

# WALKING THE TALK: THE PRACTICES AND INFLUENCES OF EIGHT CRITICAL P-12 EDUCATORS

by

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(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative in-depth interview study's purpose was to explore what influenced eight experienced P-12 critical educators across the United States to teach for social justice and how these influences might inform teacher education. Starting with an examination of the critical pedagogical practices these teachers enact, this study traced backward participants' prior life experiences and teacher preparation experiences leading them to teach critically. The study made two arguments: 1) in spite of the pressure to teach students to read the word (content knowledge) without reading the world (the sociopolitical context of the learner), critical educators must teach the word through the world, 2) and what enables critical educators to teach for social justice is a combination of radicalizing events, networks, and mentors.

Eight critical P-12 educators from various regions of the United States who had previously published about their critical teaching practice participated in the study. Following Seidman (2006), the researcher conducted a series of three in-depth life history interviews with each participant, the first two on location at participants' schools, homes, and nearby cafés, and the third by telephone. The researcher analyzed data using an inductive, thematic analysis, guided by a Freirean theoretical framework of critical pedagogy.

The study concluded that critical educators teach their students by connecting the standard curriculum both to students' lives and to a broader sociopolitical analysis that situates individual issues within a framework of power relations. These educators help their students read the world in order to transform it through having them take agentic positions in the classroom and take action in their school and community. The biggest influences on these critical educators were global and local events that radicalized them, progressive social and professional networks, and radicalizing mentors. These findings have implications for critical pedagogy and teacher education—namely, that teacher education programs need to better connect to activist organizations and mentors who demonstrate a commitment to social justice, as well as rethink admission and recruitment processes to increase the number of candidates already committed to critical pedagogy and social justice education.

INDEX WORDS: Critical Pedagogy, Social Justice, Teachers, Teacher Education, Interviews, Elementary Secondary Education, Teaching Methods, Social Change

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EDUCATORS

by

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

P-12 education in the United States has the potential to improve the lives of 53 million children, help students become active participants in a democracy, and serve as a means of achieving greater equity and justice in society. However, indicators in major areas of society affected by P-12 education show just the opposite. While some students show gains in standardized test scores and some schools and districts show decreasing performance gaps between various demographic student groups, fewer students are prepared for the job market (Council on Competitiveness, 2004; NCEE, 2007), the school curriculum increasingly emphasizes discrete facts over deep understanding (NCEE, 2007), K-12 racial gaps persist (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006; NCES, 2009), fewer Americans participate civically in society (Glickman, 2003; National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2000), and there is greater disparity between socioeconomic classes in the United States (Feller & Stone, 2009; Mishel, 2006)—with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

While most educators in U.S. schools wittingly or unwittingly reproduce the status quo (Darder, 2002; Freire, 2004), a small group of P-12 teachers critiques the detrimental effects of business as usual, teaching all of their students to be problem-solvers, independent and critical thinkers, creative innovators, democratic collaborators, and politically active citizens. These teachers who embrace teaching from a framework of “critical pedagogy,” may offer teacher educators and educational researchers insight into what it takes to enact a progressive, democratic vision of education and society. In this study I trace critical pedagogical practices teachers use that they feel contribute to their students’ success, and explore with them life experiences that shaped how they teach.

The following subsections—economic disparity, civic participation, gaps in academic achievement, fewer students prepared for the job market—describe in more detail the background of trends in U.S. society and U.S. schools that have implications for literacy educators and teacher educators in the United States.

### **Economic Disparity**

Citing updated data on U.S. income inequality by Piketty and Saez (see Piketty & Saez, 2003), Aron-Dine (2007, pp. 1-2) states that the new data show:

- Between 2004 and 2005, *the average income of the highest-income 1 percent of households increased by \$119,000, after adjusting for inflation. The average income of the bottom 90 percent of households increased by about \$550.*
- The jump in income concentration in 2005 brought the percentage of income going to the top 1 percent of households to its highest level since 1929.
- The large jump in income concentration reflects another year of very uneven income gains. From 2004 to 2005, the average incomes of the bottom 90 percent

of households grew by less than 2 percent, after adjusting for inflation. In contrast, the average income of the top 1 percent of households experienced a jump of nearly 14 percent, after adjusting for inflation.

- *The top 1 percent of households* (those with annual incomes above about \$350,000 in 2005) *garnered 47 percent—nearly half—of the total gains in 2005.* More than two thirds of total income gains accrued to those in the top decile (the highest-income 10 percent) of the income scale. Less than one third of total income gains went to the bottom 90 percent of households.

Income gains were even more pronounced among those with even higher incomes. The incomes of the top one-tenth of 1 percent (0.1 percent) of households grew more rapidly than the incomes of the top 1 percent of households. The share of national income received by the top one-tenth of 1 percent of households increased by 1.0 percentage point from 2004 to 2005 and was as high as in 2000, when it reached its highest level since 1929.

In 2005, an average Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was paid 821 times as much as a minimum wage earner, who earns just \$5.15 per hour. An average CEO earns more before lunchtime on the very first day of work in the year than a minimum wage worker earns all year. However, this ratio was not always so extreme; as recently as 1978, CEOs were paid only 78 times as much as minimum wage earners (Mishel, 2006, June 27). If we compare average CEO pay to average worker pay (rather than minimum wage), we see similar disparities. In 2005, the average CEO in the United States earned 262 times the pay of the average worker, the second-highest level of this ratio in the 40 years for which there are data. In 2005, a CEO earned more in one workday (there are 260 in a year) than an average worker earned in 52 weeks (Mishel, 2006, June 21).

The last three decades have been relatively prosperous times for top U.S. executives. This can be seen by examining the increased divergence between CEO pay and an average worker's pay over time. In 1965, for example, U.S. CEOs in major companies earned 24 times more than an average worker; this ratio grew to 35 in 1978 and to 71 in 1989. The ratio surged in the 1990s and hit 300 at the end of the recovery in 2000. The fall in the stock market reduced CEO stock-related pay (e.g., options) causing CEO pay to moderate to 143 times that of an average worker in 2002. Since then, however, CEO pay has exploded and by 2005 the average CEO was paid \$10,982,000 a year, or 262 times that of an average worker (\$41,861) (Mishel, 2006, June 21)

“Compared to the full-employment job market of the latter 1990s, the weaker post-2000 labor market has reversed significant progress in racial income gaps” (Bernstein, 2006, July 5). Bernstein found that racial income gaps between African-American and White families had decreased from 60.9% in 1995 to 63.5% in 2000. However, more recent data show that since the economic recession in the early 2000s, the gap has further widened, with the median income of African-American households at 62.0% of the median income of White households. Bernstein says of the data, “The finding suggests that unless the very favorable labor market conditions of the latter 1990s return and are maintained, racial income gaps are likely to widen further” (Bernstein, 2006, July 5).

Garner and Short, economists working with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau respectively, followed the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) determination that “the official U.S. Poverty measure is outdated, given the changes in U.S. society and in government policies” (Garner & Short, 2008, p. 2). Based on the NAS' recommendations, the authors revised the procedures for measuring poverty, using a starting threshold “for a reference family with particular characteristics,” one that “accounts for food, clothing, shelter, and

utilities” as well as medical care (p. 3). Garner & Short’s revised statistics put the 2005 poverty rate at 17.7 percent of the total U.S. population. Poverty rates (as percentages of U.S.

population), disaggregated by specific demographic groups are as follows:

- Children: 21.1%
- Non-elderly adults: 15.5%
- Elderly adults: 21.5%
- White: 15.2%
- Black: 31.9%

(p. 34)

As these data show, income disparity between rich and poor continues to grow, with the richest Americans earning progressively more and more while the proportion of people in poverty increases.

### **Civic Participation**

At the dawn of the 21st century, America faces a civic crisis...many Americans fail to see the connection between political participation and the nation’s well being. However, without strong habits of social and political participation, the world’s longest and most successful experiment in democracy is at risk of losing the very norms, networks, and institutions of civic life that have made us the most emulated and respected nation in history. The reversal of this downward spiral is critical to the civic and social health of our nation. (Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2000, p. 3)

In their 2006 report, *Broken Engagement: America’s Civic Health Index*, the National Conference on Citizenship found that “while there are some signs of civic recovery in the last few years, our civic health shows steep declines over the last 30 years” (p. 4). The authors argue

that their findings are consistent with other civic participation studies and reports, such as the 1998 blue-ribbon National Commission on Civic Renewal, which found that “America was turning into a ‘nation of spectators’ rather than the active participants that our democracy requires” (p. 4). One of the biggest divides, the conference found, was between the well-educated and less educated. Since 1999, gaps between college graduates and people without college degrees or high school diplomas have widened significantly, 9-17 percentage points. College graduates are much more likely to vote, volunteer in their communities, read newspapers, trust one another and key institutions, and participate in civic groups (pp. 10-11).

Among the general population, trust in one another is down (National Conference on Citizenship, 2006, p. 15). In the Index, trust is measured three ways: whether people are viewed as “honest,” as “helpful,” and whether they “can be trusted” (p. 15). Since 1975, trust in others has steadily declined. As the conference argued, “trust facilitates the ease with which we conduct the daily work of democracy—person-to-person, citizen-to-citizen transactions and collaboration. Without trust it is difficult for members of a community to get together and solve pressing community problems” (p. 16). Lack of trust in others has implications for education in a country that year-by-year grows increasingly racially and ethnically diverse and in which there is a large gap in background between teachers and students.

Carl Glickman and others, in a piece posted on The Forum for Education and Democracy’s blog (Glickman et al., 2008), argued that “the faltering participation gap and the stagnating intellectual achievement gap in America” are related issues and that to address them requires working on both the purposes of democracy and the practices of education. Glickman and colleagues stated that there are strong indicators that participatory democracy in America “is in a state of grave decline.”

While some hope for civic renewal remains, overall Americans participate less and less in civic affairs, indicating poor civic and democratic health in this new millennium.

### **Gaps in Academic Achievement**

Poverty statistics and graduation rates indicate disparities between White Americans and people of color in the U.S. Similar gaps appear when examining data on K-12 student academic achievement in schools (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006).

According to 2007 NAEP Reading data, 77% of White 4<sup>th</sup> graders scored in the “At or Above Basic” category, while only 46% of Black students and 49% of Hispanic students scored at that level. While 79% of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students not eligible for free and reduced-price lunch scored At or Above Basic in 2007, only 50% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders who were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch scored at this level. Similarly, when we look at 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading statistics, we find that 83% of White students scored At or Above Basic, while only 54% of Black students did, and only 57% of Hispanics did. 82% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students not eligible for free and reduced-price lunch scored At or Above Basic, while only 58% of those eligible scored at this level.

These data show clear disparities in achievement along race and social class lines when Black, Hispanic, and low-income students score around 25 percentage points lower than their White, middle and upper income peers.

### **Fewer Students Prepared for Job Market**

“Innovation will be the single most factor in determining America’s success through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” reported the Council on Competitiveness (2004), a coalition committed to “the future prosperity of all Americans and enhanced U.S. competitiveness in the global economy through the creation of high-value economic activity in the United States”



(<http://www.compete.org/about-us>). In order for the U.S. to remain competitive in international markets, according to the Council on Competitiveness, we must optimize our entire society for innovation, for innovation and creativity are the keys to differentiating our workforce from cheaper labor overseas.

Similarly, the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE, 2007) reported that in order for the United States to hang on to its standard of living, creativity, innovation, and flexibility will be demanded of everyone (pp. 23-24). But our current education system is not designed for this task:

Our accountability tests ask students to identify the one right answer from a lost of possible answers to the test question. That is, literally, the answer in the box. But what we need is the out-of-the-box answer, the one that did not occur to the framer of the test... Thus, the typical curriculum as experienced by the student is inimical to the development of strong, creative abilities. (p. 30)

According to NCEE, what is needed is a curriculum that prioritizes synthesis over analysis, complexity of tasks, abstract ideas, emphasis on teamwork and collaboration, strong literacy skills including writing, and mathematical reasoning.

Across the political continuum, analysts, think tanks, and policy-makers are calling for schools to foster creativity, innovation, and independent and critical thinking, skills and dispositions that carry low weight in today's high-stakes testing climate with its focus on multiple-choice learning and assessment.

What I have tried to show with these social indicators and statistics is that economically, civically, and academically, there are social inequities that must be addressed if our society is to flourish as a democracy with full participation by all its members—inequities that fall within the

control of K-12 education and schools. A business as usual approach to teaching perpetuates—and may even exacerbate—such inequities. Many teachers, particularly those employing a critical political stance, seek to address these inequities through their teaching practice. In this study, I refer to such teachers as employing “critical pedagogy” or “teaching for social justice,” often using such descriptors interchangeably. Let us explore these ideas more fully as we turn now to the theoretical positioning that situates this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As we have seen, disparities between certain groups of people in the United States continue to grow, exacerbating inequalities and social stratification along lines of class, race, and gender, among others. In this section I offer a theoretical framework that addresses such inequalities.

To close academic achievement gaps and improve high school graduation rates, many educators have adopted a neoliberal theoretical stance that applies the rules of the market to the educational sphere. According to this view, the value that a teacher brings to the classroom is based on how much content knowledge her students absorb during the school year, as measured on high-stakes standardized tests published by select textbook companies such as McGraw Hill. Using rhetoric borrowed from civil rights and a focus on students ignored by schools and districts, the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) opened the door for neoliberal market-based reforms such as privatization, charter schools, and lucrative packaged curricula and instructional “interventions” designed for the various subordinated subgroups defined in the legislation. With increasingly difficult student achievement benchmarks designed to bring all students to grade-level proficiency by 2014, NCLB established failing schools in need of profit-driven interventions and reforms restricted to a limited set of “scientifically-based” approaches.

