if they implemented particular aspects of critical literacy. Although the words critical literacy were never used in the survey, the questions contained key themes and beliefs of critical literacy theory and implementation. The survey also elicited teachers' interest in participating in a study to examine the effects of teachers dialoguing about critical literacy within a context of professional learning. As teachers responded to the online survey, I generated a list of potential participants. More than 60 teachers responded to the survey and 17 teachers showed interest in participating in the study.

Teachers interested in participating in the research study were sent additional questions to narrow down the participants (see Appendix C). The open-ended questionnaire included questions about text, questioning, and thoughts about critical literacy. I coded survey responses to determine levels of knowledge and understanding in critical literacy using a rubric (see Appendix I). A rubric to code participant data was created by Lewison et al. (2002) four-dimension framework for critical literacy. The dimensions include (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice.

Within the framework was the possibility of low to high levels of critical literacy knowledge and implementation. To show the level of implementation of the four-dimensions, I coded all responses into four categories.

1. Teachers with no knowledge of critical literacy but willing to participate in the study.

2. Teachers with moderate knowledge of critical literacy and also willing to participate in the study.

3. Teachers with deep understanding in critical literacy and willing to participate in the study.

4. The fourth group could include teachers at all levels of critical literacy knowledge and understanding but are not be willing to participate in the study.

Out of the 17 responses, all noted they were willing to participate. The survey responses ranged between no knowledge to moderate knowledge of critical literacy. A final questionnaire (Appendix D) was sent to all 17 participants to narrow down participants as well as gain additional insight about their classroom beliefs and practices. Only five participants responded to the questionnaire.

Final participants were asked to volunteer to participate in the study and given information on the timeline, study methods, and other commitments necessary for full participation. Each participant was provided a consent form and information on how to withdraw from the study at any point. "When wholesale participation in specific professional development programs is mandated at the school or school system level, or when it is scripted in certain ways, it becomes a substitute for grassroots change efforts" (Lieberman & Miller, 2001, p. 55). As a small incentive, participants could obtain one professional development credit for participating. The credit fee was $60 and all participants paid for the professional development credit.

Participants

Five of the 17 teachers responded to the follow-up questionnaire. Four of the teachers were female, and one male. Two teachers taught English Language Development courses, one taught science, one taught language arts, and one taught academic support. The participants represented three of the four middle schools in the district. Before the first meeting, two of the teachers contacted me to drop out of the study. They both mentioned a need to find balance in their work and personal lives.

In the end, this case study included three middle school teachers who participated in this study; all teachers were white, middle-class female and all taught in the same middle school. Their teaching experience ranged from six to nine years. Although the teachers taught in the same school, they did not serve on the same grade level or content teams. They also did not spend time together outside school. I created participant profiles and are in the data analysis section of this study.

Using the rubric in Appendix I and background information of the participants, the following descriptions classified the level of knowledge and understanding of critical literary for each participant. Penelope and Marie had no knowledge of critical literacy but willing to participate in the study. The third teacher Eleanor had deep understanding in critical literacy and willing to participate in the study. All three teachers expressed their excitement to participate in the study as they saw the study as an opportunity to learn more about critical literacy and collaborate.

Although not all teachers had the same background knowledge about critical literacy, I saw an opportunity to share and strengthen my own knowledge of critical

literacy. In addition, this study was a chance to reveal possibilities for practicing teachers with no knowledge of critical literacy.

The Researcher

I was born and raised in a small town in eastern Oregon. I am a 34 year-old female from Mexican descent. I was born to hardworking parents who taught me how to read the world, while also instilling the value of a traditional education. The critical literacy ideology has intrigued me for over 15 years. This ideology has helped me name injustices in the world, which may have gone unnoticed or unquestioned. I was initially introduced to critical literacy during undergraduate school and my understanding for the topic has developed throughout my graduate studies.

As a middle school teacher, I tinkered with using various texts and developed questions to invoke thought and discussion for my students. From my continuous study and praxis, I realized the strengths and limitations of critical literacy. I have also recognized my strengths and limitations with critical literacy implementation. Some strengths of critical literacy include the possibilities with text and classroom discussions to highlight issues of power and promote change. Some limitations include the varying definitions of critical literacy and no method to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom implementation. My strengths include the ability to transform text by creating critical questions to engage others in discussion of social issues. My limitations include a lack of experience implementing critical literacy with adults and colleagues.

Although I have left the K-12 classroom, my passion for critical literacy still exists. In my current leadership role, I view critical literacy through a new lens, one of hope to question policy and practice and implement change on a wider scale.

Data Collection

Researchers employing a case study approach may have opportunities to examine connections between patterns and relationships across various data. In addition, the case study provided a detailed way to include perspectives from the teachers and researcher. This study provides a detailed account of the ways in which middle school teachers engage and interact with critical literacy.

Through the extensive data collection, I examined their conversations, questions, and growth in critical literacy, as a way to learn how teachers respond and interact with critical literacy. I also learned how to create and adapt lessons around the four-dimension framework to help teachers engage with critical literacy.

Data collection included: participant pre and post surveys, transcriptions from focus groups, teacher, and student classroom activities, and a researcher journal. All data was analyzed for emerging themes of critical literacy understanding and classroom integration. Table 3.1 presents the research questions along with the data collected for each.

Table 3.1   Types of data collected for each research question.

Research Question	Data
1. How do middle school teachers respond to and engage with critical literacy within their classrooms? a. Describe and explore the approaches and limitations of critical literacy within a middle school context.	Audio-tape discussions Notes/observations Class assignments and activities
2. How do critical literacy teachers use the four-dimension framework to implement critical literacy in their classrooms?	Audio-tape discussions Notes/observations Class assignments and activities Student work samples
3. What support, if any do teachers need to implement the framework in their classrooms?	Audio-tape discussions Notes/observations

4. Does knowledge and understanding of critical literacy change for teachers within the professional learning focus group?	Audio-tape discussions Notes/observations Class assignments and activities Student work samples

The researcher recorded all sessions for later transcription. All data was stored in my office in a locked file cabinet and in a password protected online file storage.

Timeline

The researcher created a timeline to stay on target and meet specific goals and deadlines for this study. Table 3.2 describes the sequence of events for this research study.

Table 3.2   Research Study Timeline

End of August, 2012	Provided a verbal and written summary of the study and consent forms to middle school teachers
Mid-September, 2012	Selected three middle school teachers for study
End of September, 2012	Facilitated focus and online sessions
End of November, 2012	Finished focus and online sessions
Early December, 2012	Conducted individual interviews with participants
Mid December, 2012	Continued ongoing Data analysis
End of January	Presented data and draft of dissertation to chairperson

The researcher created the following graphic to illustrate the components of this case study. The four parts include the participants, time, purpose, and tools used to carryout the study.

Middle School Teachers
- Varying background in critical literacy
- Similar belief about student led classrooms and student engagement
- Seek opportunities for professional growth and learning

Time for Collaboration
- Establish safe and trusting environment
- Use of collaborative norms
- Face-to-Face focus groups
- Online platform

Four Dimension Framework
- Disrupting the common place
- Interrogating multiple viewpoints
- Focusing on sociopolitical issues
- Taking action and promoting social justice

Use of text, media, critical questioning and discussion
- To highlight privilege and power
- To scaffold lessons to address issues
- To promote change
- To develop a critical view
- To take a critical stance on issues

Figure 3.2   Teacher Interactions with Critical Literacy

Overview of the Study

Participants met for eight weeks, each week we met for a two-hour focus group and the following week conducted our study online. We continued this schedule for the duration of the study. Critical literacy topics, questions, and classroom lessons structured each focus group and online session. During the study, teachers were very comfortable sharing their opinions and thoughts during the focus groups and online.

The school where participants taught is known for creating time for teachers to collaborate and work together with other school-based teams. Had teachers not known each other, as the facilitator, I would have tried to create a safe and respectable atmosphere for the participants.

In current society, time seems to be a common limitation for everyone. Finding a mutual time and day to meet was difficult, but once we selected a day and time, all participants attended the sessions without difficulty.

The focus group met to discuss the constructs of critical literacy and ways to implement critical literacy in their classrooms. During the weekly focus groups, the participant-researcher and participants read articles, children's literature and other types of text, including media to deepen understanding of critical literacy (see Appendix F). Luke and Elkins (1998) promote a changing literacy landscape that includes technologies and media that will force all of us to know and understand critical literacy in new ways.

Participants also used our activities to attempt critical literacy in their classrooms (see Appendix G). Building upon the models of Freebody and Luke (1997); Janks (2000); Lewison et al. (2002) and Jones (2006) teachers used a critical literacy framework to guide classroom activities (see Appendix D).

Focus Group Discussions

The main source of data was from transcripts of the audiotaped focus group discussions. Participants met for at least two hours for each study session. The first hour of the meeting, participants focused on discussions around the specific research questions of the study. The second half of the meeting, we spent time creating classroom assignments and activities for future implementation in the participants' classrooms. After each meeting, I made notes of my own observations and reflections, and of key issues, which emerged during the discussion.

Researcher Notes

Notes were used to record focus group observations and perceptions regarding the research questions, and participant behaviors. To capture themes, patterns, personal

reflections, questions, and ideas for future critical literacy topics, notes were reviewed once a week

Participant Observations

Glesne (1999) believes participant observation outcome is to "understand the research setting, its participants, and their behavior" (p. 45). As the researcher, I fully participated in the study. I shared my experiences with critical literacy as well as facilitated the discussion.

Participant observations allow the researcher to understand the setting, participant interactions, and events in the study. I kept notes to record conversations, events, and other descriptions during the study. To ensure accuracy of the data, notes were immediately taken after each focus group session.

Class Assignments and Activities

The various texts and activities selected for the study originated from prior lessons I used as a teacher with middle school students. Articles chosen for the study were based on strong examples of practical methods for critical literacy implementation. A list of the professional articles discussed by the group is found in Appendix G. The four-dimension framework was used to organize texts and activities for the study to contextualize the concepts (see Appendix F). The documents gathered for this study included activities created during the focus groups and artifacts participants contributed to highlight how they use the four-dimension framework in their classrooms in Appendix G.

Participants also gave other activities for their classroom students to complete. For example, the wishes, worries, and wraths handout was an activity for students to complete. I asked participants to have their students complete the activity for focus group discussion. Documentation can enhance and support data from other sources. Hatch (2002) asserts documents "are objects that participants see in everyday activity of the context examination" (p. 117). This activity was an attempt for teachers to discuss issues formulated by their students.

Reflections from participants and researcher, and classroom activities will also be part of data triangulation to elicit in-depth understanding of the participants' ideals and beliefs about critical literacy. To examine the effects of teachers dialoguing about critical literacy within a context of professional learning, the researcher used an interpretational approach, which includes coding and classifying of transcripts in a systematic manner.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this case study was participant-observer. As the focus group facilitator, I prepared materials and presented activities for participants to engage in meaningful discussion about critical literacy. The primary purpose of the study was to examine the question: In the context of professional learning, how do middle school teachers respond to and interact with critical literacy? What are the approaches and limitations? To maintain this focus, I continuously reflected and examined my research practices and involvement throughout the study (Glesne, 1999). I kept a researcher journal to record reactions, expectations, and biases about the process. The notes provided additional data for analysis.

As a participant-observer, I needed to create an environment among participants, which encourages and fosters the sharing of ideas, challenging others positively, and acceptance of multiple viewpoints, personal advocacy, and collaboration. I used Garmston's and Wellman's (2009) seven norms of collaboration at each focus group to foster this positive exchange (Appendix J). I decided to use the seven norms of collaboration because they were a common tool used by administrators and teachers in the district. I began each focus group with reminding participants of the norms. They were also posted in the room for easy access.

I explained my role as a district administrator to participants. My current role does not involve teacher evaluation, and I reassured participants that I did not evaluate classroom teachers and would not discuss any ideas or opinions expressed during the study with other district administrators. My intention was to put the participants at ease to share openly and honestly about their experiences with critical literacy.

Trustworthiness

As part of this research study, to establish trustworthiness, steps were taken to substantiate the findings. The first step involved prolonged data collection over eight weeks of two-hour focus group and online meetings, classroom activities, survey responses, interviews, and observations. Triangulation was another step used for establishing trustworthiness. Methods for triangulation included the use of varying and multiple methods of data collections through multiple sources.

The use of the following verification processes strengthened the trustworthiness and validity of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1998), prolonged engagement, triangulation, clarification of researcher bias, member checking, and a rich

description of the study. "Validity refers to accuracy and trustworthiness of instruments, data, and findings in research. Nothing in research is more important than validity" (Bernard, 1995, p. 38). The following activities supported the validity of this study.

To assist with establishing trustworthiness, the study spanned over eight weeks. The definition of prolonged engagement is an extended time in the field to build trust. The time spent with participants helped build rapport and allowed participants to disclose information openly and honestly.

In this study, data triangulation occurred by the use of multiple data collection tools, methods, and sources. Collecting data over an eight-week timeframe produced an enormous amount of focus group transcripts, work samples, and notes. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe triangulation as establishing fact from more than one source of information. The multiple sources in this study include observations, interviews, and documentation. As mentioned before, data was not considered unless it triangulated with other data. Gathering and analyzing data from multiple sources provided a foundational understanding of how participants made meaning around issues related to critical literacy in their particular school and classroom contexts. Comparing and searching for emerging patterns over the course of the study and across multiple data sources achieved data triangulation.

I have a high interest in studying how teachers work together around the topic of critical literacy. To clarify my potential bias toward the topics, I reflected continuously upon my opinions and subjectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest researchers must focus continually on the objectivity of the data, yet once biases are known, they can be accounted for in the interpretations.

To validate findings, member checks were used in the analysis of data to clarify, check accuracy, and to evaluate my interpretations. "Member checking might reveal factual errors that are easily corrected" (p. 322). Participants were asked to review their participant profiles and transcripts of their contributions for accuracy. They were asked to edit and clarify their contributions. Member checking occurred during the study and at the end of the study. The researcher met with each participant individually at the end of the study for a final review of transcripts. This strategy allowed additional opportunities for deeper discussion and new learning.