In so doing, American education combined neoliberal politics with a view of teaching as technical work.

Like the neoliberal reformers, teachers embracing critical pedagogy share the aim of closing academic achievement gaps between rich and poor students and between White children and students of color (Cochran-Smith, 2004), but their approach toward education is different. Critical pedagogues (often referred to in this study simply as *critical educators*) see education as a vehicle for achieving social justice, and they start out by examining and building upon the sociocultural contexts of their learners rather than assuming a tabula rasa that needs to be filled with measurable content knowledge. They use their knowledge of their students' interests and funds of knowledge to develop instruction that is culturally relevant and meaningful to their kids, and they teach their students to be active participants in a democracy.

Various scholar/researchers (e.g. Bredo, 2007; Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kamberelis & Dimetriadis, 2005; Lather, 1991) have created typologies or constructs for categorizing theoretical research orientations. While the present study draws upon the emancipatory (Lather, 1991) work of critical pedagogy, it also moves beyond essentialist notions of power to view knowledge and ideology as *effects* of power and to enumerate various possible moves teachers make within available discourses.

“Critical pedagogy considers how education can provide individuals with the tools to better themselves and strengthen democracy, to create a more egalitarian and just society, and thus to deploy education in a process of progressive social change” (Kellner, 2000, p. 196). Teachers who enact critical pedagogy “are united in their objectives to empower the marginalized and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (Morrell, 2004, p. 21). Critical pedagogy seeks to unmask and overcome the reproduction of power asymmetries in

schools by empowering students to be critically conscious, as Peter McLaren (1995) maintained: "The fundamental commitment of critical educators is to empower the powerless and transform those conditions which perpetuate human injustice and inequity."

Paulo Freire (2004) argued that "one of the foremost tasks for a radical and liberating critical pedagogy is to clarify the legitimacy of the ethical political dream of overcoming unjust reality" (p. 19). The growing disparities mentioned in the opening section of this paper constitute an unjust reality as Freire described. What Freire and other critical educators suggest is that instead of viewing education as mere technical training, a reductionist incarnation of the banking/transmission/delivery approach (see Freire, 1970/2005), the serious progressive educator must, in addition to teaching her or his discipline well, challenge the learner to think critically through the social, historical, and political reality within which s/he exists. Freire's contemporaries (e.g. Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1994; Macedo, 2006; and Shor, 1992; 1996) argue similar points, that it is not enough merely to teach the word (i.e literacy) without also teaching the world (the socio-historical-political context of the learner).

The role of education is inherently ethical and political, and educators have a duty to work toward humanizing principles in the face of neoliberal global ethics of the market (Freire, 1997). Given global capital's duty constantly to maximize profits for corporate shareholders, its ethics rest upon increasing the bottom line without regard to impacts on nonshareholders, or the vast majority of the population. Increasingly, schools are operated according to the technical rationality of the market, with an emphasis on efficiency and productivity. Efforts to quantify learning through multiple choice tests, reduce teaching to a series of finite methods or best practices, and narrow of the curriculum to those subjects with international cultural capital such

as science and math are all components of a corporate ideology against which the critically-conscious educator must operate.

Theoretical stances toward education such as this one attempt to explain connections between widening gaps in economic, civic, and academic participation in U.S. society and actual practices in schools. According to this theoretical model, to reverse the negative inequitable effects of neoliberal global ideologies on education, teachers empower themselves and their students to resist the dominant curriculum and its hegemonic effects.

### **Journal-Ready Dissertation Format**

The structure of this dissertation deviates slightly from a more traditional five-chapter dissertation. This introductory chapter, along with a second chapter that offers a literature review defining the objectives of the research as well as my research methodology, set up the study. Following these two introductory chapters are three findings and implications chapters written as journal manuscripts ready to be submitted for publication, described briefly below. A short concluding chapter explores what I have learned from the dissertation process that will inform my work in academia as an assistant professor.

In Chapter 3, “Reading the World to Take Action: How Eight Teachers Enact Critical Pedagogy,” I explore how in an educational climate that rewards teaching students to read the word without teaching them to read the world, critical educators not only teach their students to read the world or engage in a sociopolitical analysis but also teach them to intervene in it.

In Chapter 4, “Walking the Talk: The Influences on Eight Critical P-12 Educators,” I use findings from life-history interviews of eight critical educators to offer other critical educators ways to maintain their critical work. We explore themes of what influenced these teachers to

teach critically: politicization through global and local events, forming and joining social and professional networks, and learning from near and distant mentors.

In Chapter 5, “Incubating and Sustaining: How Teacher Networks Enable and Support Critical Pedagogy,” I argue that it is imperative for teacher educators to use social justice networks to recruit prospective teachers and to help existing teacher candidates form and connect with networks.

Finally, in Chapter 6, "Moving Forward," I examine how the process of engaging in this dissertation research will inform my work in academia. Specifically, I look at the how what I have learned will impact my teaching, advising, and research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While critical pedagogy and social justice education may offer hope in disrupting status quo inequities in United States schools and society, there has been very little research that ties such teaching either forward to student outcomes or backward to the content of teacher preparation programs.

Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004), in their review of research on multicultural teacher education, asserted that

A promising way to develop the missing program of research in multicultural teacher education is through studies that map forward from teacher preparation to student outcomes, as well as those that map backward from successful outcomes for students to quality and kind of teacher preparation. Studies that map forward from initial teacher preparation would feature longitudinal designs that follow up on the experiences, successes, and problems and failures of new teachers who have been prepared in various ways as they embark (or not) on teaching careers. They would also track teachers' performances in diverse settings over some part of the professional life span. Studies that map backward from successful teaching in diverse settings would begin with successful classroom practice and trace the connections back to teacher learning experiences and varying modes of teacher preparation. (p. 966)

They went on to discuss the importance of defining “good teaching” or “successful practice” in guiding the research, cautioning against relying solely on either students' high-stakes test scores or on positive evaluations from administrators, colleagues, and parents. Both of these are

necessary components of a definition of success, as well as the two additional components of classroom pedagogy that is based on curriculum and teaching standards in the various subject matter areas, and social activism and participation in “community and professional movements for social change” (p. 967). Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries situated their literature review in terms of the “strikingly different racial, cultural, and linguistic profiles of the nation’s student and teaching populations,” (p. 931), arguing that the demographic split between students and teachers in the United States, the “demographic imperative,” strongly affects how teachers should be prepared. While my proposed study does not explicitly focus on multicultural education, it is situated in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century American schools, where 87% of the nation’s teachers are White and 44% of K-12 students are children of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a; U.S. Department of Education, 2009b).

Similar to Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries (2004), Christine Sleeter’s 2001 review of literature on epistemologically-diverse research studies addressing preparing preservice teachers for historically underserved children concluded with a suggested research agenda advocating backwards mapping from successful practice to teacher preparation: “Who are the successful teachers of children in multicultural schools, what do they do in the classroom that makes them successful, where do they come from, and how were they trained?” (p. 242). Sleeter proposed that to answer such questions, “we should start with the question of what good teachers look like and then work backward” (p. 242). Again, Sleeter situates her work in terms of “teachers of children in multicultural schools.”

In another literature review of teacher education studies focused on preparing teachers for diverse school settings, Rosa Hernández Sheets (2003) concluded that in spite of decades of



research on ethnic studies and multiethnic education, antiracist education, critical pedagogy, and Critical Race Theory,

We have not demonstrated the capacity to educate a professorate who can prepare preservice candidates to succeed in diverse settings, nor have we developed teacher preparation programs that understand how to select programmatic content, experiences, and strategies needed to help teachers develop from novice to expert levels and to apply cultural and language dimensions to curriculum and practice. (p. 117)

Sheets argued that while teacher education programs have been successful in instilling hope and inspiration in preservice teachers, they need greater accountability to improving equitable outcomes for students. Arguing that the body of diversity work—which for Sheets includes critical pedagogy—“seldom focuses on exploring the actual ways a particular ideology improves the achievement of children” (p. 113), Sheets cited numerous examples of studies showing the failure of university course content to effect change in teacher competence and ultimately, student learning.

Like Sheets, Zeichner (2005) made a similar argument after participating in the four year work of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education. While much of the existing research on teacher education components focused on teacher *beliefs and attitudes*, what is needed is more work on teachers’ *knowledge and practices*, particularly how they are influenced by what teachers experience in teacher education programs and how they are affected over time (Zeichner, 2005, p. 742). In other words, studies of teachers need to map backward to preparation, and teacher preparation studies need to map forward, especially in longitudinal ways, to current teacher practice. Zeichner also found in his review that a critical outcome that has been largely ignored in teacher education research is student learning (p. 743). But Zeichner

cautioned that “in doing so, researchers need to explore measures of other aspects of academic student learning in addition to that which is assessed in standardized achievement tests,” and that we need to expand our gaze upon student performance beyond cognitive measures, to include “other aspects of student learning such as students’ social, emotional, aesthetic, and civic development” (p. 743).

These syntheses of literature on teacher preparation indicate the need for more research that connects the three domains of teacher preparation, teacher practice, and impacts on students. Studies are needed that map forward and backward between these domains, strengthening the ability of teacher preparation programs to prepare effective teachers for 21<sup>st</sup> century American schools. In this study, I attempt to address the need identified in these major research syntheses by starting with currently practicing teachers who have managed to challenge social inequities as described earlier in this paper. I look backward with these teachers to identify personal and professional experiences that influenced how they teach today. What is different from previous studies is that my study focuses specifically on critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice, attempting to trace these practices forward to students and backward to life experiences through interviews with teachers working in multicultural schools. Before we explore my study in more detail, let us look at other interview studies with teachers who enact critical pedagogy.

### **Research on Critical Pedagogy and Teaching for Social Justice**

There has been limited educational research on teachers engaging in critical pedagogy that maps backward, as reviewers of educational research have called for. In this section, I describe one particular study on critical pedagogy that links teacher practices to student outcomes and/or teacher preparation, and I mention a few others that also focused on critical pedagogy through the use of life history methods.

## **Duncan-Andrade**

Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2007) was invited to Los Angeles to design, implement, and study a three-year program that would develop and support urban teachers committed to issues of social justice. In 2002 the program started by developing three critical inquiry groups of 6-8 teachers, two in secondary grades (6-12) and one in elementary grades (K-5). At the end of the second year, Duncan-Andrade identified four teachers from the groups who had distinguished themselves as exceptional teachers of urban students using both traditional criteria (test scores, grades, college plans) and critical pedagogy standards (critique of structural inequality and oppression, critical reading of the word and their world, individual and collective agency for social change). Duncan-Andrade developed case studies of these four participants, upon which the 2007 piece was written.

Using the concept of *cariño*, or “caring”—borrowed from Angela Valenzuela—Duncan-Andrade set out to produce non-exploitative research that focused on “giving more to the research site than [he] took from it” (p. 619). The idea was to democratize research and knowledge production so that after the researcher left, there would remain “a sense of hope and promise, one that is directly tied to the participants’ sense of themselves as capable change agents” (p. 619). Duncan-Andrade articulated three research questions for the study:

- How is it possible that a few teachers are successful in schools where most are failing to reach their students?
- What are the identifiable strategies and conditions that make these teachers more highly qualified than their counterparts?
- How can other teachers learn from these successes to develop similarly effective practices? (p. 620)

Reviewing the literature on effective teaching, Duncan-Andrade (2007) noted that “the field of urban education lacks sufficient studies of effective pedagogy and its relationship to increased engagement, achievement, and student transformative agency” (p. 621). While there are several studies that offer grounded examples of successful teaching practices for low-income students of color, according to Duncan-Andrade, missing are comprehensive studies showing that such pedagogy increases student achievement while at the same time providing students with the tools “to effectively navigate in and transform the larger society” (p. 621). In other words, there is a need for more studies that link teaching practices to outcomes, particularly outcomes measured both in traditional indicators of achievement as well as student agency and hope. Duncan-Andrade’s (2007) study aimed to address this need.

After two years of working with teachers who adopted critical pedagogies, Duncan-Andrade observed five characteristics or pillars that successful teachers of urban students had in common: critically conscious purpose, duty, preparation, Socratic sensibility, and trust. Let us examine each pillar individually.

**Critically conscious purpose.** Effective teachers of urban students teach because they believe that their students, specifically low-income children of color, are the group most likely to change the world. Such children have the least to lose and are thus most likely to take the risks necessary to change a society. But these students are also the ones most likely to struggle in traditional classrooms and need teachers with understandings of such things as the history of the communities where students live and critical awareness and analyses of structural and material inequities. Successful teachers foster in their students an understanding that the pedagogy and curriculum they offer is a part of a path to freedom—that students will be able to think critically

for themselves and their community. These teachers build intellectually rigorous lessons that are relevant to the real and immediate conditions of students' lived worlds.

**Duty.** Borrowing a distinction from Carter G. Woodson between people who fashion themselves as leaders and people who perceive themselves as responsible for serving the community, Duncan-Andrade (2007) says that successful urban teachers see themselves as members of the communities where they teach and their students also as community members that they cannot simply disregard. Moreover, Duncan-Andrade enumerated a list of traits that successful teachers possessed:

- They jumped at the chance to work with 'challenging' students.
- They were risk-takers with students, with their curriculum, and with their pedagogy.
- They described their access to students as a privilege, rather than as a 'right' of their profession.
- They genuinely wanted to be at the school and with students, even when their school attacked them personally or the broader society belittled their profession.
- They were not afraid of the community and consequently built relationships with parents, siblings, families, and the broader community.
- They described teaching in urban schools as 'a way of life' rather than as a job.
- They associated their teaching with 'the struggle' for human dignity and justice.
- They described being a teacher as 'who I am, not what I do'. (p. 628)

Overall, all of these teachers were committed to a consistent presence in the school community, something teachers saw as solidarity with their students as opposed to empathy.

**Preparation.** The teachers Duncan-Andrade (2007) studied were at or near the top of their schools in student achievement, despite having students that their colleagues had forced out

of their classrooms. But even though achievement data suggest that these were already excellent teachers, participants in the study “spent a tremendous amount of time preparing for their classes” (p. 629). In fact, when asked to give an amount of time spent preparing, none of the teachers could quantify it, saying that they could not really identify a time when they were not preparing for their teaching in some form or another. Several participants mentioned that their teachers when growing up had modeled this same level of preparation. Duncan-Andrade noted that in the three years spent observing these successful teachers, “there was virtually no part of their teaching that was not subject to revision or total discard” (p. 630). Even when scheduled to teach the same material year after year, effective teachers would rethink curriculum units from top to bottom before reteaching them. They spent countless hours adapting the standard curriculum to make it real and relevant for students. They constantly sought out new professional development opportunities.

**Socratic sensibility.** Successful teachers understand the Socratic notion that the unexamined life is not worth living, as well as Malcolm X’s statement that the examined life is painful. As Freire (1970/2005) argued, both action and reflection are necessary to overcome the oppression of people in society, and teacher and student must work together in dialectical solidarity toward humanization. Successful teachers engage in both action and reflection, or praxis, as they strike a balance between confidence in their ability as teachers and frequent self-critique. They understand their dialogic duty “to connect their pedagogy to the harsh realities of poor, urban communities” (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 632). This sensibility is exemplified by a teacher whose students dealt with a community drive-by shooting and the ensuing class discussions and action afterward.

**Trust.** Effective teachers or urban students have a unique view of trust as something that must constantly be earned and re-earned from students. They understand that government institutions such as schools have a negative, colonial history in poor and non-White communities and that regardless of good intentions, teachers in such communities are ambassadors of the historical institutions. The teachers in Duncan-Andrade's study exemplified this trust because their activities did not permit them to give up on a student when his/her transformation was not as rapid as the teacher wanted. They saw their students as *their* children, not other people's children as Delpit (1995) wrote about. They inculcated the ethical humanization of their students, following Freire and Bourdieu. By giving students the tools to name their world, their students saw that the struggles in their lives were connected, creating a sense of trust and community in the classroom.

Duncan-Andrade identified two key factors that allowed trust to develop in successful teachers' classrooms. First, such teachers understood the difference between being liked and being loved. Because they set high expectations for their students and did not coddle them, these teachers demanded a commitment to learning from students characteristic of the love of a parent, what Irvine might call "warm demanding" (1998). The move from being liked to being loved happened because of the multiple forms of support offered by teachers to students, things like after-school and weekend tutoring, numerous meals, rides home, phone/text messaging, email/instant messaging sessions, and "endless prodding, cajoling, and all-around positive harassment" (p. 634). Another key factor in the development of trust was teachers' being indignant about student failure. They saw their students' failure as their own failure, while at the same time not relinquishing students from their responsibility. As Freire wrote, "education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is

abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world” (1970/2005, p. 81). For successful teachers of low-income students of color, failure was not seen as an option because of this inextricable connection between teacher and student. Moll (2005) referred to such trusting relationships as *confianza*, indicating the social obligation inherent from the moment a student enters a teacher’s class.

In the implications section of his paper, Duncan-Andrade (2007) drew the conclusion that successful teachers of urban students focus on the humanizing element of education, something that correlates with but is not directly measured by the achievement tests of No Child Left Behind. Specifically, Duncan-Andrade called attention to the humanizing outcomes of positive self-identity, purpose, and hope. While Duncan-Andrade’s study shows that all participants demonstrated these outcomes in their students, who came from low-income communities of color, Duncan-Andrade argued that such traits are commonly present in students from high-income White families:

The correlation between high parent income and success on achievement tests is well documented, as are the seemingly intractable relationships between race and test scores. It seems a plausible conclusion that no small part of those gaps is the result of the fact that most successful students enter school with a positive self-identity, a clear purpose for attending school, and a justifiable hope that school success will be rewarded in the larger society. (p. 635)

Duncan-Andrade concluded that low-income students of color could perform successfully in school if taught to have the same traits with which their more privileged peers entered school, thus outlining much of the role of the critical educator. Although teachers may not have control over the socioeconomic background of students who enter their classrooms, they do have control



over factors such as the five pillars Duncan-Andrade identifies, giving them the power to equip their students with the dispositions necessary to be successful in school and in society. Duncan-Andrade's study had a couple of attributes that made it unique among similar research: it empirically examined successful teachers who employed critical pedagogy and it developed theory to explain what dispositions led to success in teachers of urban students.

Duncan-Andrade's (2007) study begins to address the research gaps identified by Cochran-Smith, Zeichner, and others. However, much more work is needed, particularly work that traces successful teaching not only to teacher dispositions but also to early personal experiences as well as experiences in teacher preparation and university courses. In the present study, I attempt to address such needs.

### **Life History Studies on Critical Pedagogy**

When deciding to interview currently practicing teachers and map backward to their previous life experiences, it became evident to me that I would benefit from life history interviewing methods. I decided to review studies that used life history methods where the researcher interviewed teachers about critical pedagogy or teaching for social justice. In the remainder of this section, I look at several such studies.

Asking what happens when educators attempt to implement their understandings of critical pedagogy in practice, Tricia Niesz (2006) conducted an ethnographic study of an urban Philadelphia middle school. In it, Niesz focused on two White women teachers during an 18 month period, from January 1999 to June 2001, using participant observation, individual and focus group interviews, and document and artifact collection as data sources. Niesz found that while both of her participants enacted critical pedagogies in the classroom, they differed philosophically in their stance toward teaching, with one activist participant and one participant

who held deficit beliefs about students. Niesz noted the negative effects of appropriating critical pedagogical strategies when they become “divorced from the social critique from which they emerged” (p. 343). Niesz’s work was descriptive in nature, illuminating facets of critical teaching, but the focus was not on linking them backward to earlier life or teacher preparation experiences.

As part of a larger study “designed to investigate specific features of a multicultural preservice program that significantly developed the pedagogy of teachers,” Kezia McNeal (2005) used qualitative case study design to focus on the multicultural practices of two successful novice (4<sup>th</sup> year) secondary English teachers (p. 406). While the emphasis in this study was on “multicultural” education and not critical pedagogy or social justice education in particular, the larger study did make some attempt to trace successful classroom practices backward to teacher preparation. McNeal’s study offers insight into what it meant for one African-American female and one White female teacher to implement their “intended beliefs about multicultural education” (p. 414) in the classroom and some of the life history that participants felt influenced their current practices.

Amy S. Johnson (2007) used life history interviewing to focus on one particular teacher education student enrolled in an undergraduate teacher preparation program in the United States midwest. Part of a larger life history study with 10 preservice teachers, Johnson’s study attempted, among other things, to “understand better how preservice teachers’ early experiences supported and/or constrained them in developing an ethics toward teaching that is grounded in equity and social justice” (p. 300). Johnson traced an “ethics of access” theme in which her participant felt alienated from access to certain required literacy practices but did not explicitly

connect her feelings about education to the larger sociocultural context or map forward to what happened after she started teaching.

In an ethnographic case study of 12 novice Chicana teachers actively engaged in social justice issues, Montañó and Burstein (2006) traced their transition from college to the classroom. The researchers described what happened when teachers committed to “critical pedagogy, multicultural and antiracist education, and Chicano/a studies” (p. 169) entered the teaching profession. Montañó & Burstein set out to answer questions about how to provide the best support for teachers in the field, especially in what the teachers perceived to be a very restrictive teaching environment. Their findings included a realization that teachers and teacher educators must extend social justice work beyond the walls of the K-12 classroom:

If we consider it our moral obligation to retain social justice educators, we must first realize that the current culture in our schools does not allow our teachers to enact a social justice agenda. Therefore, it is our responsibility to establish ways for teachers to connect to other activist organizations and networks that will support their social justice work. (p. 186)

A unique feature of this study was that participants had decided *not* to return to teaching. The researchers turned their attention to identifying resources to help address attrition among critical educators teaching in an environment hostile to critical pedagogy.

In her ethnographic study of five African Canadian women teachers, Annette Henry (1998) used life-history interviews and participant observation to explore ways in which participants enacted “taking back control” in their classrooms. Borrowing an idea from singer-songwriter Delvina Bernard, Henry sought to understand how Black women teachers took back control of the education of Black children, given the legacy of colonialism, racism, and

patriarchy in Canadian schools. Like Montañó & Burstein, Henry identified barriers to engaging in critical pedagogies, particularly African-Centered ones, including the invisibility of Black girls.

Naomi Norquay (1999) explored stories of rebellion among six White female elementary school teachers in Toronto. Using a combination of individual and group interviews, Norquay gathered data about her participants to understand their stories of resistance that “tested the boundaries of the dominant norms and practices that shaped their gender subordination” (p. 420), like Passerini (1987), who used oral history research to explore how the present maps back onto the past in the stories people tell about their lives. While Norquay’s study assumed certain shared experiences among participants along gender lines, she was surprised to find that this commonality was disrupted by class differences. Although we learn about Norquay’s participants’ early histories, there is little information about their current teaching practices.

Marvin Lynn (2006) conducted life-history research with a young Black male middle school teacher in South Central Los Angeles. Part of a larger study of six Black male K-12 teachers, Lynn’ study used Critical Race Methodology and Portraiture to tell the story of his participant, Kashari, hoping to “utilize his own words to tell a story of hope, perseverance, and commitment to social justice” (p. 224). We see Kashari’s life from childhood through college and into adulthood and the struggles that he faced, although, again, the participant’s life history in this study is not explicitly connected to his current teaching practice.

What these studies have in common is a focus on teachers taking a critical, political stance toward teaching, whether it was focused on issues of racism, colonialism, critical literacy, or social justice defined in broader terms. Additionally, such studies employed research designs that relied on life history and other in-depth interviewing methods to describe how teachers teach

and some of the factors that led them to teach that way. While such studies do not explicitly map backward or map forward in the way Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries (2004) suggested, they do lay some groundwork for further studies that move beyond description to making such connections. They also lend credibility to in-depth, life history interviewing as a data collection method for answering research questions around what it means to teach for social justice.

Up to this point, we have seen statistics pointing to the need for teaching and education that addresses major social inequities such as income disparities, low graduation rates, particularly for low-income students of color, low participation in civic life, and gaps in academic achievement that negatively affect students with disabilities and low-income students of color. I identified critical pedagogy as a theoretical model that attempts to explain and address these social inequities. We have looked at several studies of teachers using critical pedagogy in their classrooms, noting that very few of them addressed the need for research that connects what the teacher is doing to what the students are learning and/or how the teacher was prepared in a university teacher education program.

Now let us turn our attention to my dissertation research, which was designed to study teachers adopting a critical stance as they seek to create a more democratic, socially just world. Let me define a few phrases and terms. “Critical” refers to a theoretical position that considers the social, historical, and political context in which pedagogical events and decisions are situated. If as a teacher I take a critical stance toward my assigned textbook, I examine what information the book contains, what it leaves out, whose interests it serves, and what other information or perspectives I should include besides solely relying on this one text to teach my students. By “democratic” I mean ways in which each teacher enacts specific instructional practices that foster student collaboration and decision-making and that give students both the

freedom to make choices and the responsibility for the choices they make. By “socially just” I mean specific pedagogical strategies that address inequities such as poverty and racism.

The following sections will address my research questions, methods of data collection, and other aspects of research design.

### **Research Methodology**

In this qualitative interview study, I wanted to find out about the kinds of pedagogical practices that critical P-12 educators were enacting as well as life experiences and teacher preparation experiences that influenced them to teach critically. I traveled to the schools and homes of eight critical educators across the United States to conduct in-depth life history interviews.

### **Research Questions**

In this study, I address the following questions:

1. How do critical educators describe their pedagogy?
2. How do they enact critical pedagogy in the classroom?
3. How do they feel these critical practices contribute to their students’ learning? How do they address inequities?
4. What life experiences have enabled teachers to adopt a critical stance in their classrooms?
5. In what way, if any, did their initial preparation or ongoing teacher education influence these teachers to teach critically?

### **Participant Selection**

My selection criteria for study participants included: (a) currently practicing educators in P-12 classrooms, (b) who enacted critical pedagogy, especially in English/Language Arts, (c) as evidenced by prior publication about their critical teaching practices, with (d) attention given to a

variety of geographic areas of the U.S., experience levels, race/ethnicity, and ages/grades taught. Using a purposeful and snowball sampling strategy (Patton, 2002), I identified participants through published works in edited books and journals about critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice as well as existing networks of critical educators such as National Writing Project and Rethinking Schools. A total of eight teachers participated, and all have given permission to use their real names and other identifiers (see Table 1, below).