My final attempt at establishing validity is this attempt to provide a rich, thick description of this case study. Erickson (1986) reminds us:

It is the combination of richness and interpretive perspective that makes the account valid. Such a valid account is not simply a description; it is an analysis. Within the details of the story, selected carefully, is contained a statement of a theory of organization and meaning of the events described (p. 150).

The purpose for this study is for readers to fully understand and visualize the context, purpose, and interactions of this research study. By presenting the data collection and data analysis process, trustworthiness for the research study and inherent findings is increased.

Transferability

One of the biggest limitations in case studies is transferability. Case studies offer a detailed exploration of specific cases, which may not be found or common in other situations and institutions. The intent of this study is to develop and refine my

understanding of how, if at all, teachers collaborate around critical literacy and what, if anything, do they learn from each other. My other intent was to present findings of how one can engage teachers with lessons, text, and other media to further knowledge and experiences with critical literacy.

Although this study is unique and complex with similar data collection and analysis, certain aspects of this study may be useful to pre-service and in-service teachers as well as higher education institutions.

Focus and Online Session Overview

This study started in late September 2012. There were a total of four face-to-face focus groups and four online sessions. For the face-to-face sessions, participants, and the researcher met at the middle school where the teachers worked. Originally, the study was going to take place at the district office, but coincidently all participants taught at the same middle school. Focus group activities are presented in Appendix F and summarized below.

Between each face-to-face session, the researcher assigned readings and assignments posted on Edmodo, a free, secure online platform for teachers and students to collaborate and share educational content. I created a private online section and invited the participants to join the virtual classroom. All participants could upload and post content with ease.

Prior to the first face-to-face session, I gave participants two articles, *Connecting Practice, and Research: Critical Literacy Guide* and *Taking on Critical Literacy: The Journey of Newcomers and Novices*. The articles were not written in theoretical

language, but rather in contextualized language, which would build background knowledge for participants

During our first face-to-face session, teachers used the Frayer Model (Appendix H) to define critical literacy. We read *Taking on Critical Literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices* by Lewison et al. (2002) and each participant wrote a muddy and marvy moment as a formative assessment activity for the researcher. This activity asks students to write down one unclear comment from the reading, and one comment that resonated with them.

Next the researcher asked the participants to ask their students to complete the activity Wishes, Wants, and Wraths (Appendix H). This activity asks for students to write down three wishes, wants, and ideas, which make them angry or upset. The session ended with a brief description of the Edmodo task for the following week.

The second face-to-face session consisted of teachers reviewing the Wishes, Wants, and Wraths activity completed by their students. The teachers looked for common themes in more than 50 submissions. The student responses' to the Wishes section was not as serious as their responses to the Wants and Wraths sections. The common themes found in this activity included: Bullying-Verbal/Physical, Mortality/Safety, Failing grades, and Economics. Bullying or witnessing it, death of family members, and their own safety were concerns for students. Students also worried about failing grades and their families' finances. In Jones and Clarke's (2007) study, they found a need to know and understand their students. "Social and cultural knowledge of students and what they do outside of school is crucial if literacy teachers are to recognize the potential impact of students making connections and disconnections as they

engage with all kinds of texts" (p. 98). This activity highlighted how a teacher can begin to start building critical literacy lessons based on students' concerns.

I also showed teachers how picture books, such as *Alphabet City* and *City by Numbers* by Steven Johnson can help students see multiple viewpoints. All participants were astonished by the creativity in these books and agreed how the books or other pictures could start to disrupt the commonplace and interrogate multiple viewpoints.

I chose to read "Eleven" a short story by Sandra Cisneros as a follow-up activity to try to connect literature with social issues. "Eleven" is about a young girl, Rachel, who is turning 11. While at school, she is accused of having dumped a hideous sweater in the class coat closet. She tries to tell her teacher that the sweater does not belong to her, but the teacher does not listen. Several classmates do not help her cause either, for some of them yelled out that they had seen Rachel wearing the raggedy sweater. As her teacher forces Rachel to put on the sweater, she reflects on the stages of maturity and experiences, which we all endure to some degree in life. After concluding the story, teachers were asked to develop questions to use for classroom discussion. Marie participant offered to read the story to one of her classes and ask them the questions (Appendix G).

The third face-to-face session consisted of Marie reporting on her experience of reading the story "Eleven" to her class and asking questions to elicit discussion. She explained how hard it was to engage her students in this new manner. It took time for her students to get beyond the initial anger they expressed toward the teacher for not listening to the student. The teacher had to probe for deeper opinions about the story and other perspectives.

Although Marie enjoyed the experience, she wondered if her students were ready to engage in such critical questioning. This led to a discussion on whether or not middle school students could handle critical literacy. Flint (2000) reminds us, "Implementing a curriculum centered on social issues is a somewhat risky endeavor for many teachers. Issues of violence, poverty, race, and gender have the potential to disrupt one's world view and bring controversy to the forefront of the curriculum" (p. 31). Teacher collaboration could assist teachers with finding solutions and methods to address social issues.

For the first part of the focus group participants watched "Critical literacy" an online webcast from Curriculum Services Canada. Participants were asked to look for characteristics and strategies of critical literacy in the video. They used the following table to organize their thinking.

Table 3.3   Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like

A critical literacy classroom…

Looks Like	Sounds Like	Feels Like
Groups of various numbers working collaboratively.	Students talking and listening to each other in a focused way	A safe and energized place where students are comfortable taking a risk.

Participants and I could not meet for the final face-to-face session because of scheduling conflicts. In lieu of a face-to-face session, I combined the final online session with planned activities for the face-to-face session.

For the first online session, participants were asked to submit an autobiography focused on their decision to enter the education field. Participants also read the "Saving Black Mountain" article and completed the 3-2-1 Bridge activity.

	Name	Date:
3	Quote I found interesting…	
2	Lingering questions or wondering I want to explore more in the future…	
1	Goal that I have for my learning for the next lesson…	

Figure 3.3   3 – 2 – 1 Bridge for Critical Literacy

Using any type of text, the activity asks students to find an interesting quote, list further questions and wonderings and any goals for the next lesson.   Participants were asked to reply to at least two other posts, which either included feedback, probing, or asking for clarification.

During the second online session, participants were asked to read "The Scholarship Jacket" a short story by Marta Salinas. Every year at Marta's school, the class valedictorian is presented with a scholarship jacket. Marta's hard work and intelligence made her an obvious choice for the honor. Marta overhears a conversation from the administration about the jacket. They have decided to give the scholarship jacket to Joann, the child of a school Board and local business owner in town. Rather than telling Marta the truth, the principal tells her the scholarship jacket was going to cost 15 dollars and given to the runner-up if she could not pay for it. The story ends with Marta standing up for her beliefs and the administration realizing the unfairness of the asking for payment for an item typically earned on merit rather than pressure.

The story is also found in the district adopted 7th Language Arts anthology. Penelope, the language arts teacher, stated the story was one she reads each year with her students. After reading the story, participants completed a Raft writing assignment and uploaded their work online. They used the Praise, Polish, and Question (PPQ) technique

to provide peer feedback. The raft writings and PPQ activity can be found in (Appendix G).

For the third online session, participants were asked to read Foss' article *Peeling the onion: Teaching critical literacy with students of privilege* and White's article *Reading "the word and the world: The double-edged sword of teaching critical literacy.* The teachers were asked to generate a list of barriers found with implementing critical literacy.

For the final online session, I asked participants to review a document with various definitions of Social Justice. Participants looked for similarities and differences among the definitions and compared the definition to Lewison et al. (2002) understanding of social justice. Gee (2001) states "language is not about conveying neutral or objective information; rather, it is about communicating perspectives on experience and action in the world, often in contrast to alternative and competing perspectives," (p. 716). Participants also reviewed Edchange's Five Approaches to Social Justice Activism handout (Appendix G). They were asked to reflect on the likelihood of implementing any of five approaches in their classrooms. I asked if they would change anything about the approaches.

The vast definitions of social justice led us to a discussion of pitfalls for implementing critical literacy in school. It is just and fair to look at the issues others have faced when implementing critical literacy (Ellsworth, 1989; Simpson, 1996; Foss, 2002; White 2009). We did not just look at issues with critical literacy, but we also discussed ways to address these issues.

To further explain the messiness of critical literacy, I asked participants to view an episode from the sitcom *The Office*. In this episode, the main character Michael Scott must hold a seminar about diversity because of Michael's controversial imitation of the comedian Chris Rock. The company provides a consultant to teach the staff about tolerance and diversity, but Michael insists on conveying his own knowledge about tolerance and creates his own diversity training. Part of his training involves asking his staff to tape an index card with a different race while trying to guess each other's races through the use of stereotypes and other racial and ethnic comments.

The participants discussed the blunders in the episode and how they would have handled the situation. They also discussed how this episode related, if at all, to the challenges of implementing critical literacy in classrooms.

The final culmination of the study included individual post-interviews (see Appendix E). This time also provided an additional opportunity for participants to share thoughts about the study and to ask individual questions about critical literacy.

Summary

This research is a qualitative case study, which examines, and reflects on how middle school teachers responded and interacted around the topic of critical literacy. The methods described in this study include questionnaires, focus groups, online sessions, surveys, interviews, coursework, and other data.

DATA ANALYSIS

Background Experience of Participants

In this study, three middle school participants shared their educational

backgrounds and experiences as teachers but more important, they shared their

conversations and reflections on critical literacy. The participant profiles reveal a range

of knowledge and experience of critical literacy and assist with contextualizing the data

analysis. In other words, knowing more about the participants helps with further and

deeper understanding of the data analysis. For added credibility, I asked teachers to

review their profiles for thoroughness and accuracy.

Penelope

Penelope obtained a bachelor's degree in secondary English Education. This is

her 9th year of teaching in the same middle school. She has taught 7th grade language

arts for eight of those years and 8th grade language arts for one year. She initially chose

her major because of her love for literature, writing, and words. While she still loves

those things, kids are what keep her in the profession.

Penelope's classes do a variety of different lesson types, including whole class

instruction, partner work, small group work, and independent practice. They cover

variety of different types of writing, grammar, and reading skills throughout the year. In

her language arts class, the class reads many stories throughout the year. They always

have class or small group discussions about their reading and students have the

opportunity to share their ideas, their opinions, and their experiences. Students sometimes have a choice in project options. Students do a warm up every day, and often the topic is asking them to share their opinions or feelings about different things.

Penelope tries to relate learning to 7th grade experiences, and she tries to highlight the relevance or importance of the learning. She also tries to have fun with students, and shows genuine interest for them. Penelope's classes read *The Outsiders* every year, she reports "students do talk about how life for the Greasers is not fair and how the Socs get all the breaks." Although students discuss the problems of the Greasers, she admits they do not discuss these issues in specific detail. Penelope does believe students are engaged most when classroom lessons include real-life issues. "If they have an interest in the topic, they will be more likely to be 'present' and contribute to conversations." She has similar characteristics of teachers of critical literacy.

Marie

Marie started teaching school right out of college and went to Crownpoint, New Mexico, to a Navajo Indian reservation for her first two years. She loved the culture, the students, and the freedom she had in her classroom to teach. She taught 6th grade and coached basketball and track. She moved back to Idaho to start teaching 6th grade at a middle school. She taught Language Arts, Reading, and Social Studies. She also taught 6th grade Study Skills and 8th grade English and Drama. She coached basketball, volleyball, and ski team. She taught there for four years before she had her first child and chose to stay home. After her youngest twin boys started first grade, she decided to go back to teaching. She applied at a middle school in Nampa, Idaho and hired. She has taught at the same middle school for five years. She teaches Academic Support; a class

that helps students struggling in school to learn study skills, have extra time to finish homework and projects and to learn how to keep track of their grades. As a result she gets to teach all content areas and help kids improve their academic achievement. Teaching Academic Support is like teaching all subjects. The class works on all types of projects, which are assigned by their other classroom teachers. They conduct research for power points, posters, foldables, mobiles, books, essays, and other projects. They utilize the information given in their classes as well as information Marie provides and what they can learn from research.

Marie loves teaching and helping students realize how they can be successful and can make a difference in this world. She is passionate about helping students realize their own potential and how important their lives are to making the world a better place. According to Marie, she centers her classroom on student voices and helps students learn how to succeed in school. Students direct themselves in class, as they are accountable to using their class time to complete missing assignments, studying, and other activities to raise their grades. They know what they need to do and have resources available such as their classmates, and the teacher for help. Marie expects students to help one another and share their own experience and expertise.

Marie describes her classroom as full of diversity. She believes each student has his or her own talents and abilities, which contribute to the whole. They all know they are different, which makes them all equal with their unique talents. Real-life is all these kids know. Marie believes learning directly related to what students are currently experiencing will stay locked into their memory. The more connections in the brain, the better retention, and the more help and understanding they receive for their real-life

problems. Marie believes students' problems and concerns are foremost in their

thoughts. She tries to connect their issues with learning to change the direction of their

lives in a positive manner.

<u>Eleanor</u>

Eleanor fell into education after she heard a professor give a presentation on

bilingual/LEP education. The presentation inspired her to switch majors from

anthropology to education. She recalls the switch was easy as she loves watching people

interact in diverse situations; she loves culture and has a desire to do something, which

benefits society.

Eleanor is working on her sixth year of teaching all years have been at one middle

school in Nampa, Idaho. The last few years have been full of ups and downs, as she has

tried to best navigate herself and her students through both English and life. Throughout

her teaching experience, she has participated in continuing education courses and

different types of professional development to improve her teaching and will continue to

do so in the hopes of staying current and improving her instructional practice.

Her classroom includes layered projects, which incorporate student choice into

the curriculum at various times throughout the year. For daily lessons, she uses partner

and whole class work as practice and learning time to prepare for tests. She encourages

students to make connections to their experiences through literature. She also uses high

interest, relatable reading materials based on her student population and encourages and

uses cross-cultural examples and stories to bridge the gap between differences.

Eleanor tries to explain the reason for classroom lessons and makes them applicable to more than just their class. She also encourages ownership in students learning, "It is not my job to force them to learn, it is something for their own benefit that they can take pride in." She includes student choice when applicable, tries to find relatable, interesting, and relevant teaching materials and sets high expectations. Humor is also a big part of her classroom. She also believes students will perform better when she builds a relationship with them. She explains how she shares her life and experiences as well as takes time to ask students about their interests in and outside school.

She keeps an open classroom in regard to diversity. She manages this by making sure to discuss important themes such as respect with her students. She also uses literature as a discussion point; books like *Freak the Mighty, Paulo's Wall*, and *The Outsiders* are a few examples she uses to build a sense of connectivity with students.

Eleanor believes lessons should include real-life issues, "We don't live in a hypothetical world." She does not see a point in education if it cannot be applied to reality. She believes in promoting student interest when students can see the relevancy of a topic.

Data Collection Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study. Creswell (2005) describes data analysis as a "bottom-up" approach (p. 231). From the data collection, researchers move from preparing the data to analyzing from broad to more detailed. Data analysis included an inductive qualitative process over the course of the study. "In collecting data, qualitative researchers use whatever methods are appropriate to their purpose" (Gall et al., 2005, p. 312). Data collected from the study examined any trends and effects of

teachers dialoguing about critical literacy within a context of professional learning. The data collected was analyzed using a three level process. Although the literature on critical literacy is expansive, limited research exists on a focus of critical literacy with in-service teachers.

The data was highlighted for similarities and differences with a comparative analysis. Each theme was coded and cross-referenced with notes from the researcher's journal and information from the sessions. I looked at evident themes in the data but also searched for gaps or missing data to reveal possible limitations. I employed Creswell's (2005) think-aloud strategy for coding transcripts. Basically, as I read transcriptions, I continuously asked questions about the information. The margins of the transcriptions captured questions, thoughts, and codes. I wrote memos while analyzing the data from the onset and throughout the study. Time was dedicated to this process to capture Miles and Huberman's (1994) description of memos as a conceptual process and "one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools at hand" (p. 72). Memos were coded and organized for possible findings or discarded.

The process of data collection and analysis is heuristic. Reviewing the data helps develop a deeper understanding of the information. Merriam (2009) describes analysis as an intensive during and after data collection. The data was stored by type for organization to locate specific data during analysis. For example, all interviews were stored together in a separate folder from other data. The following section outlines the data analysis to develop credible findings.

All focus group sessions were audio-recorded to capture dialogue and transcribed by the researcher for data analysis. "Content analysis, then, examines a discourse by

looking at patterns of the language used in this communications exchange, as well as the social and cultural contexts in which these communications occur" (Berg, 2009, p. 353). I transcribed all audio recordings for coding and for triangulation and potential implications. Data was not seriously considered unless it was triangulated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I began data collection and analysis by organizing data into codes and themes based on the eight-week focus group sessions.

I have an especially high interest in the conversations between the teachers around the topic of critical literacy. Data from interviews, focus group sessions, focus group observations, and classroom activities, and artifacts were analyzed and categorized around Lewison et al. (2002) four-dimension framework. Data was placed purposefully and thoughtfully under each respected dimension. Data was listed only under a dimension if there was a correlation to the criteria within the framework.

For the first phase of analysis, the researcher read all surveys, focus group transcriptions, online posts, notes, and classroom artifacts to label important phrases and words, which related or potentially could relate to the purpose of the study. During the second phase, the researcher developed categories and their potential relationships and interconnectedness. The following table displays the categories, which surfaced under each respective dimension as well as other categories that did not easily fit into one of the dimensions. The following data supports these categories.

Table 4.1   Categories within Four-Dimension Framework

Disrupting the Commonplace	Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints	Focusing of Sociopolitical Issues	Taking Action & Promoting Social Justice
Defining Critical Literacy	Selecting Literature and Texts	Focus Group & Online Discussions	Defining Social Justice and Struggles

Defining Critical Literacy

Although many researchers have contributed to the critical literacy field, finding a succinct definition is not easy. Based on my thorough study on the topic, I have developed my own definition for critical literacy. Critical literacy is an ideology, which can create agents of change, who highlight injustices through the use of text and combat issues of power through social action. Critical literacy can be the difference between taking the lead and following the crowd. Critical literacy is a conscious choice to discuss issues, which may be hidden in text and develop a plan for action. My definition of text includes various literature, media, quotes, and photos.

By reading selected journal articles and engaging in discussion during focus groups participants quickly and naturally began to define critical literacy. Penelope describes critical literacy as:

> pushing the limits of how we typically think about what we read and social issues, digging deeper, [and] thinking differently. Viewing issues from multiple points of view and bringing to light the points of view that are lacking. It also includes encouraging and working for social change (personal communication, October 2, 2012).

Marie adds her definition:

> literacy that challenges and makes kids question their own thinking patterns and the way they see their lives and the lives of those around them. It can open up new ways of thinking and understanding of culture, society, and peers (personal communication, September 25, 2012).

Finally Eleanor shares her definition of critical literacy:

> the practice of using text in a more meaningful way. Not just question and
>
> answer techniques, but connecting to literature, examining, and evaluating it, etc.
>
> It is based on the idea that our interaction with text should be more than just
>
> surface level and require critical thinking and self-expansion (personal
>
> communication, September 24, 2012).

Each definition encompasses the four-dimension framework and highlights a sense of
passion for questioning, thinking, and understanding of others.

Selecting Literature and Texts

During the second focus group Penelope and Marie had interest in learning more
about selecting new books and text to use in their classrooms to promote critical literacy.
Penelope uses the district-adopted anthology and other chapter books to share with her 7th
grade Language Arts classroom, but did not know how to find books, which disrupted the
commonplace, to share with students. On the other hand, Eleanor did not have this issue
and shared how she locates texts for her classroom.

> You need to be aware of contemporary youth literature. You can also Google
>
> social concepts and youth literature. Look for high interest, socially relevant
>
> youth literature. Most of it can be socially relevant. It is how you turn it. Change
>
> your perspective on the book and quit focusing on the standards. If you switch
>
> the focus, the standards will fall under (transcript, FG2, Eleanor, p. 1).

Eleanor also works with other teachers in the district to keep current on young adult
literature. In her words, "I don't wait for good literature to find me, I actively search for

it" (transcript, FG2, Eleanor, p. 1). Eleanor is an ambitious young teacher, her drive, and passion for literature is a priority and a critical necessity in her classroom.

Classroom Discussions

Eleanor described discussion as a critical piece in her classroom. She encourages and expects students to participate in classroom discussion once they feel comfortable. "Discussion needs to be a big part of it. There needs to be a critical standpoint, where they [students] are scrutinizing what they read. Find a way to connect with the text and examine it and then taking the ideas from it and moving it into the social realm" (transcript, FG2, Eleanor, p. 1).

Eleanor explained how she must be intentional about creating this environment, by modeling appropriate discussion and commentary. She shared how excited students to share, but they also need to establish listening skills and appropriate responses when they do not agree.

After reading the short story "Eleven" Penelope offers her opinion and experience as a classroom teacher:

I think there are a lot of things they [students] can pull out from that story to have discussion about. If nothing else, a majority of them can relate to the feeling about not having a voice. That is the reality of their age. (transcript, FG3, p. 5)

Penelope's quote reveals her ability to grasp content for classroom discussion as well as her understanding and experience of middle school students. The other participants nodded with enthusiasm as they shared their students' feelings of frustrations about growing up as young adults.

Defining Social Justice

Participants tinkered with the definition of social justice and wondered if they may have misunderstood what constitutes as true social justice. Some of their wonderings included the idea that moving toward social justice involves teaching students to advocate for themselves and others in various situations. In other instances, participants viewed social justice as teaching students to read and write at a level to produce to in our world. Marie offered her thoughts on furthering her understanding of social justice:

> I think it would be a shame not to do critical literacy at all because you feel like you can't do the social change part of it. I'd rather do the other steps of it and knowing that we're probably not going to get to the social justice part of it, but they're [students] much better off having gone through the other steps (transcript, FG3, Marie, p. 3).

Her comment reveals a desire to understand social justice but Marie and the other participants wondered how much they could accomplish with their students, before the school year ended. Penelope adds, "For me to know that I don't have to go all the way to social change to be successful... At least I can get it started [with the other parts of the four dimension framework]" (transcript, FG3, Penelope, p. 4). Eleanor responds to Penelope with, "That is social action, if you can teach them…like how in that situation to have an appropriate response, to solve that problem… In its own way, it is social justice" (transcript, FG3, Eleanor, p. 5). Although they could not find a conclusive definition for social justice, it was clear they needed more time to understand what social justice is and how to implement this idea at the middle school level.

After our third session, I sent an e-mail to participants with a short web article titled "What is 'Social Justice'? - A collection of definitions" by Derrick Kikuchi (see Appendix G). I asked participants to read the social justice definitions and answer the following questions:

1. How are these definitions similar and different from the Taking on Critical Literacy article?

2. Anything surprise you about these definitions?

I also included "Edchange's Five Approaches to Social Justice Activism" (see Appendix G). I asked them to respond to the following questions:

1. Do you agree or disagree with these approaches?

2. In the reality of our lives as classroom teachers, are these approaches realistic?

3. What, if anything would you change about these approaches?

Participants seemed to struggle with social justice. The following text displays their thoughts and feelings on the subject:

Penelope did question George's quote about social justice. George states "Social justice means complete and genuine equality of all people" (p. 1).

I find this extremely unrealistic. In the history of man-kind, there has never been equality for all people. I don't think there ever will be. There's always going to be someone on top, someone on the bottom, someone who is privileged, someone who is in power, someone who is oppressed. I'm not trying to be pessimistic, but rather realistic. So if this is what social justice is, it's unattainable (personal communication, November 14, 2012).

Marie adds her stance on social justice:

> I thought it was interesting how different they seem in the overall meaning, but
> the underlying meaning is the same. I liked the quote "This justice is not a goal
> that we'll ever reach, but a process, a struggle in which we can be engaged
> through all the pain and all the joy." Social Justice is not the end, but the process
> of making life better (personal communication, November 27, 2012).

Eleanor adds her thoughts:

> There is definitely a focus on Social Justice being a "big picture, hands on, down
> and dirty job in these definitions." It's real life action. Whereas in our
> discussions we made a much bigger emphasis on starting the seeds of thought that
> could lead students to make social change through their own lives. We discussed,
> and I agree that social justice can begin with a discussion or an abstract thought
> that leads to insight, compassion, empathy. The definition listed state that it is not
> a thought but an action. I also agree with this but still think that within the
> classroom it can begin differently (personal communication, November 15, 2012).

Participants also reviewed Edchange's handout titled Five Approaches to Social Justice
Activism. They discussed the reality of these levels. Penelope shared her thoughts:

> The five approaches to social justice activism show varying degrees of
> involvement and intensity in working for social change. I agree that all are
> avenues toward social change. And although Systemic Reform for Social Justice
> is obviously the most intense, I don't agree that it's best or the only way to make
> an impact on social justice. That approach may not be feasible for all or right for

all. I guess I'm saying that to make an effort, to make a change, everyone does not

need to be at this level. It is unrealistic. This level seems to describe few people

who dedicate their entire lives to a cause, people like Mother Teresa or Martin

Luther King, Jr. (personal communication, November 14, 2012).

Penelope's use of worldly icons perfectly describes her view on social justice. Activism

is not for the everyday people, it can be accomplished only by those rare individuals who

seem to possess strengths and abilities beyond the norm. Penelope does agree with

exposing students to an awareness of cultural differences and the idea of service to the

community.

I think that the most realistic approach for students is the Food, Festivals, and

Fun. Although this approach doesn't address injustices, it does bring about

awareness, which is a critical first step. If we expose students to different cultures

and bring about awareness, then they have begun. The other steps may be more

appropriate for people to strive toward in adulthood, although I do think that

students would be capable of Individual Advocacy and Service and Volunteerism

too (personal communication, November 14, 2012).

I was grateful for Penelope's honesty about these levels, as her views represent a large

number of teachers' views on culture. The five levels handout starts with exposing

students to culture through foods, festivals, and fun. Although critical literacy is more

than a celebration of food and fun, it can be a starting point for teachers to lead to further

criticalness.

Marie shared the same sentiments as Penelope, and believes any attempt of the

five levels constitutes a success. "I also think that anything done whether small or

seemingly insignificant can still make a difference. I feel that individual people are more important than 'The whole society.' If I can make a difference in one individual's life I will count myself very fortunate" (personal communication, p. 1, November, 27, 2013). Her opinions seem to match her teaching style, as she believes in helping students advocate for themselves and works with each of them on an individual level based on his or her particular educational needs.

Eleanor gained most of her exposure to critical literacy in her undergraduate studies. She shared a different stance on the five levels of activism. "I struggle with the first one because I agree with what it says about these types of events being too surface level and inadvertently contributing to stereo-types. These have to be very well planned in order to not end up being a negative" (personal communication, p. 1, November 15, 2012). She did have some concerns about the plausibility of some of the more involved levels. "As for implementing these at the middle level, I think that charitable giving and individual advocacy would be appropriate and plausible. Volunteerism is more easily handled at the high school level with our current budget restraints among other things" (personal communication, November 15, p. 1, 2012).

Social Justice Struggles

All teachers struggled with the idea to engage in social justice activities. After reading the four-dimension framework and other articles, the participants understood social justice to be a grand culmination or movement toward creating change. Penelope shares her concerns,

> I get hung up on the social change part for quite a few reasons. I think it is great,
> I support it, I understand it, but at a middle school level, it comes with a lot of

obstacles…even just looking at the mundane obstacles, such as transportation, organizational, time commitments, and you only have kids for an hour (transcript, FG3, Penelope, p. 3-4).