Table 1. Participants' demographic information.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Grade Taught</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Years Teaching Experience</b>
Jennifer Aaron	New York, NY	Elementary	F	37	White/European American	12
Bill Bigelow	Portland, OR	High School	M	58	European American	30
Lisa Espinosa	Chicago, IL	Middle School	F	35	Latina	9
Mark Hansen	Portland, OR	Elementary	M	37	European American	10
Terry Moore	Tenafly, NJ	Elementary	M	59	Caucasian	33
Hyung Nam	Portland, OR	High School	M	41	Korean American	12
Ann Pelo	Seattle, WA	Preschool	F	45	White	20
Maria Sweeney	Ridgewood, NJ	Elementary	F	49	Irish/German/Yugoslavian American	25

### **Data Collection**

I conducted a series of three in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants for around 90 minutes per interview (see Seidman, 2006). For the first and second interviews, I traveled to participants' classrooms, homes, and nearby cafés so we could talk in person. The first interview focused on current teaching practices, as reported in this paper. The second interview addressed life history and other experiences leading teachers to teach critically, and the

third consisted of a member check in which participants reflected on transcripts and preliminary analysis of previous interviews, which they had been sent prior to the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed data using an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ezzy, 2002), guided by the research questions: (1) How do critical educators describe their pedagogy?, (2) How do they enact critical pedagogy in the classroom?, and (3) How do they feel these critical practices contribute to their students' learning and address inequities? This process started with my becoming familiar with the data by listening to the 16 first and second interview recordings several times as well as reviewing and re-reviewing my notes from the third interview to get a complete picture of the body of data. Then I transcribed the interview conversations, often listening to the audio-recordings several times to ensure the accuracy of my transcription. I generated initial codes and manually applied them throughout the transcripts.

Once I systematically applied initial codes to the data set, I grouped these codes into categories that cohered or clustered together I cut apart the entire data set and reorganized it by collating data items into categories. Next, I started to develop themes by collapsing categories into each other and judging for internal and external homogeneity (Patton, 2002). This was accomplished first by checking to see that all coded data extracts appeared to form a coherent pattern and second by rereading the entire data set and coding data extracts with the three identified themes to test them for accuracy. Then I cut apart this re-coded data set at the data extract level and physically reorganized by theme and sub-theme, which produced a visual thematic map of the entire data set. I reassessed this reworked map was then to ensure that the themes were not redundant and did not leave gaps.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **READING THE WORLD TO TAKE ACTION: HOW EIGHT TEACHERS ENACT CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

Abstract: In an educational climate that rewards teaching the word without teaching the world, this in-depth interview study explores ways in which critical P-12 educators in different regions of the United States not only teach their students to analyze their world through a structural, sociopolitical lens but also help them take action to intervene in it. After presenting participant data on how critical educators teach their students to analyze the world in order to transform it, the author examines implications for critical pedagogy.

P-12 education in the United States has the potential to improve the lives of 53 million children, help students become active participants in a democracy, and serve as a means of achieving greater equity and justice in society. However, indicators in major areas of society affected by P-12 education show just the opposite. While some students show gains in standardized test scores and some schools and districts show decreasing performance gaps between various demographic student groups, fewer students are prepared for the job market (Council on Competitiveness, 2004; NCEE, 2007), the school curriculum increasingly emphasizes discrete facts over deep understanding (NCEE, 2007), K-12 racial gaps persist (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006; NCES, 2009), fewer Americans participate civically in society (Glickman, 2003; National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2000), and there is

greater disparity between socioeconomic classes in the United States (Feller & Stone, 2009; Mishel, 2006)—with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

While most educators in U.S. schools wittingly or unwittingly reproduce the status quo (Darder, 2002; Freire, 2004), a small group of P-12 teachers critiques the detrimental effects of business as usual, teaching students to be problem-solvers, independent and critical thinkers, creative innovators, democratic collaborators, and politically active citizens. These teachers who enact critical pedagogy may offer other teachers insight into what it takes to embrace and sustain a progressive, democratic vision of education and society. In this article, I explore ways in which eight P-12 educators across the United States went beyond the simple depositing of curriculum into students' heads called for by the current high-stakes accountability movement and instead taught their children to "read the word through the world" as Paulo Freire (1997; Freire & Macedo, 1987) implored. I start by introducing the study participants and where they taught at the time of the study. Then I describe the methodology I used in collecting and analyzing data. Next, I present data from participants and connect it to theory about critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice. Finally, I argue that critical pedagogy is necessary to bring about the systemic change necessary to begin to overcome the inequitable conditions described above.

### **Reading the Word through the World**

After developing a literacy program in which he taught thousands of Brazilian peasants to read, Paulo Freire (1970/2005, 1972/2005, 1997; 2004; Freire & Macedo, 1987) argued that the reading of the world (the socio-historical-political context of the learner) precedes the reading of the word (literacy): "It is impossible to access meaning simply through reading words. One must first read the world within which these words exist" (1997, p. 304). Following Freire, educators who adopt a critical pedagogy start their teaching by getting to know the world of their learners

(Cowhey, 2006; Jones, 2006). Knowing their students allows critical educators to find ways to contextualize the learning based on students' interests, helping students find relevance and meaning. This contextualization helps critical educators teach their discipline well, whether it is the general studies of elementary grades or a high school history class. As Cochran-Smith (2004) has argued, teaching skills and bridging academic gaps is a characteristic of social justice education. But the critical educator must go further and "not only teach his or her discipline well, but he or she must also challenge the learner to critically think through the social, political, and historic reality within which he or she is a presence" (Freire, 2004, p. 19).

Reading the word through the world is a dialogic, recursive process, where each continually implies the other. While it is important for educators to start with the world of the students in order to better teach the word (the subject matter), merely doing so can preserve the inequitable, undemocratic ends of the status quo just as teaching the content in a decontextualized, transmission or banking approach does (Freire, 1970/2005). As students learn to apply the techniques and understandings of each discipline learned in school, critical teachers help them use these new learnings to think critically through the social, political, and historic reality in which they live. Freire (2004) noted, "The progressive educator...never accepts that the teaching of any discipline whatsoever could take place divorced from a critical analysis of how society works" (p. 20). These two—the word and the world—go hand in hand and should be taught in tandem.

By fostering the development of students' critical analysis of society, critical pedagogy "challenges us to recognize, engage, and critique (so as to transform) any existing undemocratic social practices and institutional structures that produce and sustain inequalities and oppressive social identities and relations" (Leistyna & Woodrum, 1996, p. 2). The point is not simply to

engage in a sociopolitical critique of the learner's world; doing so is instrumental in transforming injustice. As Freire and Macedo (1987) argued, "reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* or *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work" (p. 35).

Reading the world, the sociopolitical analysis from a structural viewpoint, sets critical pedagogy apart from other forms of multicultural education and social justice education. Sleeter and Delgado Bernal (2004) wrote, "Within multicultural education, curriculum is often discussed in terms of bias, a concept that does not necessarily lead to an analysis of power and consciousness" (p. 242). Similarly, Howard and Aleman (2008) maintained that critical educational theorists "differ from many multicultural education scholars in that they do not see individual prejudice or ignorance as the problem in education, but rather that it is the systemic institutionalization of such prejudice which allows it to remain hidden and thriving" (p. 166).

By paying attention to power relations in society, critical educators are able to address individual prejudice while also looking at the structural conditions leading to prejudice and bias that maintain inequity. Freire (1998, 2004) argued that teaching students to read their world and analyze structural inequities makes possible the ability to intervene and act for social change. Without acting on our new insights, we are restricted to verbalism (Freire 1970/2005). "One of the most important tasks of critical educational practice," Freire (1998) emphasized, "is to make possible the conditions in which the learners...engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons" (p. 45). But he also cautioned against acting too fast and sacrificing reflective analysis, as some social justice educators might do in their haste to effect change. Just as the cycle of reading the word and world

is recursive, so is the cycle of action and reflection (Freire, 1970/2005). Critical educators analyze the world in order to take an active presence in it and act against racism (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Espinosa, 2009; Sweeney, 1999), classism (Bigelow, 2008), sexism (Espinosa, 2003; Pelo, 2008b, 2008d), heterosexism (Cowhey, 2007, Pelo, 2008a), ableism (Kissinger, 2008), and other forms of oppression (Schniedewind & Davidson, 2006).

### **Critical Educators in the Study**

My selection criteria for study participants included: (a) currently practicing educators in P-12 classrooms, (b) who enacted critical pedagogy, especially in English/Language Arts, (c) as evidenced by prior publication about their critical teaching practices, with (d) attention given to a variety of geographic areas of the U.S., experience levels, race/ethnicity, and ages/grades taught. Using a purposeful and snowball sampling strategy (Patton, 2002), I identified participants through published works in edited books and journals about critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice as well as existing networks of critical educators such as the National Writing Project and Rethinking Schools. A total of eight teachers participated, all of whom agreed to use their names and other identifiers (see Table 1, p. 30). For a more thorough description of the teachers in the study, see the Appendix.

### **Research Design**

In this qualitative in-depth interview study, I asked eight critical P-12 educators across the United States about their critical teaching practice as well as experiences that they felt influenced them to teach critically. This paper reports on the critical pedagogical practices these teachers enact both in the classroom and beyond.

## **Data Collection**

I conducted a series of three in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants for around 90 minutes per interview (see Seidman, 2006). For the first and second interviews, I traveled to participants' classrooms, homes, and nearby cafés so we could talk in person. The first interview focused on current teaching practices, and the second interview addressed life history and other experiences leading teachers to teach critically. Before the third interview, I sent participants transcripts of the first two interviews as well as my preliminary analysis, and we used the third interview as a member check and opportunity to add, refute, or revise anything they felt to be important.

## **Data Analysis**

I used an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ezzy, 2002), guided by three research questions: (1) How do critical educators describe their pedagogy? (2) How do they enact critical pedagogy in the classroom? and (3) How do they feel these critical practices contribute to their students' learning and address inequities? This process started with my becoming familiar with the data by listening to the 16 first and second interview recordings several times as well as reviewing and re-reviewing my notes from the third interview to get a complete picture of the data. Then I transcribed the interview conversations, often listening to the audio-recordings several times to ensure the accuracy of my transcription. I generated initial codes and manually applied them throughout the transcripts.

Next, I grouped these codes into categories that cohered or clustered together. I cut apart the entire data set and reorganized it by collating data items into categories. I generated tentative themes by collapsing categories into each other and judging for internal and external homogeneity (Patton, 2002). This was accomplished first by checking to see that all coded data

extracts appeared to form a coherent pattern and second by rereading the entire data set and coding data extracts with the three identified themes to test them for accuracy. Then I cut apart this re-coded data set and physically reorganized it by theme and sub-theme, which produced a visual thematic map of the entire data set. I reassessed this reworked map to ensure that the themes were not redundant and did not leave gaps. I identified three themes related to these critical educators' teaching practice: making teaching responsive and relevant, examining marginalized perspectives, and taking action for social justice. In this paper I will focus on taking action for social justice, but I will draw from the other themes, as well.

### **Reading the World to Act for Social Justice**

“I don't want to, frankly, collect pennies for pets, things like that. I mean, this is me, nothing wrong with that. You know, if they did a pennies for pets to find out why the hell do we have to raise money for pets and why are they being abandoned, why are they being abused, who's profiting from it, you got something, I'm on your side. But that's not the way it works; it's let's collect pennies for pets and then we're done. Or the blankets for the Afghans when the big earthquake hit. You know, let's raise the money, let's send blankets over to the Afghans, and we're done. Well, why are these Afghans caught up in the mountains? I don't care what you do, look further into it. Every single thing merits it.” –Terry Moore

As we sat down to talk in his third grade classroom after school, Terry Moore (2004) expressed frustration at what he perceived to be “throwing money” at social problems rather than looking for underlying causes. In their excitement to take action for social causes, many teachers raise money or try to help out the less fortunate without undertaking an analysis of why these

issues exist in the first place. Terry exhorted educators to go deeper with kids and look at structural inequities and other root causes. He and the other teachers taught their students to read their world by analyzing it from a critical, sociopolitical perspective. They helped children “read the economic, social, and political realities that shape their lives in order to develop the necessary critical consciousness to name, understand, and transform them” (Leistyna, 2009, p. 53). This reading of the world, while valuable in itself, also created a space for students to see themselves as agents who could intervene in their world. In this section, I describe some of the ways in which each of these critical educators taught their students to read the world in order to act upon it. I divide the section into three parts: taking action in the community; using simulations, roleplays, and theater to read the world; and solving problems.

### **Taking Action in the Community**

While Mark Hansen (2005) talked about many different ways he teaches for social justice, including taking a critical literacy approach that addressed prejudice and discrimination, one of the things he discussed was his concern about the proposed redevelopment of the diverse community in which his students lived. When it was time for Mark’s third graders to learn to write persuasively, he decided to launch an interdisciplinary place-based education unit starting with a piece of children’s literature and ending with his students’ taking action to protect their community. Reading *The Wonderful Towers of Watts* gave students a backdrop against which they might think about preserving the aspects of their own community that would soon be razed, the Columbia Villa in Portland, one of the oldest public housing developments in the United States.



Mark and his students learned that when the Columbia Villa was built during World War II, it “was the first time that African Americans lived in communities in Oregon in significant numbers. It was the first non-European diversification in the urbanized Portland area.” They went walking through the neighborhood to memorialize aspects of this racially and socioeconomically diverse community:

We walked around, and the kids talked about these plum trees that they climbed on during the summer and all the fruit that they ate. They wanted to save the plum trees. They wanted the fire hydrants saved so that the firefighters could still fight fires. So we redesigned it...I felt they felt invested and were so knowledgeable about their neighborhood. They could really think about what it should look like.

After they inventoried strengths and issues of concern in the Columbia Villa, Mark's students redesigned the community based on their research and discoveries and wrote letters to various government officials asking them to preserve important community assets.

By first researching the problem, Mark challenged his students to “critically think through the social, political, and historic reality within which [they are] a presence.” As they learned about the history of the community and wrote to city planners about what they wanted to memorialize and preserve, Mark’s students were able to intervene and give city developers a much-needed children’s perspective on how the redevelopment of their community would affect them. Mark started with the formal curriculum, integrating reading and persuasive writing standards with social studies standards about civics, neighborhood, and community. If all he cared about was getting his students to perform well on high-stakes tests, Mark could have taught these standards solely in the classroom using a paper and pencil approach. By connecting the curriculum to his students' lives, situating their inquiry historically and politically, and pitching

the inquiry as a problem that needed to be solved, Mark enacted a critical pedagogy that views children as agents in charge of their learning and not mere recipients of a predefined curriculum.