Other issues such as lack of funding, unsupportive administration, and liabilities were also noted during the focus group as potential barriers for engaging students in social justice. Franzak (2006), in her review of literature on literacy policy remind educators to take a stance on policy and focus on students as individuals. Wolk (2009) ask teachers not to view "political realities of schooling…as insurmountable hurdles but rather as challenges for them to creatively rise above" (p. 666). Rather than wasting time by viewing challenges as obstacles, time should be spent on addressing the challenges. Although participants had varying backgrounds on critical literacy, they shared similar concerns about how to implement social justice at the middle school level. Issues included lack of funding for transportation and supervision. The most surprising issue was the time needed to implement a social justice project. Eleanor openly shared her resistance of spending personal time to engage students with social justice.

> I feel like they [students] are just starting to get into a point in their life where they are thinking at a much deeper level about a variety of things…with a bit of guidance. I don't think it's a bad thing to focus on the other aspects of critical literacy and really push and grow in that way, so by the time they get to high school, they are ready for social action and actually have good conceptual knowledge about these deeper issues. So when they go into the social action they know why they are doing it. They are not doing it because someone said 'hey, let's go pick up litter today.' (transcript, FG3, Eleanor, p. 4).

Focus group discussions captured social justice as a huge and overwhelming task, but perhaps researchers need to refine their thoughts on social justice? Does social justice have to be so big and elaborate? Do we have to parade around town to show our commitment to social justice? After further reflection of their concerns, I can see how the participants viewed social justice as an overwhelming activity. Perhaps, two possible solutions exist: redefining social justice or redefining current curriculum or restructuring school systems to include time for social justice.

The participants began to wonder if social justice starts with the initial step of the four-dimension rather than ending with it. Do we work toward social justice by disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on sociopolitical issues, or is social justice interwoven into those dimensions? In other words, are we implementing social justice and creating change by engaging in these domains: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints and focusing on sociopolitical issues?
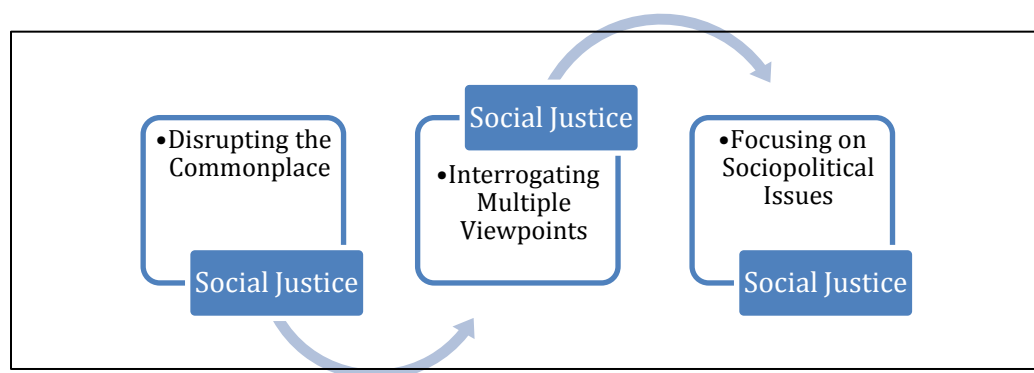
Figure 4.1   Interwoven Social Justice

For the final phase of analysis, I confirmed initial coding themes with existing data and related research to support the emerging theories. The process of repeated readings of coded data, think alouds, and member checks determined the final categories. The final categories emerged from participants' hesitations of critical literacy implementation and could serve as areas for future research.

Easier at Other Levels?

Each participant shared their wonderings about implementing critical literacy at other grade levels. With limited middle school examples of critical literacy, perhaps participants were skeptical of implementing critical literacy with adolescents. Penelope shared "I can see my husband at the high school working on this with his students" (transcript, FG1, Penelope, p. 1).

The other participants saw a need for more time with students to fully benefit from critical literacy. We concluded that with time and effective modeling, middle school students would be able to engage in critical literacy. One downfall was the idea that students at the middle school level are not in classes long enough and how easier it would be to engage students at the elementary level with one teacher all day. Eleanor shared how fortunate she was to have students for more than one year. She teaches English Language Development (ELD) which is a class specifically for English Language Learners. Due to the complexity of second language acquisition and other student factors, Eleanor can have students for up to three years or for their entire middle school experience. Working with students over time may be a necessity for critical literacy implementation in secondary settings.

Classroom Atmosphere

Each year, all teachers create a respectful classroom atmosphere for students.

Brady (2000) offers the following need "classrooms need to reflect a democratic setting,

one that builds a community of difference that is safe—a zone of equality—which

enhances intellectual rigor in the respect for multiculturalism and difference" (p. 373).

Participants all agreed creating a safe and respectful classroom setting was essential.

Marie offers "They [students] need to know how to comment on others viewpoints in a

respectful manner" (transcription, FG2, Marie, p. 1). A safe atmosphere is crucial for

questioning and multiple viewpoints. "I try to relate what we are learning to 7th grade

experiences, and I try to point out the relevance or importance of the learning. I try to

have fun with students and show them that I care" (questionnaire, Penelope, October 2).

In addition, teachers need to provide a safe classroom atmosphere where students could

take risks. "In the spirit of critical literacy, teachers should grant children the freedom to

express themselves and weave life experiences into learning, while seriously addressing

issues of social justice, equity, and diversity…" (Chafel et al., 2007, p. 74). In other

words, teachers need to learn more about students' backgrounds and interests to find

connections with students.

Connecting with Students

After establishing a safe and supportive environment, participants revealed a need

to connect to students to promote engagement and active classroom participation.

Eleanor shared how she connects with students:

> Between you and the student, to figure out where they are and what's going on in
>
> their life and get a good clue into where they are. I know that I'm lucky in the fact

that I know a lot of these kids' families for longer or the kids themselves for

longer (transcription, FG3, Eleanor, p. 3).

Penelope shared how she engages students in learning. "That is when they [students] are

most engaged. If they [students] have an interest in the topic, they will be more likely to

be "present" and contribute to conversations" (questionnaire, Penelope, October 2).

Participants agreed that knowing about students' backgrounds was critical to

implementing critical literacy activities in the classroom. In other words, teachers need

to learn more about students' backgrounds and interests to find connections with

students.

Summary

My quest to uncover how middle school teachers respond to and engage with

critical literacy revealed both possibilities and barriers. Overall, participants engaged in

learning and expanding their current knowledge of critical literacy and as the participant-

observer; I also gained knowledge and experience with this subject. Although participants

struggled with social justice understanding and implementation, the context of teacher

collaboration was a critical aspect of discussion with this topic. Future work on defining

and implementing social justice is needed. In addition, further research on teacher

collaboration and how, if at all, it can lead to viable solutions for critical literacy is

needed?

All attempts to conduct a high quality research study were implemented yet

several limitations were present. These will be discussed in the following section. In

addition, areas for future research illuminated throughout the study, these areas will also be discussed in the following section.

Limitations of the Study

The following section describes the limitations to this study. Many of these ideas range from a lack of focus on social justice and text to the well-publicized district's financial issues, which have created a tension and uncertainty for this major employer in the area.

Case Study

The use of a case study for research purposes can be seen as a limitation. The small sample size of the study led to a very narrowly focused study. Findings from the research can be limited to this particular case study. Although this can be true for some case studies, findings from this study can be replicated in similar or differing settings for similar or deeper results.

Social Action

This study focused on teachers collaborating about critical literacy; however, teachers did not engage in social justice. "Teaching for social justice is teaching for the sake of arousing the kinds of vivid, reflective, experiential responses that might move students to come together in serious efforts to understand what social justice actually means and what it might demand" (Greene, 1998, p. xxix-xxx). As the facilitator of the focus and online sessions, I did not ask teachers to go beyond the mere definition of social justice. The group only discussed the definitions of social justice and the strengths and limitations of promoting social justice with students in the current context of school.

Text

Another limitation from the study was the limited number of text and media shared with participants. Luke (1997) states, "… a commitment to reshape literacy education in the interests of marginalized groups of learners, who on the basis of gender, cultural and socioeconomic background have been excluded from access to the discourses and texts of dominant economics and cultures" (p. 143). More emphasis on highlighting issues of power and injustice through text would have enriched my study.

During one of the focus sessions, Penelope and Marie specifically asked how I chose text for lessons. I quickly shared my experiences with locating text, but I should have provided participants with more examples of text, which portrayed marginalized groups or stories, which highlighted social issues. "When teachers share critical texts with children and talk with them about the issues raised by these books, they become deeply involved in the process of culture making" (Leland & Harste, 2000, p. 6). At the minimum, I should have provided participants with an annotated bibliography of literature and media to share with their students.

Power and Privilege

During the study, I did not ask teachers to examine their power and privilege as middle-class Caucasian females. Although some of our discussions alluded to the power held by teachers, women, and middle-class citizens, the group did not focus on their power and privilege and the possible influence it can have in their teaching or on their students of different race and ethnic backgrounds. This type of focus is powerful and can help with deeper understanding of the intricacies of critical literacy.

Background Knowledge

The three teachers had varying background knowledge in critical literacy. Two teachers had never heard about critical literacy and the other teacher attended a neighboring university, who focuses on critical literacy. Fecho (2000) describes this all too common phenomena:

This kind of pedagogy, however, is markedly different from those of traditional classrooms, and too often we send new teachers into schools full of good intentions to inquire and reflect, but with little else. Frequently, they find their task daunting because they base their groundbreaking practice on limited preservice explorations into critical-inquiry pedagogy, which often raise more questions than they divine directions to follow (p. 195).

Although one teacher had a good grasp of critical literacy, she engaged with our conversations, offered classroom strategies, and seemed to benefit from the critical literacy collaboration.

Time

The duration of the study is another limitation. Extending the study over a full school year or extending the focus group time with participants could have revealed more possibilities and barriers to teacher collaboration around critical literacy.

More Participants

Increasing the number of participants also could have affected the outcomes of the study. Additional participants from varying backgrounds and understanding of critical

literacy as well as teachers from various content areas could have shifted conversations and revealed particular mindsets, beliefs, and possible resistance to the topic.

Familiarity with Surroundings

A major limitation to this study was my familiarity with surroundings. The focus groups were held in the district and also in the middle school where I worked. My previous teaching experience in the building could have been influenced entrance to the school and access to teachers at this particular setting. In addition, two of the three participants had worked with me in different capacities. Eleanor and I taught for the ELD department. A year after I joined the school Marie was hired. Marie and I enjoyed each other's company and often shared time discussing school policy and classroom activities. Penelope and I did not know each other very well. She joined the study based on her interest in learning more about critical literacy.

Economic Crisis

At the start of the study, district officials announced a 4.8 million dollar budget deficit due to budgeting and accounting errors. The large deficit cast a depressing shadow upon the district, which is a major employer in the area. Many employees were fearful of losing their jobs and livelihoods and married couples employed by the district felt a heavier burden. Continuous media scrutiny and several lawsuits against the district exacerbated the multimillion dollar mistake. Numerous resignations followed while teachers were asked to volunteer in lieu of pay, and other employees forced to take furlough days to assist with balancing the budget.

This gloomy atmosphere may have had an influence on the initial 17 participants. The district is known for providing time for teacher collaboration focused on a variety of professional development topics. Teachers are accustomed to participating in trainings after-school and during the summer yet participation and interest dropped significantly as news of the budget surfaced. Although I did not ask the participants of their reason to drop the study, many explained other commitments and a need to find balance in their lives.

One teacher, who initially agreed to participate, dropped out due to her responsibilities as an officer for the local union. She stated how her responsibilities in the union grew due to the budget shortfalls and concerns. Another teacher had to drop because of his afterschool teaching commitments. He taught recreational after-school courses a few days a week and participating in this study would have conflicted with his classes. Two first-year teachers explained their desire to participate but the intricacies of their first-year in the field were overwhelming.

Summary

Although some of these limitations are unique to this particular study, such as the economic crisis. Other issues, such as background knowledge of participants and time are typical limitations found in research. My familiarity with the staff and school is my biggest limitation in this study. Rather than entering the school as an outsider, the teachers in the building welcomed my presence and supported my work. To address this limitation, I gave participants permission to disagree with me and to show resistance.

Although participants showed a genuine interest in the study and the topic of critical literacy, I do not believe my familiarity of the surroundings had an influence on

the findings of the study. If I did not know the surroundings or any of the participants, I would have spent time building a strong rapport before and during the study. Although I had taught in the building before moving to the district office, I never engaged with these teachers on the topic of critical literacy.

FINDINGS

This study attempted to identify how, if at all, middle school teachers discuss and interact around the four-dimension framework of critical literacy. The qualitative case study aimed to engage teachers in discussion around the topic of critical literacy using text, media, and questioning to influence current teaching practices. The findings described in this chapter were based on the following research questions:

1. In the context of professional learning, how do middle school teachers respond to and interact with critical literacy?

    a. What are the approaches and limitations?

2. How do critical literacy teachers use the four-dimension framework to implement critical literacy in their classrooms?

3. What support, if any do critical literary teachers need to implement the four-dimension framework in their classrooms?

4. Does knowledge and understanding of critical literacy change for teachers within the professional learning focus group?

A focus on critical literacy theory over classroom application overwhelms the literature. The study was undertaken to help address the literature of critical literacy interaction and discussion with in-service middle school teachers, as there are limited studies examining critical literacy in this particular context. The literature review

highlighted critical literacy studies focused on individual teachers and his or her classrooms as well as implementation of critical literacy with pre-service teachers.

Researchers have stressed the need for more research on critical literacy with current teachers (Lewison et al. 2002; Luna et al. 2004). Therefore, a need to focus on the experiences of middle school teachers interacting and discussing critical literacy was the focus of the study.

Overview of Research Findings

Findings signify all participants had a much better understanding of critical literacy compared to their initial understandings prior to the study. By providing teachers with a safe environment and lessons focused on the four-dimension framework of critical literacy, they engaged in rich and open discussions both face-to-face and online. The key findings, which emerged from this study:

1. Interaction and discussion using Lewison et al. (2002) four-dimension framework contributed to a change in participants' perspectives and realizations of critical literacy.