Similar to Mark's using a place-based approach, Jennifer Aaron (Aaron et al., 2006) has engaged her students in many academic service learning projects over the years. When we met in the Hamilton Heights classroom where she had looped from second to third grade with her students, Jennifer described a project that grew out of questions about the diversity of the students' families. New York City's second graders study neighborhoods each year, and third graders study world communities. After Jennifer discovered that her students' families represented six different continents around the globe, she designed an integrated project in which students researched their families and communities to take action in the community. To learn about her students and start bridging their lives with the content matter, Jennifer asked students to interview their families "about the communities they grew up in, problems that were in their community, how their community dealt with those problems." Evidence of this work was on the walls as I walked around the class. Students also read and discussed children's literature about communities to help add perspective to their work.

After taking stock of the issues in the families' home countries and communities, Jennifer decided to inventory current community issues. She recounted, "They interviewed their families about the neighborhoods that they live in now—problems that exist in our New York neighborhoods, and ways that those problems could be addressed." After taking several walks around the neighborhood and getting input from parents and other family members, Jennifer and her students found that beautification was an important issue, especially in regard to graffiti, litter, and people not curbing their dogs.

Working from a budget of \$1200 they raised the year before, Jennifer and her students decided to address this issue first by writing letters to the parks department, housing authority, and sanitation department to explore their options. They wanted to see whether they could get permission to paint murals over graffiti, add additional garbage cans to city streets and possibly decorate them to make them more visible, or take empty lots and turn them into community gardens. As Mark had, Jennifer taught her students to read the word by reading their world. As they explored problems important to them and their families, her students used literacy—the word—to take action to solve the problems and experience firsthand what it means to be a citizen in a democracy.

Lisa Espinosa (2003, 2008, 2009) also engaged her students in an inquiry that would lead to community action. When she first showed the film *Ethnic Notions* to middle schoolers while doing her student teaching in a predominantly Mexican American community in Chicago, she was not prepared for the laughter and stereotyping about African Americans that ensued. While she has continued to use the film with her seventh graders, she has developed it into a much larger unit on *representations* that compares the way different groups—Native Americans, Latinos, and African Americans—are portrayed in texts, the media, and popular culture. Lisa wanted to teach these issues because she knew they were prevalent in the community, particularly stereotypes about Black people:

I would say the hardest thing is when we talk about African Americans. I think that's the touchiest thing because I know that it's such a widespread thing in the community, that they've heard their parents make negative comments. How do I say these things and bring these things up in a way that's not offensive to their parents and that I'm not saying that their parents are being racist when they say stuff like this?

Lisa decided to compare the way different ethnic groups are represented as a means of recognizing the systemic nature of the marginalization of people of color—so students could make connections between the way they were treated by others and the ways in which other groups experienced the same thing.

Using both film and written texts, Lisa and her students watched a film and read a book about each of the three groups, as well as examining photographs, music, magazines, and other relevant media. One of the books they read was *Our America*, which followed two African American adolescent boys living on the South Side of Chicago as they documented their community through audiorecorded narration and interviews with community members. This provided information about what life was like from these boys' perspective so that students could start seeing that while people of color are stereotyped by others, they bring many assets that deserve to be recognized. *Ethnic Notions* also offered a way of doing ethnography, of teaching children how to take agency by representing themselves and their community. Their reading of *Our America*, as well as listening to the National Public Radio version of it, scaffolded learning as Lisa's students created culminating project in which they took photographs using disposable cameras that represented their life and community.

By drawing upon students' experiences with stereotypes (“big lips,” “lazy,” “horses,” “teepees,” “beaner,” “wetback”) and then offering instructional material that examined these stereotypes from a larger social, historical, and cultural context, Lisa taught her students to read their world. They were able to see that while negative images, low wages, and lack of healthcare were prevalent among the different groups they studied, so were resistance and protest as members of each group historically took agency and fought for better living conditions. After exploring the various ways in which students' own groups were represented, they had an

opportunity to intervene in their world by *self*-representing, by evoking and representing images that captured the unique assets that they and their community possessed. It was clear from listening to Lisa's stories about her teaching and looking at the artifacts around her classroom, such as students' analysis of Tupac's lyrics or the class murals hanging on the walls, that this was one of many examples of teaching for social justice where students read their world in order to change it.

Each of these three teachers spent time in class analyzing issues that connected the standard curriculum to the lives of their students and people in their communities. They integrated their specific subject areas (literature, social studies, writing) with a critical reading of the world that led to their students' taking action to intervene.

In the next section we'll examine how other teachers in the study taught social and political issues through the use of roleplays, simulations, plays, and other pedagogical exercises in which students took agency in the classroom and beyond.

### **Using Roleplays, Simulations, and Theater to Read the World**

Ever since he worked with Norm Diamond in the 1970s, a professor at Antioch College in Ohio with whom he later co-authored a book (Bigelow & Diamond, 1988), Bill Bigelow (1985, 2006, 2008; Bigelow & Peterson, 1998, 2002) has been developing debates, simulations, roleplays, and other ways of teaching justice issues. When we met in his house in Portland, Bill discussed his recent work on climate change and an example of the way he taught about the relationship between corporate power and the environment. When Bill and his high school students watched a film called "Earth and the American Dream" that explores United States history from the standpoint of the Earth, the experience proved so compelling for students that

they ended up thinking that if they simply changed their attitudes about the Earth, then everything would be okay and environmental problems would cease to exist.

However, Bill thought to himself, “Wait a second, it’s not just our *ideas* that are the problem, it’s the social patterns we have that are hostile to the environment and are built into the economy.” Bill wanted to create a learning experience for students to see that from the perspective of a corporation, helping the environment is far less important than maximizing profit. He developed The Thingamabob Game (Bigelow, 2002) to simulate the tension between humans’ responsibility to the Earth and corporate fiduciary responsibility to shareholders. Bill explains to students that in the game they are rewarded for profitability; however, if they go over a certain trigger number, we all lose because they have ruined the place that sustains life.

What makes this game so powerful, according to Bill, is that “it shows them a basic problem with the relationship between the economy that we have and the capacity to sustain life on earth.” Even though he has played it with both high school students and adults at different universities over the years, he has “never had a group on the *first* try stop themselves and save the earth.” Inevitably, each group goes beyond the trigger number of sustainability in their effort to continue making profits. Bill gives students a second chance by repeating the game. He also gives them an article, “How to Be a Climate Hero” (Schulman, 2008), saying that sometimes the kids do save themselves: “They save themselves by talking all together, they save themselves by limiting, they save themselves basically by changing the rules of capitalism.” Bill emphasized the importance of not leaving children feeling discouraged or hopeless about social issues. By playing The Thingamabob Game more than once, students have the opportunity both to analyze the situation from a systemic perspective and to then chart a different course of action based on this new analysis.

By putting students in agentic positions in relation to an authentic problem—the tension between maximizing profits and preserving resources—Bill has led his students to analyze their world and take action. While The Thingamabob Game is a single example, the other games, simulations, improvisations, and roleplays that Bill has developed over the years serve the same purposes: to engage in sociopolitical analysis in order to take action for justice, for students to “think of themselves as activists, to think of themselves as people who can make a difference in the world.”

Like Bill, high school social studies teacher Hyung Nam (2006) uses a counter-factual approach where he teaches U.S. history not just as what actually happened but also what *could* have happened, seizing on the pivotal moments when decisions had to be made and the role of ordinary people in making and influencing those decisions. It is putting students in the driver’s seat so they may see themselves as change agents that is important for Hyung: “I don’t want my students just to get the content of questioning imperialism or questioning injustice; I also want to give them the experience of the process of working for justice or solidarity and those kinds of experiences, too.” For example, just before our interview conversations, Hyung had taught a unit on the history of the Middle East, imperialism, and the Israeli-Arab conflict. The culminating activity for students was a roleplay between eight groups, four on each side representing different perspectives from moderate to extreme such as Hamas, Ultra-Orthodox, Likud Bloc, Peace Now, and Arab Israelis.

In this roleplay, once students were divided into groups, they came up with different possible solutions for dividing political boundaries and land. Each group had to research the perspective of their role and present the information to the class through speeches. Hyung compiled information from each group into a summary sheet that he gave to everyone so that

they could prepare for a debate. Their homework was not only to craft their own argument for a solution but also to anticipate how the other groups would respond and ultimately to think about possible solutions that might benefit every group. Hyung showed the film *Promises* so his students could see both sides from the perspectives of Israeli and Palestinian children. When the students presented their arguments and debated, Hyung was impressed with their level of engagement and ability to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously: “They were very engaged...they didn’t come away thinking there’s one right way answer about the solution. But they really understand the complexity of the issue.” The process of coming to recognize this complexity and the active engagement in debating one’s perspective put students in the role of “assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons,” as Freire (1998, p. 45) advocated.

As a fourth grade teacher in New Jersey, every spring Maria Sweeney (1999, 2002) had her students write and perform a play about a topic they cared about and wanted to explore in more detail. Her students had performed plays about South African apartheid (Sweeney, 1999), The Paterson Silk Strike of 1913, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Robert Munsch’s *The Paper Bag Princess*, commercialism in schools, the truth about Columbus, and Nike and Disney sweatshops (Sweeney, 2002). As with Bill and Hyung’s students, researching, writing, and acting out these plays gave Maria’s students the opportunity to examine an issue from multiple vantage points and take action for justice.

As Maria and I sat in her home and talked, she discussed the work that went into the Nike/Disney play. Earlier during the school year, she used an article in *Time for Kids* about child labor describing children in Pakistan who were making soccer balls for Nike. Her students were outraged that children their age were working in factories for extremely low wages, in unsafe



conditions, rather than going to school—all for Nike, a company they loved. This led into a study of global sweatshops where products such as toys were made involving the use of child labor. When Maria offered her class a choice about a topic for their play, they chose to return to the issue of global sweatshops, focusing on Nike and Disney since these were companies with which the K-5 audience would be familiar. Maria had her students researched ways in which multinational corporations closed up shop in the United States to search for the cheapest labor and weakest environmental regulations in order to increase profits for their shareholders. Their earlier unit on the 1913 Paterson Silk Strike, something Maria teaches every year, taught them about how ordinary people took action against unfair working conditions and offered a foundation for understanding the power of the free market as they broadened their focus to global capital.

Through reading articles and critiquing public relations statements from Nike and Disney, watching video segments from a variety of news sources, listening to a guest speaker who was a former Indonesian worker for Nike, writing letters to Michael Jordan and other company spokespeople, and having discussions about what they were learning, Maria's students sharpened their sociopolitical awareness of issues about globalization, sweatshops, and the struggle between maximizing profit and maintaining humane working conditions. When some students and parents expressed disagreement with the critique of Nike and Disney, Maria made sure to include corporate perspectives and allowed one student to take the role of Phil Knight, Nike's CEO, in the play. Three days before the play was to be performed in front of the school, Maria's principal told her and her students that the play was inappropriate for children and would be performed for parents only.

When the *New York Times* found out about this decision and ran a story on it, a theater owner invited the class to perform the play on Broadway. In the performance, Maria's students gave audience members several ways to take action against sweatshops, including boycotting Nike and Disney and writing letters expressing concern about the working conditions of their employees. As with Bill and Hyung, Maria taught her students to examine global sweatshops from a systemic perspective so that they could see structural causes for unfair conditions rather than seeing them as isolated incidents or aberrations. In turn, Maria's students were able to act upon their new understandings through letter writing, boycotts, and taking agency through their acting in the play. Although not all of the children's parents bought into the sociopolitical critique of sweatshops in which Maria and her class engaged—a form of critique or resistance that critical teachers must face—Maria was able to find roles that represented corporate views.

### **Solving Problems**

Some teachers use simulations, roleplays, or debates to solve problems affecting their class and students. When teacher mentor Ann Pelo (2007, 2008; Pelo & Davidson, 2000) and her colleagues noticed that the city of Legos that the students in their child care center's school-age program had built had been demolished over a long weekend, they seized the opportunity to regroup as a team and launch a critical investigation of private property and power hierarchies with their students. Housed in a church, the Reggio Emilia-inspired children's center where Ann taught and mentored teachers for 16 years was a shared space. A group of several six- to eight-year-old children had built what came to be known as "Legotown," a town with buildings, houses, stores, a Starbucks, a library, and a school. As the town grew and Lego pieces became rarer, children started excluding others who wanted to play, and hierarchies developed among

participants. So when Legotown was demolished by another group using the church one weekend, it offered what Ann considered a serendipitous opportunity to pull back and make a deliberate effort to teach collective decision making, democracy, and resource sharing. Ann and her colleagues decided to remove the Legos from the play area in order to explore issues of power with the kids (Pelo & Pelojoaquin, 2006).

Just weeks before, as part of their ongoing professional learning on power, privilege, and anti-bias teaching and learning, Ann had led the children's center's staff in a session in which they played a resource distribution game that mimics the way capitalism works using M&M's. The destruction of Legoland was a key opportunity to use this game in the classroom by replacing the M&M's with Legos. Each child chose 10 Legos; afterward Ann told them that different colors represented different point values. Ann and her colleagues also told students that the two kids with the highest number of points would get to make rules for trading Legos and that they would trade for several rounds after that. When the two boys with the most points made rules that actually benefited the others, the other kids, already suspect of an unfair system, did not recognize the fairness of their rules. After only a few rounds of playing the game, Ann's students felt how "the experience was so painful." She remarked, "This capitalist system in which the kids have lived...is so deeply inculcated that they get the injustice."