2. Interaction and discussion among participants revealed a need to define social justice.

This chapter reviews each research question and details findings with data to support each claim.

Question 1: In the context of professional learning, how do middle school teachers respond to and interact with critical literacy?

Participants were very accepting of critical literacy and excited to learn more about the topic. Marie shares her opinions about writing and text.

> Even if it's so biased in their writing, it's the words and language they are using. It's like twisting people, to think in a certain way, when really that's not necessarily the way that everyone should be thinking. I mean, you have to challenge that (transcript, FG1, Marie, p. 4).

Critical literacy only named what she already believed about writing with hidden agendas. Although she had no previous background of critical literacy, she had common characteristics of people who search for the power and privilege information and question to seek the truth.

Question 2: How do critical literacy teachers use the four-dimension framework to implement critical literacy in their classrooms?

Disrupting the Commonplace

The study started with the ability to develop a critical lens for the everyday. Participants discussed how writers can position us as readers to believe a certain way. They could understand this dimension very easily. Marie shares her thoughts, "Learn to think on their own and not let others' sway you, if you really feel strongly about something." (transcription, FG2, Marie, p. 1). Participants also cited experiences of revealing hidden messages in political agendas. Based on the time of year, I was not surprised participants used politics as an example for hidden biases. They all agreed the importance of a developing a critical lens and believed students should be able to develop this ability.

Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

I used the two short stories to help participants view how voices can be marginalized intentionally and unintentionally. With questioning, the participants could relate to the young women in the stories, and they also shared how their students could relate to the stories. The RAFT assignment also allows for viewing multiple perspectives.

Table 5.1   Raft Assignment

Eleanor's Raft Assignment   October 24th, 2012
Role: Grandpa   **Audience:** Self   **Format:** Inner monologue
Topic: Frustration over the concept of earning something
"What is happening to people? When did the idea of "earning" something disappear and get replaced with buying what you want? Ridiculous. Why would Marta even ask me to pay for such a thing? Damn weeds. Something isn't right. The school should know better than to ask a child to pay $15 dollars for something that they call a "scholarship" jacket. Do they not even understand the words that they use? Humph, and they call themselves educators.

Additional examples can be found in Appendix K to show how participants stepped into new roles and shared their experiences through new lenses.

Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

A large part of critical literacy is the ability to address issues of power and privilege. For this study, we used the Wishes, Wants, and Wraths activity to reveal any student issues. As mentioned earlier, the activity did reveal a variety of social issues they faced. During the discussion of these student issues, Penelope shared her hesitation about the types of issues students face and was unsure how to address those issues through a classroom lesson. "What do you do with social change with death and their fear of dying?" (transcription, FG3, Penelope, p. 5). Eleanor shared, "I think it all rolls together,

the more you talk about these things with kids the more you know about them, which makes it easier to continue the conversation" (transcription, FG3, Eleanor, p. 5). Teacher hesitation could serve as a critical point for future study. Do other teachers feel uncomfortable or hesitant about discussing social issues with their students? Would further research reveal teacher uncertainties and possible ways for teachers to surpass those feelings?

Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

The fourth dimension of the critical literacy framework was difficult for all participants to grasp. Perhaps they are too comfortable with their current teaching culture of 55-minute class periods or the traditional school calendar made it difficult for teachers to see past these limitations to engage students with social justice. Perhaps the limited research of critical literacy at the middle school level made it difficult for participants to envision an environment of students moving toward social justice. "While critical literacy practices encourage participants to take a more critical look at their surroundings, the ultimate goal is for these participants to take action that impacts those surroundings in ways that lead toward equity and social justice" (Stribling, DeMulder, & Day, 2011, p. 30). Participants were not opposed to working toward social justice, but rather they were unsure how to start with the daily limitations of a middle school setting.

Question3: What support, if any do critical literary teachers need to implement the four-dimension framework in their classrooms?

The four-dimension framework served as a supportive tool to discuss classroom possibilities for critical literacy. The safe and trusting environment led to open and honest conversation and discussion about sensitive topics. As mentioned earlier,

participants needed additional support in defining social justice and assistance with implementation.

Question 4: Does knowledge and understanding of critical literacy change for teachers within the professional learning focus group?

The following continuums depict the gradual progress of participants' knowledge and understanding of critical literacy throughout the study. The continuums also highlight the discussion and collaboration between participants around the topic of critical literacy.

Critical Literacy Continuums

Penelope did not have any background knowledge of critical literacy, but she was open to learning more about this theory. Although she was quieter than the others, Penelope managed to show her interest and understanding of critical literacy and classroom applications through her online posts and writing samples.

October 2, 2012
"This is new to me. When I read this stuff, I was like, I've never even heard of this stuff before" (transcript, FG1, Penelope, p. 1).

October 16, 2012
"I really like the notion of having students write for real purposes and audiences" (transcript, FG2, Penelope, p. 1).

October 30, 2012
"I think there are a lot of things they can pull out for discussion of that story. If nothing else, a majority of them can relate to the feeling about not having a voice" (transcript, FG3, Penelope, p. 5).

November 14, 2012
"I especially like the part of Innosanto Nagara's quote. To me that is not only making life livable, but making life enjoyable, making life something that people want to live" (personal communication, November 14, 2012).

Figure 5.1   Penelope's Critical Literacy Continuum

Marie had previous teaching experience with students from diverse backgrounds in New Mexico. Her initial interview highlighted her respect for students' background knowledge and experiences and claimed to celebrate differences in her classroom. Although she had never heard of critical literacy, she seemed to possess attributes of a critical literacy educator.
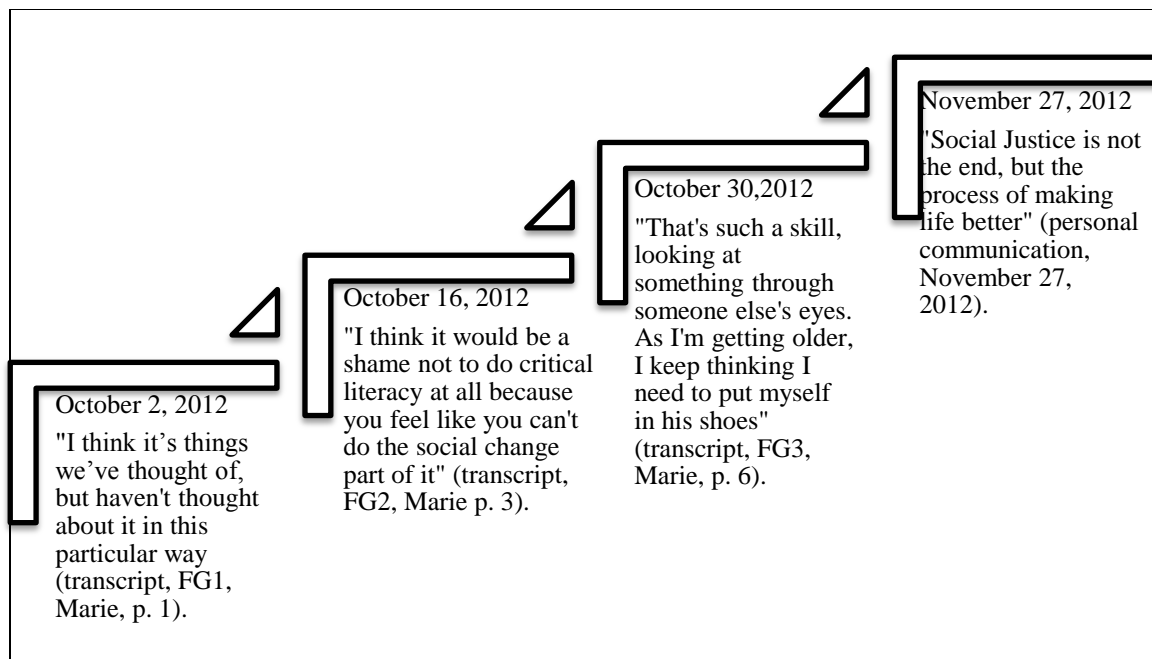
Figure 5.2   Marie's Critical Literacy Continuum

October 2, 2012

"I think it's things we've thought of, but haven't thought about it in this particular way (transcript, FG1, Marie, p. 1).

October 16, 2012

"I think it would be a shame not to do critical literacy at all because you feel like you can't do the social change part of it" (transcript, FG2, Marie p. 3).

October 30,2012

"That's such a skill, looking at something through someone else's eyes. As I'm getting older, I keep thinking I need to put myself in his shoes" (transcript, FG3, Marie, p. 6).

November 27, 2012

"Social Justice is not the end, but the process of making life better" (personal communication, November 27, 2012).

Although Eleanor had previous experience, knowledge, and understanding of

critical literacy, she still showed growth of understanding throughout the study. She

admitted not having her classroom engage in social justice, but she felt very comfortable

with the three other dimensions of the critical literacy framework. She was particularly

interested in looking at alternative definitions for social justice. Toward the end of the

study, she began to view her attempts at engaging students with critical literacy as a form

of social justice.

September 24, 2012
"Critical literacy is the practice of using text in a more meaningful way. It is based on the idea that our interaction with text should be more than just surface level..."(personal communication, September 24, 2012).

October 16, 2012
"Find a way to connect with the text and examine it. Then taking the ideas from it and moving into the social realm" (transcript, FG2, Eleanor, p. 1).

October 30, 2012
"So when they [students] go into social action they know why they are doing it. They are not doing it because someone said, "Hey, let's go pick up litter today" (transcript, FG3, Eleanor, p. 3).

October 30, 2012
"That is social action, if you can teach them[students] from that, like how in that situation to have an appropriate response to solve that problem. In it's own way, it's social justice" (transcript, FG3, Eleanor, p. 3).

Figure 5.3   Eleanor's Critical Literacy Continuum

Summary of Findings

With a huge focus on student accountability, the move toward teacher collaboration has increased. In my experience, the types of teacher experience range from top-down district initiatives to teacher focused topics. This study was an attempt to engage teachers in collaboration around the topic of critical literacy. It was evident participants had various understandings of critical literacy, but all gained additional insight.

All participants were interested in the topic of critical literacy and how to implement this ideology in their classrooms. Throughout the study, participants shared their opinions, interests, and understandings of critical literacy. This was displayed
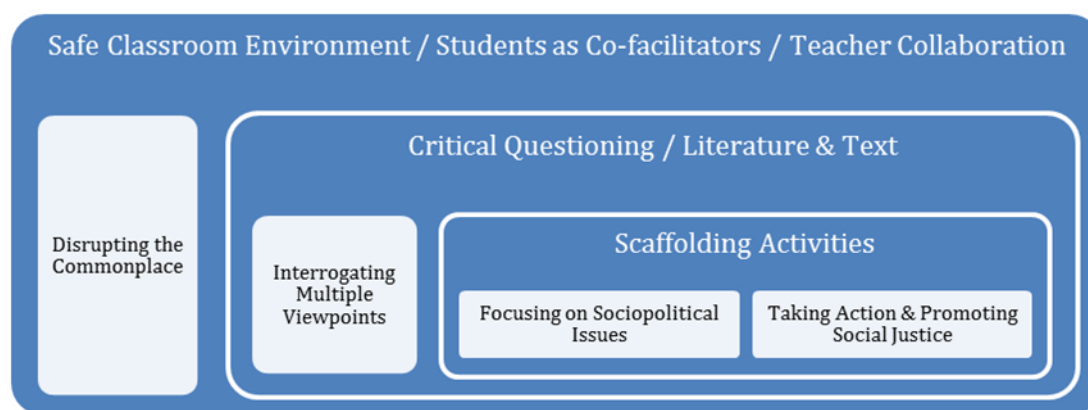
through their willingness to find literature to share with their students, their ability to generate critical questions from the short stories as well as their reflective conversations around the writing activities, which highlighted students' perspectives of critical issues.

Keys ideas, which emerged from the study, included the following:

- Connect with Students

- Use of a Critical Literacy Framework

- Use of literature and other text

- Use of Critical Questioning with text

- Use of scaffolding activities

- Create a safe classroom environment

- Time to collaborate with colleagues

- Students as co-facilitators in the classroom

These keys ideas are essential for creating a critical literate environment for teachers. In addition, further research focusing on using these ideas by teachers to engage students with critical literacy if needed.

Safe Classroom Environment / Students as Co-facilitators / Teacher Collaboration

Critical Questioning / Literature & Text

Disrupting the Commonplace

Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

Scaffolding Activities

Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

Taking Action & Promoting Social Justice

Figure 5.4   Critical Literacy Framework & Research Findings

Making Connections

        In this study, as the facilitator, I attempted to connect lessons with the participants' lives and experiences as middle school teachers. Although I knew the participants well, I choose to connect our lessons about critical literacy with their teaching experiences. I used my experience as a middle school teacher to prepare lessons focused on critical literacy, which would resonate with the teachers.   I view making connections with others as a non-negotiable in implementing critical literacy any setting regardless of the content.

Use of a Critical Literacy Framework

        Lewison et al. (2002) four-dimension framework helped me develop and contextualize a course around critical literacy. Prior to learning about the framework, I fumbled around with critical literacy lessons, but with the four-dimension framework, I chose literature, and other text to demonstrate my understanding of critical literacy. The framework helped all of us view critical literacy ideology as practical rather than just theoretical.

Use of Literature and other Text

        Using literature and various texts as tools and connecting with the four-dimension framework can promote critical literacy. High quality literature, which highlights multiple perspectives or social issues, is ideal. Other literature, which is not as explicit, can be used also. In fact, one of the short stories I shared with participants was found in the anthology she uses with students. Using the same text through a critical literacy lens can highlight the struggles of class, which may not have been noticed before.