Using the game as a springboard to explore issues of ownership, power, privilege, and authority, Ann and the other staff led the children through a process over several weeks where they discussed and brought in artifacts of things they owned and had to justify how they knew they owned them. They went to Seattle's Pike Place Market to explore how ownership worked in a public place. When the teachers reintroduced Legos after a four month hiatus, they deliberately

had children work in small teams to build collective structures mimicking the stalls at Pike Place Market. Ann talked about how the teachers “continued that cycle of taking careful documentation and studying it and really watching for moments of shift in the kids’ thinking,” which they did, in fact, start to see. The children established new, equitable rules about Legos focusing on collective ownership, resource sharing, and nonhierarchical power relationships. Through their process of stopping unfair play, analyzing the conditions leading to the problem from a structural view, searching for just solutions, and taking action to solve the problem, Ann’s students engaged in the reflection-action cycle that Freire (1970/2005) described.

Like Ann, third grade teacher Terry Moore (2004) addressed issues of conflict with his students and helped them solve problems. When we met, he described ways in which he taught for social justice through teaching critical literacy, studying prejudice and discrimination, and using simulations and other methods. Terry’s work with an afterschool club, World Improvement by Tenafly Students, or WITS, stood out in particular. WITS started out working primarily on hunger issues, but over the years the club also addressed other concerns such as homelessness, sweatshops, global warming, fair trade, and peace action. In response to the growing Iraq War, Terry led the group through an analysis of the conflict using lessons from Oxfam’s “War and Peace Iraq.” They examined the changing power structure in Iraq and history of the region over the last two decades. After studying the issues impacting the war, Terry and his students engaged in a debate called Peacenik vs. Warnik to determine what actions the group might want to take about the conflict. Terry recalled, “We had debates for weeks, and eventually the majority of the kids decided they wanted the troops to come home.” Terry knew someone from a local chapter of Military Families Speak Out (MFSO), a group of mothers and fathers against the war who have children serving in the armed forces, who invited WITS to participate in their vigils to bring

the troops home. The club decided to join forces with MFSO, but those students in favor of the war were given the option of not participating in the work.

An opportunity became available for Terry's club to combine hunger and peace issues when Terry discovered that there was a food pantry specifically devoted to families of servicepeople. Terry was shocked to discover that the United States government did not provide food for families of the military, so with the group he decided to hold a school-wide peace action near the entrance of this food pantry. They asked families of students to donate diapers, formula, and food for the pantry. Terry recalled that even though some people "were unhappy that the club was actually taking a stance against the war, they didn't want to go against us because they were good-hearted enough to understand that this part of our work was going towards the military families." Even so, however, when club members went to drop off donations at the pantry, the door was locked. "They locked the doors on us. They wouldn't let us drop the food off. They lied and said the guy who opens the door had to go to the dentist. I think they were embarrassed beyond belief" that club members were collecting food and other donations.

Terry and other club members were still able to donate food by collecting it from anyone who wanted to donate, even if they chose not to participate in the vigil. WITS members would collect the food and then drop the food off at the pantry sometime after the vigil when the pantry was open. Since some time had passed between the initial work with the pantry and the time I met Terry for an interview, Terry was happy to report that "Now the soldiers are opening up the food pantry and bringing the food in, while three years ago, it was locked on a cold day and we couldn't drop the food off." He attributes this to the hard work of the group in analyzing the complexity of the issue and the ways in which various stakeholders' interests intersected: "The

mantra of almost this whole conversation is it's not enough...it is just not enough to know that something's wrong in this world. Why's it wrong, and what can we do about it?"

Terry taught his students—WITS club members—to analyze social issues by reading their world in order to act upon it. As surprises came up in their work together, they read and re-read the situation in order to act in effective ways, rather than finding an easy or convenient solution. Terry's and his students' informal analysis of power led to some interesting results. While the U.S. military yields considerable power against opposing forces throughout many parts of the world, in Tenafly, NJ, the families of those serving in the military felt powerless over the lives of their loved ones serving in active duty. In this situation, power did not fall in even sides of a binary, and the solution Terry and the others came up with likewise had no clear cut solution. The fact that soldiers eventually opened the doors of the food pantry and welcomed donations from an anti-war coalition spoke to both the complexity of the issue and the diplomacy with which Terry, club members, and others involved acted.

In the next section, we will explore the obstacles teachers face in teaching their students to read the world in order to change it and implications for critical pedagogy.

### **Implications**

In this section, I contrast the assumptions and expectations of high-stakes testing and accountability with the assumptions and expectations of critical pedagogy, drawing a parallel with Freire's notion of reading the word versus reading the world. I argue that in order to start to overcome the disparities mentioned in the opening section, teachers must help their students engage in the kinds of learning experiences demonstrated by these eight teachers and help their students read the word through reading the world.

## **Corporatization and Reading the Word**

“When one accepts the role of being a mere dispenser of knowledge along the lines of the market requirements that view students as mere consumers of knowledge, one becomes entrapped in the very ideological manipulation that denies one the possibility to articulate his or her world as a subject of history and not as a mere object to be consumed and discarded” (Freire, 1997, p. 315).

Social justice has been appropriated by neoliberals and neoconservatives to justify increased accountability and high-stakes testing in United States schools. The rationale is that by paying attention to students’ scores on high-stakes standardized tests we as a society will be better able to close academic achievement gaps based on racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic differences among students. Such logic fits neatly into a market-based schema that treats teachers as technicians, curriculum as a packaged commodity, and students as consumers rather than producers. In this market-driven educational system, students who do not perform at targeted levels on high-stakes tests sold by corporate publishers receive stronger “interventions” of prepackaged curriculum (also sold by corporate publishers) until they either “reach proficiency” or until their schools receive sanctions for falling into “needs improvement” status. The problem is that those who make educational policy decisions have a self-interest in schools’ failing. When schools do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP), they must purchase more and more scripted programs to use as interventions. As the pattern of not making AYP continues and restructuring takes place, most schools become partially or fully privatized by becoming charter schools that accept or run by for-profit companies.

While the high-stakes testing and accountability movement has co-opted the language of social justice, its ideology is not so easily masked. The narrowing of the curriculum to finite bits of information that are easily digested by students and regurgitated on multiple-choice tests has resulted in watered down content that lacks rigor and relevance. Such a climate positions the corporate-produced texts as the expert, the teacher as delivery-person for the curriculum, and the student as passive recipient or consumer. There is simply no room for dialogic relations of co-inquiry between students and their teacher in this approach. In order for students to perform well in this context, they must be skilled at receiving information and spitting it back out on tests without asking too many questions or letting their personal lives, emotions, and individual needs get in the way.

The context of high-stakes testing and corporatization of education, solely teaching the word, gives teachers less room for working with students to make the curriculum relevant. Glued to the permitted standards and texts, teachers are rewarded for compliance rather than substance and are not able to use much creative or professional judgment. Whenever a recent superintendent in my district did five-minute walkthroughs in schools, he expected to see every teacher and student holding a copy of the adopted language arts textbook and was infuriated when they were not. Many of them opted instead to teach with quality children's trade books. Field trips and excursions out into the community, while they build background knowledge and help students connect their learning to their own lives and the lives of others, are rarer and rarer because they don't fit neatly into the testing and accountability learning genre. Academic content matters while the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts in which the students live and breathe do not.



## **Critical Pedagogy and Reading the Word through the World**

Not caving in to the pressure merely to fill their students heads with random bits of content knowledge, these teachers help their students become active participants in a democracy by connecting content to real issues. Bill recalled a proposed statewide social studies test in Oregon composed of what he called "Trivial Pursuit" type questions:

They asked a question on the test about which constitutional amendment gave women the right to vote. My U.S. history class had done a roleplay on Seneca Falls, the 1848 gathering, the first time women got together in this country to demand their rights as women. 1848 was the last year of the U.S. war against Mexico, and in the roleplay, instead of just having the middle and upper class reformers, White women, I included conquered women in New Mexico, Cherokee women who had been moved from Georgia on the Trail of Tears, enslaved African American women, and working class White women. All these women came together to discuss the plight of women at that time. The issue was what if there had been a more representative assembly of women, what kind of demands would they have come up with? And then we read the Declaration of Sentiments that came out of Seneca Falls and compared these against what the class came up with. The students knew a lot about the conditions of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But could they have answered what amendment established women's right to vote? Maybe not. That's because it was a Trivial Pursuit question and we had not done a Trivial Pursuit curriculum.

Clearly the compare and contrast teaching and learning around the Seneca Falls roleplay that Bill used with his students led to higher order thinking skills than the multiple-choice test measured. It engaged students in conversations with each other, where they posed and solved problems,

critically examined historical documents, and reinserted the voices of the marginalized back into history, all critical components of democratic participation that writers and organizations about civics and economics (Council on Competitiveness, 2004; Glickman, 2003; Glickman et al., 2008; National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2000; NCEE, 2007) say we need. If we are going to close academic gaps between low income and high income students, between children of color and White children, such critical teaching is necessary.

Looking back across the teaching examples participants described, when Mark, Jennifer, Lisa, and their students studied their communities and took action, they made curriculum immediately relevant by situating it in the world of the children and their families. Rather than starting with abstract concepts far removed from the daily lives of students, these teachers helped their students bridge connections between the formal curriculum and what was happening in their communities. By posing real problems that needed solving, these critical educators engaged their kids and gave them a sense of efficacy in solving problems. The complex negotiations required by inventorying personal and community strengths and concerns, determining an audience to whom they might present their information, and representing their views through individual and collective action far exceeded the complexity of memorizing facts for a test. The learning process the children went through not only valued the assets that the children and their families possessed but also gave them opportunities to see themselves as decision-makers, collaborate with one another, and give back to their community. These leadership skills will serve the children long after they leave the classroom and move on to another grade.

Similarly, through the use of roleplays, simulations, and theater, Bill, Hyung, and Maria taught the standard curriculum in a way that was meaningful to their students. In order to enact

these dramatic forms of pedagogy, students had to first read the world through a sociopolitical lens. These teachers taught content by situating it in a context that examined issues of power and justice, subjects that are appealing to students while giving them a broad understanding of the complex forces shaping individual decisions in society. By using simulations, roleplays, and plays, these teachers integrated content across disciplines, weaving reading, writing, listening, speaking, civics, and history together so that the learning was engaging for students. Because of the multiple roles presented, students had to go beyond their own self perspective to see the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders and players. They had to examine facts from multiple sources and take a position that they supported with evidence. By enacting this democratic skill of arguing from a positions with supporting evidence, these teachers' students experienced firsthand what civic participation is like and had opportunities to see themselves as human agents in charge of their learning.

Likewise, Ann and Terry led their students to address conflicts and solve problems through the use of simulations and debates. When Ann's young students were not sharing, she and her colleagues helped the children step outside their own perspective to analyze the situation from a systemic perspective so they could start working toward the common good. Terry engaged his students in an analysis of what it means for the United States to occupy another country and helped them see multiple sides of the conflicts in the Middle East. He helped channel some parents' disagreement with his club's activism by finding mutually acceptable ways to support U.S. troops fighting in the war. These teachers taught their students to look at whose perspectives were not being valued and to take action in the community that made things more just for all parties involved, life skills that could not be taught by "reading the word" alone.

What these eight teachers have in common is helping their students work with each other to *intervene* in the world as Freire (2004) described. While there is a strong push for educators to adapt to existing power structures that maintain inequality, what makes educational practices critical is the combination of reading the world *and* intervening in it, reflecting and acting on that reflection. Making teaching more dialogic by responding to students' interests, in itself, does not lead to a transformation of inequitable social structures. While it may lead to a greater power balance in the classroom, reading the worlds of the students in order to better deposit the standard curriculum serves inequitable ends just as much as teaching from a script. As these teachers have shown, in order for critical educators to transform their students and society, they must not only teach learners to engage in sociopolitical critique; they must also put them in agentic positions where they can start to intervene toward making the world more just and humane.

However, as necessary as action is, some educators promote action without engaging their students in reading their world critically. As Terry's quote suggests, many teachers want to help others by raising money for different social issues but fail to explore fully the root causes of the problem. Teaching critically entails not just raising money or donating to charity but exploring why money is needed in the first place. Bill lamented how at the end of a unit, some teachers simply want to check off that they took action: "One of the problems I see in how some people interpret social justice teaching is that they have a bit of a checklist. So at the end of every unit, students are supposed to 'make a difference.'" But acting to make a difference without a critical reflection first can help maintain the status quo as equally as not acting. Before the term *activism* came into popular use, Freire (1970/2005) defined it as a "sacrifice of reflection" (p. 87). Just as a teacher can be a verbalist—all talk and no action, so can she or he be an activist—

all action and no critical reflection. Of course, having students intervene in their world so as to transform it is a necessary component of a critical pedagogy. But it is not a sufficient condition for critical practice unless combined with a critical analysis of power and the conditions leading to the need for action.

These teachers demonstrated their critical pedagogy through a critical reflection and action cycle where they taught their students to read their world through an analysis of the sociopolitical context and then intervene in it through making decisions that would transform the existing reality. By critiquing unfair and undemocratic conditions, these teachers' students were able to then, through their actions, announce a better, more just, more democratic, and more humane world. In a climate of high-stakes testing, accountability, and fear, such critical teaching offers a glimmer of hope that we may work toward closing gaps, achieving justice, and making living conditions more equitable for all citizens.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **WHAT INFLUENCES CRITICAL EDUCATORS: RADICALIZING EVENTS AND MENTORS**

**Abstract:** This in-depth interview study used life history methods to find out what influenced eight critical P-12 educators to teach critically. In this paper I argue that two factors that enable P-12 critical educators to teach for social justice are radicalizing events and radicalizing mentors. After examining data that support this argument, I explore implications of these understandings for teacher education.