Use of Critical Questioning with Text

This idea of using critical questioning can be accomplished through various texts and media to highlight issues of power and struggles. Texts are tools to promote critical questioning and sharing of personal experiences. Although important, the use of high quality literature, which promotes critical literacy is not sufficient. Critical questions must be developed for classroom discussion. During one of our focus group sessions, I asked participants to develop questions for the short story *Eleven*. The group created some useful questions for the story to elicit discussion (see Appendix H), but participants had questions about the process of creating questions. Marie shares her uncertainty of writing questions.

> Would you want them [students] to decide what's going to be the main topic that you are going to pull out or are you going to have something in mind already? So do your questions need to be very general so that maybe the bullying part wasn't' the part they got, maybe they got part about not having a voice or maybe they got the part about it's your birthday, and it was a horrible birthday. I don't know how do you see it? (transcript, FG3, Marie, p. 6).

Eleanor shared her thoughts on how she would develop the questions for the story.

> I think you can do both. I think you start were they take it, and you can always add your perspective when they are done. I think I would start with "why do you think she burst into tears? Why was she crying and just see what their answers were to that (transcript, FG3, Eleanor, p. 6).

Penelope also shared the idea of forming questions around multiple perspectives.

You can throw in the whole point of view thing. It is from her perspective. You

can ask, what was wrong? Why was she being treated unfairly? What do you

think the teacher was thinking" from her point of view. (transcript, FG3, Eleanor,

p. 6).

In hindsight, I should have focused each session with the development of critical

questions. Questioning is often misunderstood as educators typically refer to higher

order or critical thinking in regards to developing questions for students. Critical

questioning is about making the unknown known and highlighting what is not always

stated. These types of questions reveal the experiences and backgrounds of participants

and serve as a necessity for critical literacy implementation

Use of Scaffolding Activities

Over the years, I have acquired various handouts and classroom activities, which

have been helpful for contextualizing critical literacy theory. In addition, these types of

activities have helped promote thinking and understanding for complex topics. Although

classroom discussion is a major part of critical literacy, the use of scaffolding activities

can help students formulate their thoughts and present their understanding in a concrete

manner. Moreover, in the era of accountability, the handouts could be scored on

particular criteria and assigned a grade.

Time to Collaborate with Colleagues

Preserving time for discussion of critical issues with colleagues is needed. When

I was a classroom teacher tinkering with critical literacy, I did not have the opportunity to

collaborate with colleagues on my triumphs and struggles with critical literacy

implementation. Rather than working alone, I suggest establishing time for teacher collaboration. Teaching is not an isolated act, especially when embarking on critical literacy in the classroom. Critical literacy is not linear, so teachers should engage in continuous professional collaboration with other teachers. Teachers need to have time to share their accomplishments and struggles as well as time to generate ideas and develop classroom lessons and units of study.

Create a Safe Classroom Environment

Before any lesson or discussion of critical literacy can begin, the teacher must establish a safe and collaborative classroom environment. Communicating expectations and constructing norms of classroom conduct are essential for creating a safe space. For example, when discussing topics from multiple viewpoints, students may need additional instruction on properly disagreeing with a conflicting opinion. Creating a safe classroom environment can help students feel comfortable with sharing their thoughts and opinions. A safe environment promotes a space where voices are valued and thoughts can turn into action. The participants agreed in establishing a safe and inviting classroom for students to engage in critical discussions.

The findings combined with my experience of critical literacy implementation are helpful for others interested in engaging the colleagues or students with the four-dimension framework. I share these findings to create change in existing classrooms by helping teachers recognize an alternative to teaching and learning. This change calls for teachers to highlight issues of power and injustice while working with students to find solutions for these inequities.

IMPLICATIONS/DISCUSSION

With limited research on teachers discussing and interacting about critical literacy, researchers must continue this work for deeper and further understanding. The following implications serve to assist collaboration efforts of in-service middle school critical literacy teachers and those interested in learning more about critical literacy. In addition, the use of a critical literacy framework to develop and capture understanding of critical literacy is a major implication for this field. These implications also can be useful for in-service critical literacy teachers in elementary and secondary levels. Furthermore, higher institutions of learning can use this study as a catalyst to provide more knowledge and understanding of critical literacy to pre-service teachers. Moreover, exposure to opportunities for collaboration for pre-service teachers is an essential and effective way for continuous professional learning.

Although only one teacher had more background knowledge of critical literacy, the other two teachers, but they all held similar characteristics found in teachers with a critical stance. Characteristics included ideas such as creating a student-centered classroom and getting to know students. Penelope shared the following during her follow-up questionnaire, "We always have class or small group discussions about what we have read and students have the opportunity to share their ideas, their opinions & their experiences" (questionnaire, Penelope, October 2). Marie's classroom is also student-centered based on her description,

My whole room is centered on student voices. It is all about them and what they

need in order to succeed here at school. They run the class and really dictate what

is done each day. They know what they need to do and have resources available

in their classmates, and myself for help. Students are expected to help one another

and give of their own experience and expertise (follow-up questionnaire, Marie,

September 25).

Eleanor also shares how she works with students in her classroom:

I always try to explain the reason for our lessons and make them applicable to

more than just "our class." I also encourage ownership in students learning – It is

not my job to force them to learn, it is something for their own benefit that they

can take pride in. I include student choice when applicable, try to find

relatable/interesting/relevant teaching materials and set high expectations. Humor

is also a big part of my classroom – Students will perform better when they have a

relationship with their teacher (initial interview, Eleanor, September 24).

This important discovery opens up the potential for in-service educators to learn more

about critical literacy to transform their current classroom practice with critical literacy.

In other words, introducing critical literacy to teachers can occur either during their pre-

service or in-service experience.

The use of the four dimension framework for teaching and learning in critical

literacy is a major implication for the field. For years, researchers have attempted to give

practicality to this theoretical topic. Lewison et al. (2002) four dimension has helped

with construction of a framework to capture the essence of critical literacy for practical

classroom use.

A focus on collaboration for critical literate teachers is essential for continuous learning and refinement of understanding and classroom implementation. Teacher study groups have been found to be a practical form of professional development for teachers to stimulate reflection on teaching practices and pedagogical knowledge through social interaction and co-construction of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Rather than spending teachers' limited time on broad whole-school initiatives or book studies, teachers should shift their focus toward critical literacy. Time and support from colleagues is essential to engage with critical literacy.

Furthermore, teacher preparation programs should instill a collaborative culture among pre-service teachers. Creating a collaborative culture to explore critical literacy can include modeling and implementing lessons related to social issues. These programs can establish an expectation for critical questioning and assist new teachers with discussion techniques for future classroom use.

Moreover, pre-service teachers should have multiple opportunities to work with diverse student populations. This experience can help teachers recognize their own privilege as well as the strengths and struggles of students. Ladson-Billings (1999) reminds us:

Despite the changing demographics that make our public schools more culturally and linguistically diverse and the growing body of knowledge on issues of diversity and difference, multicultural teacher education continues to suffer from a thin, poorly developed, fragmented literature that provides an inaccurate picture

of the kind of preparation teachers receive to teach in culturally diverse

classrooms. (p. 114)

Although the literature in this area is fragmented and inaccurate, Sleeter (2001) suggests

more research in teacher education focused on connecting pre-service teachers with

schools, communities, and ongoing professional learning.

The implications of this study suggest a positive experience while middle school

teachers collaborate around critical literacy topics. This study also suggests the potential

for teachers at all levels to engage with critical literacy to assist with transforming K-12

classrooms. Moreover, this study highlighted a method to professional learning different

from traditional and non-negotiable professional development workshops.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this section, I highlight future studies, which build upon this research study.

One recommendation includes the need for a longitudinal study as well as working with

in-service teachers from different grade levels. Additionally, working with teachers with

deeper levels of critical literacy knowledge could add more depth to this field. A focus

on social justice among in-service teachers could assist with implementation and ways to

overcome existing barriers in schools.

Finally, there is a need to introduce critical literacy to pre-service teachers, while

also promoting a collaborative culture once in the field. "Many schools of education

encourage thinking about teaching as a way to make a difference, but little support is

available during induction to support these idealistic teachers in their pursuit of social

change" (Picower, 2007, p. 2). By providing support to pre-service teachers, the possibility to enact chance is more likely.

Longer Study

One recommendation for future study would be to conduct a longitudinal study with a larger group of teachers. With more time, participants could focus more in-depth in each of the four dimensions. Documenting change over time with a teacher cohort has potential to focus on the critical literacy framework and delve into creating curriculum units, which encompass the four dimensions, to implement with students.

Teachers of All Levels

The study focused on discussion and interaction among middle school teachers, conducting a similar study with teachers from elementary or high school levels would also add to the literature in this area. "On a variety of fronts, critical literacy theory encourages teachers to uncover and openly discuss any underlying assumptions that may be made in the process of working with students and texts at any grade level" (Creighton, 1997, p. 440). What would elementary and high school teachers reveal about critical literacy? Would they have similar or differing thoughts and barriers to critical literacy implementation?

Critical Literacy Teachers

Furthermore, a focus on teachers with more background knowledge of critical literacy could add another component to teachers' understanding and implementation. Ritchie (2012) states, "By starting with practicing teachers who enact critical teaching,

teacher education research can identify the conditions that lead to teachers' enacting critical pedagogy in their classrooms and beyond" (p. 121).

Working with teachers with deeper knowledge and understanding of critical literacy could focus more on critical literacy implementation and social justice. Joyce and Showers (1995) adds, "Without companionship, help reflecting on practice, and instruction on fresh teaching strategies, most people can make very few changes in their behavior, however well-intentioned they are" (p. 6). In other words, teachers supported through critical literacy implementation are more likely to improve their practice or have greater success.

Critical Questioning

Critical questions are a vital component to classroom discussion and dialogue. Based on Marie's hesitation of developing questions for the short story *Eleven*, I see a need to focus on the process and development of creating critical questions for various text and topics. Creating critical questions from text or for discussion could be an area to study more in depth.

Student Perspectives toward Critical Literacy

This study captured some student reactions and responses to teachers' use of critical literacy in the classroom. Further study of teachers' discussion and interaction about their student perspectives' of critical literacy could add to the research. In other words, rather than dialoguing about critical literacy, teachers could focus their discussion on student reactions of classroom critical literacy activities and lessons. Some potential questions include: How do their students feel about critical literacy? How do students'

respond to and engage with critical literacy? How do students' work within the four-dimension framework in their classroom? What are their roles?

Critical Literacy Leadership

With my growing experience in leadership roles, a focus on critical literacy with leadership could reveal possibilities and challenges for this topic. In addition, leadership support is needed for school implementation efforts to develop and sustain. "Although current school reform efforts use different approaches to improve teaching and learning, all depend for their success on the motivation and capacities of local leadership" (Brown, 2006, p. 702). Moreover, involving leaders in learning and understanding critical literacy could address the limitations and barriers teachers face during implementation. More work is needed on working with school and district leadership on the possibilities of critical literacy and implications for a more just world in and out of schools.

Moving to Social Justice

Finally, further work is needed on implementing social justice in schools with looming concerns of funding, time, and other liabilities. The teachers in this study struggled with moving toward social justice due to personal and professional barriers as well as an unclear understanding of social justice and how to implement. Wood, Soares, and Watson (2006) emphasize the importance of social justice as a component in critical literacy.

> Critical literacy encourages students to gain critical consciousness through a language, which teaches them to question their world, to ask who has power and who benefits from power, and to analyze why things are the way they are. As

educators, our goal should be to teach our young adolescents to be more than "social actors" but rather to become "social transformers" of their world. (p. 59)

Time to focus on those barriers could lead to further implementation of critical literacy with strong components of social justice. "We need to know a great deal more about the conditions and contexts that sustain teachers' efforts to work for social justice as well as the conditions that constrain them" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 164). The teachers in this study did not have enough time to discuss how to overcome these barriers. With further study, more data could add to this area of research.

Summary

With future research studies, the understandings gained through this study should impact the ways teachers collaborate around the topic of critical literacy. This collaboration could lead to future opportunities for teachers to engage in curriculum, which offers multiple viewpoints, highlights issues of power and a way to fight against injustices.

Conclusion

Prior to the study, participants' knowledge of critical literacy ranged from no knowledge to some knowledge. Use of Lewison et al. (2002) four dimension framework of critical literacy supported participants' interactions and discussions of critical literacy. The evidence of change in participants' perceptions and realizations in critical literacy was documented with data over time. Interactions and discussions of the framework revealed a need to further study and defining of the fourth dimension: social justice.

This study demonstrated the usefulness of a critical literacy framework and highlighted the need for in-service teachers to interact and discuss the topic of critical literacy.

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APPENDIX A

Online Survey

Online Survey

Question	Strongly Disagree 0	Disagree 1	Agree 2	Strongly Agree 3
Should popular culture be a regular part of the curriculum?			Eleanor	Marie Penelope Eleanor
Should text or literature show multiple viewpoints?				Marie Penelope Eleanor
Should students connect their personal experiences with the content and lessons in their class?				Marie Penelope Eleanor
Should some lessons include student choice?			Penelope	Marie Eleanor
Should some lessons include real-life issues for students' to address, discuss and problematize?				Marie Penelope Eleanor
Should some lessons highlight issues of language and power in text?			Penelope	Marie Eleanor
Should students be encouraged to think critically and asked critical questions about information they receive including information they receive from their teachers?				Marie Penelope Eleanor
Should teachers model and provide students with opportunities to reflect on their think and challenge assumptions about content?			Penelope	Marie Eleanor
Should lessons highlight students' interests, backgrounds, and values?			Penelope	Marie Eleanor
Would you be interested in participating in a research study on the topic of critical literacy? Provide name and contact information.				Penelope Marie Eleanor

APPENDIX B

Initial Participant Email Survey Letter

Initial Participant Email Survey Request

Dear Teachers, I know you are busy, so I will keep this brief. I am compiling some data on middle school teachers and teaching. Please complete the 10 question survey at link: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/H6VHBLH

Thank you!

Christina Nava
Title III & IC LEP/Migrant District Administrator
District Office
Ext. 1020

APPENDIX C

Follow-Up Participant Email

Follow-Up Participant Email

Teachers:

Thank you for taking part in the online survey and expressing an interest in participating in a research study on the topic of critical literacy.

If selected for the research study, participants will meet for 10 weeks for two-hour focus group sessions. The sessions will be structured around critical literacy topics, questions, and classroom lesson design. The study is scheduled to begin the first week of October, the day and time of each session is yet to be determined.

Before participants can be selected, additional information is needed about your knowledge and experience in critical literacy. Please answer the following questions and return by September 25th.

1.   Tell me about the types of classroom lessons and/or projects you implement in your classes?

2.   How do you center student voices, interests, and experiences in your classroom?

3.   How do you "engage" students in learning classroom content?

4.   How do you approach issues of diversity and equity when they arise in the classroom?

5.   Why should lessons include real-life issues for students' to address, discuss and problematize?

6.   What is critical literacy?

Thank you for your time in answering these additional questions.

Christina Nava

APPENDIX D

Pre-Study Interview Questions

Pre-Study Interview Questions

The following interview questions were used to gather background knowledge of the participants prior to the study.

1. Tell me about the types of classroom lessons and/or projects you implement in your classes?

2. Tell me about the students in your classes? What specific student concerns do you have in your class?

3. How do you center student voices, interests, and experiences in your classroom?
4. How do you "engage" students in learning the classroom content?
5. How do you approach issues of diversity and equity when they arise in the classroom?

6. Why should lessons include real-life issues for students' to address, discuss and problematize?

7. The focus of this study will be on utilizing a critical literacy stance. What does that phrase mean to you?

8. Where did you learn about critical literacy? What do you believe is the most important aspect of critical literacy?

9. What are some challenges or issues (if any) do you face with critical literacy?

APPENDIX E

Post-Study Interview Questions

Post-Study Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience participating in the study.

2. Did your understanding of critical literacy change? If so, how?

3. Tell me about the impact (if any) this study had in your classroom.

4. Tell me what you learned from participating in this study?

5. Tell me what you think the other participants learned from this study?

6. Is there anything else you would like me to know or understand about regarding the study?

APPENDIX F

Critical Literacy Text and Media for Focus Group Sessions

Critical Literacy Text and Media for Focus Group Sessions

Start End	Essential Questions/ Topics	Activities, Assignments & Readings	Formative Assessments
Week 1 F2F 10 02 – 10 08	CL as Professional Learning	**Critical Literacy Experiences** ☐ Introductions ☐ Read Article: Connecting Practice and Research: Critical Literacy Guide ☐ Read Article: Taking on Critical Literacy: The Journey of Newcomers and Novices ☐ Wishes, Wants, & Wraths (Assignment for Students) ☐ Introduction to Edmodo	☐ Critical Literacy in Frayer Template ☐ Muddy Marvy Moment
Week 2 Online 10 09 – 10 15	What is Critical Literacy?	**Disrupting the Commonplace** ☐ Autobiography (submit online) ☐ Read "First graders and fairy tales: One teacher's action research of critical literacy" ☐ Read Article: Saving black mountain: The promise of critical literacy in a multicultural democracy.	☐ 3, 2, 1 Bridge
Week 3 F2F 10 16 – 10 22	Critical Literacy as a Process	**Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues** ☐ Review student responses' to Wishes, Wants, & Wraths ☐ Read *City by Numbers* & "Eleven" ☐ Formulate critical questions for "Eleven" ☐ Read Article: Walking in their shoes: Using multiple-perspectives texts as a bridge to critical literacy.	
Week 4 Online 10 23 – 10 29	What is the role of Teachers in CL?	☐ Read "The Scholarship Jacket" ☐ Complete RAFT Writing and provide PQP Feedback	☐ RAFT Writing ☐ PQP Feedback
Week 5 F2F 10 30 – 11 05	How do we balance the critical in CL?	☐ Marie's report on reading "Eleven" and asking the critical questions to her classes ☐ View: Critical Literacy Video (41m)	☐ Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like activity

Week 6 Online 11 06 / 11 12	Critical Literacy in Children's Literature	**Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints** □ Read Article "Reading the word and the world: The double-edged sword of teaching critical literacy." □ Read Article: "Peeling the onion: Teaching critical literacy with students of privilege."	
Week 7 F2F 11 13 / 11 19	Creating Critical Literacy Classrooms	□ Read various definitions of Social Justice □ Read handout: Five Approaches to Social Justice Activism (Discuss differences) □ Watch "Diversity Day" from *The Office*	
Week 8 Online 11 20 / 11 26	What is Social Justice?	**Taking Action & Promoting Social Justice** □ Read "20 (Self) Critical Things I Will Do to Be a More Equitable Educator" □ Read Article: Stirring up justice: Adolescents, reading, writing, and changing the world.	□ For What Chart

APPENDIX G

Literature, Text, and Media

Literature, Text, and Media

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APPENDIX H

Assignments and Handouts for Focus Group Sessions

Assignments and Handouts for Focus Group Sessions

Frayer Model

Directions: Fill in the Frayer Model Template with your understanding of a critical literacy

DEFINITION	CHARACTERISTICS
EXAMPLES/MODELS	NON-EXAMPLES

Figure G.1   Frayer Model for Critical Literacy

Muddy/Marvy Moments

List information that is still confusing, as well as information you find interesting.

Marvelous Moments	Muddy Moments

Figure G.2   Muddy/Marvy Moments for Critical Literacy

"Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like"

A critical literacy classroom…

Looks Like	Sounds Like	Feels Like
Groups of various numbers working collaboratively.	Students talking and listening to each other in a focused way	A safe and energized place where students are comfortable taking a risk.

Figure G.3   "Looks Like, Sounds Like, Feels Like" for Critical Literacy

Four What Chart

Name_____

What?	**So What?**	**Now What?**	**Okay... What?**
What is critical literacy?	Is understanding of critical literacy and classroom application important?	What will you do about critical literacy and your classroom?	What is unclear about this topic?

Figure G.4   Four What Chart for Critical Literacy

3 – 2 – 1 Bridge

	Name Date:
3	Quote I found interesting…
2	Lingering questions or wondering I want to explore more in the future…
1	Goal that I have for my learning for the next lesson…

Figure G.5   3 – 2 – 1 Bridge for Critical Literacy

Choose any of the RAFTs below to complete the task. You can choose to complete one or all of them, the choice is yours.

RAFTs for Narratives

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Francisco	Parents	Letter	Why I don't want to move…
Rachel	Self	Diary	How I will stand up for myself.
Sweater	Mrs. Price	Thank You Note	Glad I Could Be of Service
Trumpet	Francisco	Song	How I Can Help You Express Yourself
Struggling Reader	Textbook	Persuasive Speech	You Need to See My Side of the Story
Choice	Choice	Choice	Choice

Figure G.6   RAFT Assignment for Critical Literacy

Wishes, Worries, and Wraths

If you could have 3 wishes what would you wish for? List and draw them.		
List and draw something that worries you.		
List and draw something that makes you angry .		

Adapted from Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001.

Figure G.7   Wishes, Worries, and Wraths for Critical Literacy

Questions for Eleven by Sandra Cisneros

1. What would we do in this situation?
2. How would you fix this problem?
3. Why do you think she burst into tears? Why was she crying?
4. From her perspective, what was wrong? Why was she being treated unfairly? What do you think the teacher was thinking?
5. From the teacher's point of view, what was the problem, what happened?
6. What do you think Sandra means by being all the ages? What does it mean that she's 11, 10, 9, 8, etc…?
7. Have you ever had an experience when a younger you came out unexpectedly?
8. Why did Phyllis wait so long before speaking up about the sweater?
9. Was Phyllis the heroine?
10. How would you deal with Sylvia?
11. How would you answer the teacher respectfully, if you were in this situation?
12. What would you do if you were in this situation and couldn't speak up for yourself?]
13. Is not speaking up for yourself good or bad?

What is "Social Justice"? - A collection of definitions
by Derrick Kikuchi, Reach and Teach

In my experience as a journalist I once believed that service in feeding the hungry and working to change policies causing hunger are two largely separate things. And there is some truth to that. But it is also highly subversive to do work. It is not possible to do justice in the abstract — you must touch real people. God's work in the world is for all to have enough to eat and to not be afraid.

- *Sara Miles, Journalist, Author of Take This Bread, and Director of St. Gregory's Food Pantry*

Social justice means moving towards a society where all hungry are fed, all sick are cared for, the environment is treasured, and we treat each other with love and compassion. Not an easy goal, for sure, but certainly one worth giving our lives for!

- *Medea Benjamin, co-founder Global Exchange and Code Pink*

Social justice means complete and genuine equality of all people. Not exactly stuff for Bartlett's, but there you go.

- *Paul George, executive director Pennisula Peace and Justice Center*

Social justice provides the foundation for a healthy community. It grows out of our sense that each person — each created being — has value. Only as we recognize the value and dignity of each person can we build a healthy community, so it's a slow, painful process of learning and growing. To help the process along we develop attitudes of respect for one another. We also shape policies and patterns of behavior to protect and enhance the worth of each person. We do this by building governmental and economic structures, educational and religious institutions, and all the other systems that provide for health and social welfare. This justice is not a goal that we'll ever reach, but a process, a struggle in which we can be engaged through all the pain and all the joy.

- *Doug King, editor and WebWeaver, The Witherspoon Society of the Presbyterian Church USA*

By social justice I mean the creation of a society which treats human beings as embodiments of the sacred, supports them to realize their fullest human potential, and

promotes and rewards people to the extent that they are loving and caring, kind and generous, open-hearted and playful, ethically and ecologically sensitive, and tend to respond to the universe with awe, wonder and radical amazement at the grandeur of creation.

- Rabbi Michael Lerner, co-founder of the Tikkun Community

Social Justice means no kids going to bed hungry, no one without shelter or healthcare and a free and lively discussion and participation by all people in the political direction and organization of our communities and nation.

- Kirsten Moller, executive director and co-founder, Global Exchange

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A long and mysterious historical process in which those who are excluded and exploited by social forces of privilege and power attempt to consociate into movements that struggle for: a more equitable distribution of social and economic goods; for greater personal and political dignity; and for a deeper moral vision of their society. Social justice is a goal toward which we move, always imperfectly, and persons and groups are motivated to realize it by their deepest spiritual and political traditions. Justice is only meaningful when it is historically specific and embodied (as opposed to theoretical or abstract).

The degree to which social justice is achieved in a given time and place should be measured by two (seemingly contradictory) notions: 1) the greatest good for the greatest number, and 2) how the least powerful and the smallest minorities in a society are faring. The vision of social justice is best articulated through stories that have the marginalized as their subject and that present hard questions to those at the center of power — stories like the ones Jesus of Nazareth told.

- Ched Myers, ecumenical activist, Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries

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"Social Justice Work"' is work that we do in the interest of securing human rights, an equitable distribution of resources, a healthy planet, democracy, and a space for the human spirit to thrive (read: arts/culture/entertainment). We do the work to achieve these goals on both a local and a global scale. Of course, except for those who require we follow the alleged dictates of one god or another, almost everyone could probably agree to such a broad definition of social justice. So, I would also want to articulate the specific systems that I believe we should be working to implement.

- Innosanto Nagara, co-founder DesignAction Collective

"Social Justice" — I love this term because it's a big enough umbrella for all of us. It brings together people of many different faith traditions, human rights and environmental activists, labor organizers, young people who want to make the world a better place, and on and on. When I speak of working for social justice, I begin with the teachings of Jesus, and his commitment to basic fairness and a life of dignity for the poorest of the poor. In our world today, that means we walk with the majority of the world's population that works hard every day with no expectation that life will ever get better. It means we cannot rest until everyone, everywhere, is paid a wage with which he or she can provide for the basic needs of his or her family. It means that those of us who have privilege must be willing to give up those things that cannot be sustained in a fair world — especially those things that use an unfair percentage of the world's environmental resources.

Social Justice isn't something I expect we'll attain in my lifetime. Fortunately, nothing could be more fulfilling than working to make it happen.

- Rick Ufford-Chase, international director, [BorderLinks](#) and moderator of the [Presbyterian Church USA](#) (PCUSA)

Five Approaches to Social Justice Activism

1.   Food, Festivals, & Fun
Activism at this stage is based on cultural events and "celebrating diversity," usually through cross-cultural programs and activities. Events tend to focus on surface-level cultural awareness, and often actually contribute to the stereotypes they are meant to challenge. People at the Food, Folks, and Fun stage might host an International Fair, a Multicultural Night, or a Diversity Fashion Show. Although these events have the potential to bring people together across difference, they do not have the potential to address injustices such as racism, sexism, classism, or homophobia.

2.   Charitable Giving
One way we can contribute to social justice movements is by donating money or other goods to human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, United for a Fair Economy, the Humane Society, or even a local food shelf. People often choose this route to activism when they want to do something that will ease their own conscience, but don't want to associate in any deeper way with a particular cause.

3.   Individual Advocacy
An important part of being a social justice activist is building personal relationships with people who are less privileged than you are. People whose activism primarily takes this approach empathize deeply for the ways in which injustices affect people at an individual level—particularly the people with whom they have built personal relationships. However, they are not quite ready (or willing) to risk their own privilege by pushing for systemic change. So they draw on their privilege in smaller ways, serving as an ally or advocate to individual people who are being discriminated against.

4.   Service & Volunteerism
Opportunities to work for social justice through service and volunteerism are endless. You can organize a fundraiser for a human rights organization, help build houses for the economically disadvantaged, volunteer at a battered women's shelter, or get trained to become an anti-homophobia educator. The key point, though, is that you are *actively involved beyond an individual advocacy level*. You are doing the *work* of social justice, not simply supporting that work philosophically. (To clarify, what often passes as "service" is really charitable giving. Service and volunteerism require that we work *with* oppressed communities, avoid the "savior syndrome," and abolish the hierarchies that remain in place when, for example, wealthy kids are sent into poor neighborhoods to do service-learning, but never discuss how their relative wealth *is connected with* the relative poverty of the people inhabiting those neighborhoods.)