While much has been written about preparing teachers to teach for social justice, little empirical research focuses on the influences of experienced P-12 critical educators and the conditions that sustain their justice work. Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) argued that "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" (p. 164). This study starts with critical educators and traces the influences that led them to teach for social justice. After a brief description of the theoretical frame in which I situate the study, I explain the research methodology and report on data from the eight participants. Then I explore what these data mean for teacher educators and teacher preparation programs.

#### **A Framework of Critical Pedagogy**

Freire (2004) argued that "one of the foremost tasks for a radical and liberating critical pedagogy is to clarify the legitimacy of the ethical political dream of overcoming unjust reality"

(p. 19). Critical pedagogy operates from a vision of how society could be, simultaneously denouncing oppressive and unjust structures on the one hand and announcing more humane, democratic, and just possibilities on the other. Teachers who enact critical pedagogy listen to their students and build their teaching around learners' interests and experiences rather than seeing curriculum as something to be "deposited" or "delivered" into their empty heads. They call into question the prescribed curriculum, asking whose perspective it represents--who benefits and who loses from such a perspective.

In spite of the recent move in United States education toward viewing teaching as "training" or a series of technical procedures such as preparing students for high-stakes tests, Freire and other critical pedagogues suggest that instead of viewing education as mere technical training, a reductionist incarnation of the banking/transmission/delivery approach (Freire, 1970/2005), the serious critical educator must, in addition to teaching her or his discipline well, challenge the learner to think critically through the social, historical, and political reality within which s/he exists (Freire, 2004). In order for our students to read the word (i.e., literacy or content matter), we must first teach them to read the world (the socio-historical-political context in which they exist) (Freire & Macedo, 1987). As learners develop a critical consciousness about their reality, they may take action to make it better.

Freire (1970/2005) used the notion of *praxis* to describe this cycle of reflection and action, arguing that we need both and that they operate simultaneously. By naming their world, learners engage in the process of denouncing unjust structures and hierarchical power relations. This reflective analysis, this naming, offers the opportunity to rename the world and intervene to transform it: "Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*" (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 89). By renaming their world, learners

take agency to transform it, thus completing the reflection-action cycle. Critical teachers help their students take agency to name and transform their world through roleplays, debates, and simulations, as well as taking action outside the classroom to address school and community issues.

The teachers in this study share a critical pedagogical vision of effecting social change through education. While each of these critical educators articulates her or his vision differently, there are some common threads in the experiences that influenced them to come to embrace and sustain their focus on critical pedagogy, which we will explore after a brief look at the research design of the study.

### **Research Design**

This study examined P-12 educators' critical teaching practices as well as experiences influencing them to teach critically and sustain their critical pedagogy. The findings reported here relate to the following research questions:

What life experiences have enabled teachers to adopt a critical stance in their classrooms?

In what way, if any, did their initial preparation or ongoing teacher education influence these teachers to teach critically?

Using a combination of purposeful sampling and snowball sampling (Patton, 2002), I identified and recruited eight participants (see Table 1, p. 30) who were P-12 teachers enacting critical pedagogy in their classrooms and who had previously published something about their teaching. To identify participants who had already published about their critical teaching practice, I consulted archives of several journals (*Rethinking Schools*; *Radical Teacher*; *Teaching Tolerance*) and edited books (*Making Justice Our Project*; *Teaching for Social Justice*; *No Deposit, No Return*; *Controversies in the Classroom*; *Rethinking Our Classrooms*), looking for



teachers who were still teaching in P-12 classrooms. While one participant, Bill Bigelow, had left the classroom two years before, I made the decision to include him in the study because of his substantial impact in the field of critical pedagogy.

I also utilized my own networks, asking teachers and teacher educators with whom I worked as well as already-recruited participants for recommendations of teachers who fit the study criteria. A few participants were initially identified through word of mouth, and I followed up to ensure that they were currently teaching and had published about their critical pedagogical practices. I tried to select participants from various geographical regions of the United States with a mix of gender, race/ethnicity, and number of years teaching as well as a range of ages, grades, and subjects taught.

Not wanting to fall prey to the objectivism and realism of much research (Gitlin & Russell, 1994), I wanted to find a research methodology that fit with my Freirean dialogic theoretical framework. Seidman's (2006) three-part interview series offered a structure that enabled backward mapping, starting with current critical teaching practice and tracing back to prior experiences, while allowing a dialogue between researcher and participants whose intent was "not to discover absolutes, or 'the truth,' but to scrutinize normative 'truths' that are embedded in a specific historical and cultural context" (Gitlin & Russell, 1994, p. 185). I conducted a series of three in-depth life history interviews with each participant for about 90 minutes per interview. For the first and second interviews, I traveled to participants' classrooms, homes, and nearby cafés so we could talk in person. The third interview was conducted by telephone. My interviews have been a conversational give and take between researcher and participants, with frequent member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) via email and telephone

calls in which participants added further details left out of initial interviews and responded to my analysis for clarification and accuracy.

Because I wanted to draw out patterns and themes that might help current and future critical teachers and teacher educators, I analyzed interview data using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), starting with open coding and proceeding to axial coding (Ezzy, 2002). I tried to honor an emic perspective as much as possible (Patton, 2002), so I could generate a classification scheme using participants' own words and constructs. I was interested in extracting any common experiences among participants that have implications for teacher education while not ignoring disruptions and inconsistencies in the data. This paper focuses on two themes: radicalizing events and radicalizing mentors.

### **New Understandings**

While these eight educators had a variety of experiences leading them to become teachers and to enact critical pedagogy, there was also considerable overlap. It is this overlap, these commonalities, that I present here. First, we will take a look at how these teachers became radicalized through events in the world and in their communities.

#### **Radicalizing Events**

*“Whatever interest I got in social justice was outside of school.” Hyung Nam*

Social and political happenings in the world and in their communities had a strong impact on the critical educators these participants would become. For most of these teachers, global events like the Vietnam War, U.S. intervention in Central America, and the First Gulf War shaped their critical capacity to read the world. In addition, local events in their schooling experiences, activism, and the types of schools in which they were employed played a large role

in developing their critical capacities. Participants spoke of how these events politicized or radicalized them to work for social justice.

**Global events and issues.** Terry spoke of the 1960s as his influence, saying that while his mother's early interest in the Civil Rights Movement might have played a role in shaping his political stance toward the world, "Probably the most influence came, like for a lot of us, because it was the 1960's. *That* was the big change. That was my teacher, the social movement."

Growing up in Catholic schools in a "very traditional, strict background," Terry was 18 years old in 1968, "walking out into a world which was an amazing historical epoch." Like other teenagers coming out of high school during this time, Terry "really connected to the anti-war movement and was energized and excited about it." For Terry, the social and political landscape of the 1960's allowed him to network with others who shared his views, and even today he still participates in an organization called Blue Wave that he and others formed when he was a teenager, saying, "We were all attracted to each other because it was the right kind of people."

Like Terry, Bill also expressed the strong influence of the 1960's and the Vietnam War, saying, "The biggest impact on me was the war in Vietnam and the anti-war movement in the Bay Area." Having dropped out of college at The University of the Pacific's Raymond College in Stockton in 1970 to return to the Bay Area and become a peace activist, Bill discussed how his involvement the anti-war movement "was a key influence" for him, saying he was a full participant in the anti-establishment ethos of the times. Joining the Marin Peace Coalition, Bill became a draft counselor and engaged in activism against the war, saying how "That was kind of the seminal experience that led me deeper and deeper into a critique." For him, the war raised important questions about our society—"What is the nature of a society that wages a war like this? Is this a mistake? Is it part of a pattern? Is this just a bad thing?" Bill wondered if the

Vietnam War was just “an aberration, or is it in fact a part of imperial wars and engagements that stretch throughout history? And what kind of society do we need to build in order to not have these kinds of patterns?” Reading the world through the lens of the Vietnam War became for Bill “a long process of politicization.”

While Maria was younger than Terry and Bill when the Vietnam War took place, she discussed how becoming aware of the war as a child influenced her toward reading the world critically. In particular, Maria remembered meeting boat people refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia one Christmas night and how the fact that “these people had nothing” would “just roll around and around and around” in her head. She described the thought process that went through her mind after one refugee family taught her how to use chopsticks at a shared meal:

I just remember very distinctly this family very determinedly trying to teach me how to use chopsticks. It seemed like such a small thing, but that’s what they had: they had something they could teach me to do. They had the patience to help me learn how to do it. And I just couldn’t stop thinking about, “What was it like on a boat? How did you make it here? What are you going to do now? What do you have?” I just could cry thinking about it because it was so overwhelming... Afterwards I kept asking my mother, “What are we going to do?” and “What’s happening with them?” and “What about their children?” and “Where will they go to school?” and “How will they understand if they don’t speak English?”

As with Bill, war posed a series of problems and raised political questions for Maria that would impact the way she would teach many years later.

Like these others, Hyung Nam (2006) learned to read his world through international events. During high school, Hyung was influenced by international events during the Iran-Contra Affair:

I started listening to KPFK, which is the old Pacifica Radio station down there. And at that time, the Iran-Contra Scandal was happening, or actually this was before that really was known in the mainstream. Daniel Sheehan of the Christic Institute was talking about U.S. policy in Central America. So I think that really opened my eyes, I think I was really thirsting for that, but I wasn't getting anything like that in school.

Having access to alternative media helped Hyung read critically the limited texts presented in school. It helped him read his world in ways that he would continue to use as a philosophy major and later as a social justice teacher.

For Mark, the spread of the AIDS epidemic in the United States in the late 1980's led him to become involved in AIDS activism, taking an agentic stance toward the world that would strengthen during the First Gulf War when he was in college. As this was Mark's "first mature activist role or pursuit," he talked about how he met people who were sick and then died of AIDS-related illnesses, saying the work "was really demoralizing." For him, such work opened up a "world of like-minded people, people who were really interesting to me and people who were very attractive to me in just how smart they were and how out there they were and the good work that they were doing." But Mark also talked about how "at the same time it was very lonesome, just how much hard work there was to be done and how little attention was being paid to AIDS and HIV." Because of Mark's involvement in AIDS activism in high school, when he got to college, he "was really primed for activist groups," saying,

I got involved with a lot of student groups. In the middle of my freshman year, the First Gulf War started, and that kind of killed the semester for me. We were close to Washington, and there was a lot of stuff going on down there.

National and global events such as the AIDS epidemic and the First Gulf War spawned an activism in Mark that would last throughout his academic and then teaching career.

Like with Mark, the First Gulf War influenced Ann so strongly that she not only engaged in community activism around peace and conflict resolution issues, but she developed graduate research on the interactions between parents and children on peace and war. At the time, Ann was in Indiana enrolled in a Ph.D. program “with the man I was partnered with at the time who was doing his Ph.D. in philosophy and was also native to Washington State.” She described how “We were both sort of wide-eyed to Midwest culture. We were both doing a lot of activism there with this small group of activists in this conservative community,” and how “that was more influential in a way than my coursework.”

Fortunately, in her anti-war activism, Ann had the support of her major professor, who “was a Quaker peace activist and then did this child development professional work.” Ann reported how she “was doing this activism on the one hand and started this peace coalition in this town, in Lafayette, Indiana. Then my graduate research was with her around how parents talk to children about peace and war.” Although she did not complete a teacher preparation program because she was enrolled in the School of Consumer and Family Sciences, Ann’s graduate internship in a childcare program for low-income children consisted of doing staff development work “around some general pedagogical principles, like thinking about conflict resolution and what are some strategies for teachers to bring conflict resolution into the classroom with kids.” So for Ann, world events affected the entire direction her career would take, leading to fruitful

work as a classroom teacher, author, and early childhood activist. Her critical reading of world politics opened up paths for Ann to take action for justice and teach others to do the same.

**Local events and issues.** Mark reported a pivotal experience in college at Swarthmore, when a portrait of Malcolm X was vandalized. When Mark and other White liberal students wanted to engage in dialogue with students of color about what had happened, the African American student group resisted having to teach White students about racism:

It was that collective action that said to the community, “We’re not going to teach you about this. You need to take more responsibility for this.” That really moved me forward. I had relationships with different people and different people who had left and then weren’t going to talk to me about this issue anymore. It really politicized the campus in a way that I think was transformative. All campuses continued to struggle with political issues like that. But I remember that really being transformative for me, just in thinking about the responsibility that I have to take for learning and studying and educating myself. It’s a lot of work, you know?

Mark discussed how the process of working through his own privilege and his guilt about being privileged “really gave [him] a deeper understanding of how fraught a classroom situation is, how framed it is by different histories and power.”

Like Mark, Maria had an experience in school that forced her to confront her own privilege. Growing up during school desegregation in the 1960s, Maria had two teachers in junior high school who enacted Jane Elliott’s Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes exercise. Maria remembered feeling outraged at being placed in the group that was most discriminated against: “I was this total pipsqueak of a nobody who no one even knew, and I just flew into a rage. It was very surprising to me. ‘You can’t make me stand all day! You can’t let them chew gum and not

me!” For Maria, her difficult home life may have played a role in her strong reaction to this experience, as she remarked, “I think that might have just come from family experience of always feeling like things were so tight and hard that you’re not going to do this to me in school now, too.”