5.   Systemic Reform for Social Justice
Activists who see themselves as systemic reformers focus their energies on fighting for larger social change. They might see charitable giving, individual advocacy, and some other approaches to activism as misguided and inconsequential because these approaches fail to address the systemic nature of injustice. So systemic reformers are determined to organize and act on a larger scale in order to change laws, policy, and larger social conditions. They are less interested in educating *about* racism as it exists than with *eliminating* racism; less interested in celebrating diversity than in transforming institutions for equity and justice; less interested in lifting individual people out of poverty than in demanding the eradication of poverty.

APPENDIX I

Critical Literacy Rubric

Critical Literacy Rubric

Participant	Tell me about the types of classroom lessons and/or projects you implement in your classes? *(Disrupting the Commonplace)*	How do you center student voices, interests & experiences in your classroom? *(Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints)*	Why should lessons include real-life issues for students' to address, discuss & problematize? *(Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues)*	How do you approach issues of diversity & equity when they arise in the classroom? *(Taking Action & Promoting Social Justice)*	Online Survey points
Penelope	Students sometimes have a choice in project options. Students do a warm up every day, and often the topic is asking them to share their opinions or feelings about different things.	We always have class or small group discussions about what we have read and students have the opportunity to share their ideas, their opinions & their experiences.	That is when they are most engaged. If they have an interest in the topic, they will be more likely to be "present" and contribute to conversations.	To be very honest, these issues don't come up much.	26
Marie	We work on all types of projects that are assigned by the classroom teacher. We do research for power points, posters, foldables, mobiles, books, essays, and many others.	My whole room is centered on student voices. It is all about them and what they need in order to succeed here at school. They run the class and really dictate what is done each day.	Real-life is all these kids know. If what they are learning is directly related to what they are currently experiencing it will stay locked into their memory.	My classrooms are full of diversity. This brings so much to everyone. Each student has his/her own talents and abilities that contribute to the whole.	30
Eleanor	I include layered projects that incorporate student choice into my curriculum at various times throughout the year.	Students are encouraged to make connections to their own life experiences through literature.	I keep an open classroom when it comes to diversity. I also use literature as a discussion point; books… are great tools for building a sense of connectivity within our diversity.	Because that is life. There is no point in education if it cannot be applied to reality. We don't live in a hypothetical world.	29

Disrupting the Commonplace

- Problematizes & Questions texts
- Use of pop culture & media
- Use Language of Hope

Interrogating Multiple Viewpoints

- Juxtaposes text
- Highlights the invisible
- Uncovers the marginalized

Focusing on Sociopolitical Issues

- Highlights power and oppressive acts
- Deconstructs text to highlight sociopolitical issues
- Makes the unconscious conscious

Taking Action and Promoting Social Justice

- Reading and Writing Word/World
- Uses language of possibility to challenge/change existing discourses
- Engages in reflective praxis

Researcher Comments

Adapted from Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002.

APPENDIX J

Seven Norms of Collaboration

Seven Norms of Collaboration

1. Pausing

Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion, and decision-making.

2. Paraphrasing

Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you – "So…" or "As you are…" or "You're thinking…" – and following the starter with an efficient paraphrase assists members of the group in hearing and understanding one another as they converse and make decisions.

3. Posing Questions

Two intentions of posing questions are to explore and to specify thinking. Questions may be posed to explore perceptions, assumptions, and interpretations, and to invite others to inquire into their thinking. For example, "What might be some conjectures you are exploring?" Use focusing questions such as, "Which students, specifically?" or "What might be an example of that?" to increase the clarity and precision of group members' thinking. Inquire into others' ideas before advocating one's own.

4. Putting Ideas on the Table

Ideas are the heart of meaningful dialogue and discussion. Label the intention of your comments. For example: "Here is one idea…" or "One thought I have is…" or "Here is a possible approach…" or "Another consideration might be…".

5. Providing Data

Providing data, both qualitative and quantitative, in a variety of forms supports group members in constructing shared understanding from their work. Data have no meaning beyond that which we make of them; shared meaning develops from collaboratively exploring, analyzing, and interpreting data.

6. Paying Attention to Self and Others

Meaningful dialogue and discussion are facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others, and is aware of what (s)he is saying and how it is said as well as how others are responding. This includes paying attention to learning styles when planning, facilitating, and participating in group meetings and conversations.

7. Presuming Positive Intentions

Assuming that others' intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and discussion, and prevents unintentional put-downs. Using positive intentions in speech is one manifestation of this norm.

Center for Adaptive Schools, 2007

APPENDIX K

RAFT Writing Assignment

RAFT Writing Assignment

Penelope's Raft Assignment   October 24th, 2012

Role: Martha
Audience: local school board
Format: persuasive letter
Topic: disputing their change in policy regarding charging $15 for the scholarship jacket

Dear Texas School Board:

My name is Martha, and I am an eighth grader this year. I have been a straight A student since first grade. My hope for many years has been to earn the scholarship jacket which has been awarded each year to the student with the highest grades. I take my school work very seriously. I always try my best, and I feel like I have earned this recognition.

Yesterday my principal informed that there has been a change in policy regarding the scholarship jacket. He said that there is now a $15 charge for the jacket. I do not think that this change in policy is fair, and I urge you to reconsider your decision.

A scholarship jacket is a recognition of academic excellence. It symbolizes many years of hard work and dedication. The scholarship jacket has always been something earned, not purchased. I know because my older sister Rosie earned the jacket a few years ago. Asking the top achieving student to pay for the jacket makes it seem like less of an award. It now feels like something that can be bought, and that is wrong.

It is also not fair to ask the top achieving student to pay for the jacket because the truth is, he/she might not have $15. That would then mean that the scholarship jacket is awarded to a different student who did not have the highest grades. Is that what the jacket represents? Is it a test to see who can pay for it, or is it designed to recognize excellence? By charging a fee for the jacket, you change the whole idea behind it.

I believe the scholarship jacket should be something earned, not purchased. It should be awarded to the student with the highest grade point average. Please reconsider your change in policy and return the scholarship jacket to a being a symbol of academic hard work and dedication, not of financial standing. I thank you for your time, and I trust that you will do the right thing.

Sincerely,
Martha

Marie's Raft Assignment
October 24th, 2012

Role: Principal Jones
Audience: local school board
Format: persuasive letter
Topic: disputing their change in policy regarding charging $15 for the scholarship jacket

Dear School Board:
I am the principal of Albuquerque Junior High. I have had the opportunity to give a scholarship jacket to a deserving student now for 9 years in a row. These students show excellence in all they do. They have been working hard since they first entered school in Kindergarten. The Scholarship Jacket represents 8 years of the highest achievement level in the class. This recognition has always been given, not bought. I think that if the school board requires it to be bought then it is not a scholarship jacket, but something with much less meaning.

There are many students who have worked hard over the past 8 years, but there is only one student who outshines all the others. It is to this student that has already EARNED the jacket that we must award the jacket to; with no strings attached. This student Martha Ramirez. Martha has not only excelled in school, but has gone above and beyond in her efforts to achieve. I know her personally and her family as well; she is honest, trustworthy, hardworking and determined. It would be an act of dishonesty not to award her the Scholarship Jacket, and I could not condone that action.
My appeal to the board is that we must continue with the Scholarship Jacket tradition and award the student who has earned it, and not base the award on any other parameters.

Sincerely,
Principal Jones

Eleanor's Raft Assignment
October 24th, 2012

Role: Grandpa
Audience: Self
Format: Inner monologue
Topic: Frustration over the concept of earning something

"What is happening to people? When did the idea of "earning" something disappear and get replaced with buying what you want? Ridiculous. Why would Marta even ask me to pay for such a thing? Damn weeds. Something isn't right. The school should know better than to ask a child to pay $15 dollars for something that they call a "scholarship" jacket. Do they not even understand the words that they use? Humph, and they call themselves educators. What are they trying to teach – That you can work and work for something but in the end your work doesn't count for anything? Only your money? However true that may be in this life, I don't like the lesson… They *must* know what they're doing. I bet this is just another way to honor some over-recognized kid and sort out folks like us." He pauses a moment to survey the land around him while he rests his weather-cracked hands on the worn handle of the hoe. His eyes squint as he wipes sweat from his brow and looks back toward the house.

"Marta… She doesn't need a jacket to know that she's done well. She must already know that. *I've* never had such a thing but I still feel proud of my work. Or at least I will when these damn weeds are gone and my beans grow. Why does she need this? I don't know, maybe I should give her the money... It must mean a lot to her; she never asks for things and she was nervous today. No. She is a smart girl. She knows what it means to earn something. She knows that she deserves it, that *we* know she deserves it, that we're proud of her. She knows." He bends low at the waist to inspect the ground and returns to the never-ending task before him.

Beyond *Celebrating Diversity*:
Twenty Things I Can Do to Be
a Better Multicultural Educator

by Paul C. Gorski <gorski@edchange.org>
for EdChange <http://www.edchange.org>
Revised September 18, 2010

1. I can learn to pronounce each student's full name correctly. No student should feel the need to shorten or change her or his name in order to make it easier for me or anyone else to pronounce it. Being sure that I do not contribute to a student feeling she or he needs to do so is the first step toward being inclusive.

2. I can sacrifice the safety of my comfort zone by building a process for continually assessing, reflecting upon, and challenging my biases, prejudices, and socializations and how they influence my expectations for, and relationships with, each student, family, and colleague.

3. I can review all learning materials, ensuring that they are free of bias whether in implicit or explicit forms. When I find bias in required materials, I can commit to encouraging students to recognize and analyze it.

4. I can learn, and teach about, the ways people in the subject areas I teach have used their knowledge to advocate for either justice or injustice.

5. I can reject deficit ideology—the temptation to identity the problem of outcome inequalities (such as test scores) as *existing within* rather than as *pressing upon* disenfranchised communities. I will always keep in mind that such disparities do not result from supposed deficiencies in disenfranchised communities, but usually are, instead, symptoms of systemic educational and social conditions. This means, as well, that I must find solutions to these problems that focus, not on "fixing" disenfranchised communities, but on fixing those conditions and practices which disenfranchise communities.

6. I can teach about critical multicultural issues such as racism, sexism, poverty, and heterosexism. And despite false perceptions that younger students are not "ready" for these conversations, I will begin doing so at the youngest ages because students from disenfranchised communities already are experiencing these problems, and witnessing their parents or guardians experiencing them, at the youngest ages.

7. I can understand the relationship between *intent* and *impact*. Often, and particularly when I'm in a situation in which I experience some level of privilege, I have the luxury of referring and responding only to what I have intended, regardless of the impact I've had on somebody. I must take responsibility for and learn from my impact because most individual-level oppression is unintentional. But unintentional

oppression hurts just as much as intentional oppression.

8. I can reject the myth of color-blindness. As uncomfortable as it may be to admit, I know that I react differently when I'm in a room full of people who share many dimensions of my identity than when I'm in a room full of people who are very different from me. I must be open and honest about this reality, because those shifts inevitably inform the experiences of people in my classes. In addition, color-blindness denies people validation of their whole person.

9. I can keep in mind that some students do not enjoy the same level of access to educational materials and resources, such as computers and the Internet, as other students. I will be thoughtful, therefore, about how I assign homework.

10. I can build coalitions with teachers who are different from me in terms of race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, home language, class, (dis)ability, and so on. These can be valuable relationships for feedback and collaborative problem-solving. At the same time, though, I must not rely on other people to identify my weaknesses. In particular, in the areas of my identity through which I experience privilege, I must not rely on people from disenfranchised groups to teach me how to improve myself (which is, in and of itself, a practice of privilege).

11. I can improve my skills as a facilitator, so when issues such as racism and heterosexism arise in the classroom, I can take advantage of the resulting educational opportunities.

12. I can elicit anonymous feedback from my students and, when I do, I can model a willingness to be changed by their presence to the same extent they are changed by mine.

13. I can avoid *essentializing* students from identity groups different from my own. Despite the popularity of workshops and literature that suggest that we need to know only one dimension of a student's identity in order to know her or his learning needs, culture, and proclivities, such a position is dangerously simplistic. Similarly, despite popular belief, there is no such thing as a singular, predictable "culture of poverty" or Asian culture. All girls and women do not share a single learning style. One's racial identity is not a reasonable predictor of her or his learning preferences or competencies. I will refuse these simplifications and focus, instead, on individual students' interests and needs.

14. I can offer an integrated multicultural curriculum, not just during special months or celebrations, but all year, every day.

15. I can understand inequity, not just as an interpersonal issue, but as a systemic issue. Although I might not consider the fight against global sexism or world poverty as within my purview, part of understanding students is understanding the ways in

which conditions and inequities within the education system itself affect them.

16. I can encourage my students to think critically and ask critical questions about all of the information they receive, including that which they receive from me.

17. I can challenge myself to take personal responsibility before looking for fault elsewhere. For example, if I have one student who is falling behind or being disruptive, I will consider what I am doing or not doing that might be contributing to their disengagement before problematizing their behavior or effort.

18. I can work to ensure that students from disenfranchised communities are not placed unjustly into lower academic tracks. I can fight, as well, to get them into gifted and talented programs. Better yet, considering that two decades of research demonstrate that tracking benefits only the five percent of highest achievers, I can fight tracking altogether.

19. I can fight for equity for *all* underrepresented or disenfranchised students. Equity is not a game of choice; if I am to claim that I am committed to education equity, I do not have the luxury of choosing who does or does not have access to it. For example, I cannot fight effectively for racial equity while I fail to confront gender inequity. And I never can be a real advocate for gender equity if I duck the responsibility for ensuring equity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students. When I find myself justifying my inattention to any group of disenfranchised students due to the worldview or value system into which I was socialized, I know that it is time to reevaluate that worldview or value system.

20. I can *celebrate* myself as an educator. I can, and should, also celebrate every moment I spend in self-reflection regarding my practice, however challenging, because it will make me a better educator. And *that* is something to celebrate!