For some critical educators, community experiences with activism led them toward P-12 teaching. This sometimes happened when working with adults whose convictions were so strong that trying to get them to see things in a new way led to frustration. Hyung described this when reflecting on his experience canvassing for California Public Interest Research Group (CalPIRG): “I would talk to people that were just so entrenched in their beliefs that I felt like I could talk to them forever but they’re working in the industry, and they are totally denying that we have these environmental problems or whatever it is. I thought working with young people would be great, so I gave that a try and did that for a while.” Hyung got a job working with troubled teens to see whether he liked it.

Similarly, while engaging in activism after college, Ann realized it would be easier to enact social change by starting with people who were younger:

So I was doing a lot of activism and then working with kids, and I came to a realization where I was like, ‘You know, rather than trying to change someone’s mind, like this 65 year old wealthy trustee at a private college, what if I worked with him when he was three years old and I taught him, and then he just didn’t invest in apartheid?’ That would be great! I’ll just work with three year olds. Man, forget trying to do this activism at this adult level; it would be so much more efficacious to work with the younger kids.

While these experiences may have been frustrating, they were pivotal in helping these participants decide to teach.



## Radicalizing Mentors

*For me, it was this great fortune of mentor after mentor, of people for whom activism was a seamless part of their everyday life.” –Ann Pelo*

All eight of these teachers mentioned near and distant\* family members, romantic partners, university professors, and other mentors who influenced them to teach critically. In addition to influential networks or groups of people, individuals also played a large role in shaping their critical teaching.

Several participants mentioned the critical role their family played in developing the teacher they would later become, although most were quick to point out that they were not red diaper babies (the children of parents who held radical political beliefs or who were Communist sympathizers). Ann talked about the importance of having a father who, while he never overtly talked about it, connected social justice and education in a meaningful way for her. Her father, a high school teacher in what was “the poorest legislative district in Washington state,” demonstrated a commitment to the community where he worked. Ann recalls:

I came away with some sense of his outrage at the inequities and his passion and commitment as a teacher of being of service to the community beyond being a teacher there...so I grew up very much with the notion that politics, ethics, and justice issues went together with schools.

Besides having a father who modeled service to impoverished communities, Ann also grew up with a brother who was deaf and who later came out as gay. Ann described how the lack of accommodations for John in her family and in her school influenced her, not just to be “fiercely

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\* I borrowed this phrase from Power and Hubbard (1996).

protective” of him, but also how, “It called me to an active stance rather than a passive stance about being deaf and being gay because it’s not an abstraction, it’s my brother.”

Maria talked about how when she was young her mother had an influence on her. In addition to teaching her kids about the existence of racism and taking a stand against racism, although her actions would sometimes contradict this stance, Maria’s mom joined a women’s organization with Liz Holtzman, New York attorney and former U.S. Congresswoman. During this time period, Maria’s mother took her to church services and events, which greatly influenced Maria toward social justice. She “became involved with this church in a very poor part of Brooklyn, St. Paul’s,” and although Maria’s family background was “very working-class,” it wasn’t “people hanging on for their lives” like she experienced at this church. Maria remembered helping out in the soup kitchen there, donating clothes, and other forms of service to the poor that “really made an impression” on her at an early age.

Besides talking about the important roles family members played, participants also discussed how their romantic partners influenced them. Lisa talked about the influence of partner Greg Michie, who had just left the classroom and started working at the university, “trying to teach teachers how to teach critically.” Because Greg was presenting at conferences and writing about critical teaching, Lisa was able to have conversations with him about his work and attended conferences with him. Similarly, Mark discussed the mentoring role his not-yet partner Katharine Johnson played as co-director of the local National Writing Project site where she facilitated a professional learning class that Mark took. Jennifer talked about how her partner Brad Aaron influenced her to become more politically aware and involved in local politics. A writer for an independent news weekly, *Flagpole Magazine*, Brad later started his own progressive news magazine, *Athens Weekly News*. Jennifer reported how Brad was writing about

city commission meetings, and how because of this she attended government meetings and local political events. In her words, “It’s not that I necessarily became political; I didn’t work for anyone’s campaign. But it was the first time I really had a sense of how government worked.”

Like Jennifer, Bill discussed his partner Linda Christensen, saying “there’s no way to overemphasize how much of an influence Linda has been on my teaching.” For him, Linda played a crucial role in modeling how to engage learners experientially. Bill reminisces about co-teaching a two-period literature and history class with Linda in the mid-1980’s: “For me, that was the single biggest thing that changed my teaching, that influenced me, that made me a more thoughtful teacher, because Linda so powerfully brings students’ lives into the class, into the conversation, and into the curriculum.” Bill remarked about how later, as a workshop leader and professional developer, Linda engaged teachers in the very same learning experiences she was asking them to do with their students. “If you want to teach them about writing, you have them write or if you’re going to talk about doing roleplays with kids, you have them *do* the roleplay.”

Most of these teachers emphasized the important influence of university professors on their teaching. Mark remembered having a strong relationship with a sociology professor who studied discourse analysis. While he was not yet teaching at the time, he discussed the impact that paying careful attention to language would have on his teaching and work as a teacher:

I look back to that stuff now, the attention to language and the way that language can position people in terms of power. I think anyone with a good enough bullshit detector kind of does that naturally when they’re reading a curriculum directive from a superintendent or at a professional development meeting when they’re being told how to do guided reading.

Because of the mentoring of his professor, Mark was able to see years later the negative way in which teachers are sometimes positioned.

For Lisa, college was the first time that she felt a connection with any of her teachers. Lisa asked somewhat incredulously how such a thing could happen, “Now as a teacher, I think: ‘How does that happen? How does a child go from kindergarten through eighth grade through senior year without having one teacher who ever connected?’” It wasn’t until her junior year of college, when she transferred from a junior college to the University of Illinois at Chicago, that Lisa had influential professors: “And *there* I finally had some great teachers, some teachers who really opened up my mind.” Taking courses with Maria Varelas and Steven Tozer exposed Lisa to the ideas of critical historians and educators who allowed Lisa to think critically:

Reading Paulo Freire and Lisa Delpit had a huge impact on me. I also took a lot of history classes where teachers were bringing in voices of people—my people! I always felt in school when I read the history books that I was just reading somebody else’s history. I was a spectator; this was not my history. I was not welcome in this country. I was not American. But here, I read Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, and it was like a whole world opened to me.

Having these mentors meant that Lisa was finally able to connect with what she was learning.

In addition to describing strong mentors who were professors, Lisa also talked about her relationship with her mentor teacher in a middle school where she student taught. David McWilliams, who was known as the radical teacher in the school and with whom Lisa felt she “fit philosophically,” was reading *House on Mango Street* with his students. He gave Lisa a copy of the book, and she described her reaction: “‘Oh my gosh I love this book!’ Esperanza, she was

me. That's me! That experience of having a book where you see yourself—I *never* read stuff like that in school. It was all other people's stories."

Unlike Lisa, Maria did not have any professors as an undergraduate who taught her to interrogate classism or racism or sexism: "I had to take my science and basic literature and basic writing, even a history course, but I just wasn't getting that kind of background that one would get to be able to think more critically." For her, traveling abroad and having mentors in France who taught Maria about U.S. imperialism played a larger role than her undergraduate professors or coursework. While she graduated with a bachelor's degree in French, Maria's master's degree with teacher certification finally gave her opportunities to work with mentors like Linda Gonzalez. Maria would spend afternoons in Linda's library, reading Paulo Freire, Jonathan Kozol, and Robert Coles and helping Linda write journal articles. While Gonzalez "didn't get tenure" because "she was much too radical," Maria described her as "a very, very key influence" in helping Maria learn to teach critically.

Like Lisa and Maria, Jennifer was not exposed to critical educator mentors until later in her teacher education, when she enrolled in a doctoral program. Despite the fact that Jennifer already had a bachelor's and master's degree in education, it wouldn't be until she started a doctoral program that she encountered critical pedagogy. In a reading education class with professor Bob Fecho, Jennifer encountered the ideas of Freire, Foucault, and Bakhtin. These critical ideas resonated with her:

Reading about breaking away from the banking model of education, looking at critical theory, looking at how Ira Shor teaches his college students just struck that place, it was like 'That's how I want to be able to teach. That's what I want to be able to do.

It was disappointing to Jennifer that she had to wait so long: “I find it amusing or confusing that I can go through a four year undergrad program and a year-and-a-half master’s program and never be introduced to these people and this way of thinking.”

For Terry, other than the 1960s, one professor stands out: “Professor Herman who was a Marxist lefty, what we’d call progressive today, totally changed the way I saw the world.” Terry talks about hanging out with Professor Herman after class, having lunch together on the lawn while talking about politics, war, Marxism, and the haves and have-nots.

Although he didn’t mention specific professors in his teacher preparation program, Bill talked about a mentor text--how Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was his “one critical book” at Reed College. He and partner Linda read it together, and Bill took a week-long class that Paulo Freire taught in Portland in the summer of 1987, saying “What I needed was to have the big picture of what matters here and the way in which education intersects with social change.” Reading Freire, Ira Shor, and Henry Giroux, for Bill and Linda, “transformed our teaching...it made the link between kids’ lives and a broader social analysis more urgent in our teaching.” On the other hand, however, while Bill appreciates what theory has to offer, he was also critical of certain uses of it:

I get irritated at lots of university-based writers on critical theory. I spent two years in a doctoral program at Portland State, and so I did a lot of theoretical reading. So often they try to use a highfalutin language to mask the fact that their practice is not very rich, and that annoys me. A lot of times they engage in an orgy of self-referential back-patting where they cite each other but they never cite teachers.

The concern Bill expressed had come up for me as I was looking for study participants. If many of the teachers in this study appear connected to each other because of Rethinking Schools, it is

because what Bill and other experienced networkers have done is to create an outlet and forum for P-12 teachers and their work.

Like Bill, all other participants named specific authors who influenced them, with several mentioning Paulo Freire, Jonathan Kozol, Ira Shor, Michael Apple, and Noam Chomsky. Some participants talked about the role of musicians on their political awareness, from Bruce Springsteen and John Lennon to the Clash and the Dead Kennedys. While these critical educators did not have a personal relationship with the distant mentor authors and musicians, what they wrote and sang about shaped study participants' reading of their world.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

These new understandings about radicalizing events and mentors suggest that we need to rethink teacher education if we want more teachers who will enact critical pedagogy and social justice education. In this section I will explore implications for teacher education course content, field placements, admissions, and recruitment.

As we have seen, the vast majority of these teachers came to a teacher preparation or child development program already radicalized in their politics and commitment to justice. Through a combination of pivotal events and critical mentors in their lives, these critical educators sought out teaching as a way to effect social change in line with their beliefs about equity, justice, and democracy. Let us unpack what this might mean for the way we prepare future generations of teachers to enact social justice work in schools.

First, let us explore what these data might mean for teacher candidates in existing programs. Because social and political events were important influences for the majority of these participants, we may inquire into how teacher educators might make better use of current events and issues in the classroom as a means of politicizing and radicalizing preservice and inservice

teachers. While we cannot wait around for a catastrophic event to happen, we can learn from the educators in this study who found issues they cared about and engaged in activism around them. We ought to make deliberate efforts to get to know our students and what passions they hold so that we can try to help them connect with activist organizations if they have not already done so. We need to interrogate more critically political issues within the field of education such as testing, privatization, or No Child Left Behind to help sharpen teacher candidates' sociopolitical analysis. We should model activism by inviting our students to activist events in which we are engaged, whether it involves writing letters to legislators or marching at the state capitol building. We ought to find distant mentors with whom our students are likely to connect. For example, as Lisa remarked about how she had never encountered writers describing the history and experiences of people like her until college, we can be the matchmakers between our teacher candidates and similar mentor authors. Likewise, as we get to know our students, we can better match them up with faculty and teachers who share similar interests or background experiences.

In addition to getting to know existing teacher candidates to connect them with issues, activism, and mentors, we might also rethink the way we assign mentors for field placements. As we have seen, mentors played a huge role in radicalizing all eight critical educators. This begs the question of why we match teacher candidates with any mentor teacher willing to accept an intern. We need to rethink our goals for teacher education and the corresponding the role of mentors. If our goal is to produce educators who believe all children can learn, who care about their students' families and communities, and who teach their students to interrogate issues and read their world, then we need to carefully choose mentor teachers who model these dispositions, even if it means doubling or tripling the number of student teachers assigned to a particular teacher.



But mentoring need not be limited to the P-12 classroom. What is important, as the data have shown, is for prospective teachers to spend time with mentors who will work tirelessly to make sure every child learns or mentors who work tirelessly to address justice issues, even if these mentors deviate from "standards-based instruction" or work outside of formal education. Because of the vast amount of deficiency-oriented thinking about children and families operating in schools as well as the current stronghold of high-stakes testing and accountability, there may not be enough radicalized mentors to go around. As Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) have described, we can look outside formal education to find mentors who enact critical pedagogy with children, whether they are athletic coaches, dance instructors, camp counselors, or others devoted to helping all children learn and succeed. Likewise, mentors in activist organizations working on living wage campaigns, health care reform, or other justice issues affecting children and their families can help radicalize future teachers equally if not more than random public school teachers who happen to volunteer for a field placement.

In addition to changing the mentor matching process, since many veteran critical educators came to teaching already radicalized, we ought to also rethink the admissions and recruitment processes for identifying and accepting new candidates. As Duncan-Andrade (2007) and Haberman (2005) have written, what leads to longevity and success in diverse and urban schools has far less to do with traditional entry requirements such as grade point average and SAT scores and more to do with radicalizing dispositions such as the following:

- Jumping at the chance to work with ‘challenging’ students.
- Being risk-takers with students, with their curriculum, and with their pedagogy.
- Describing their access to students as a privilege, rather than as a ‘right’ of their profession.

- Genuinely wanting to be at the school and with students, even when their school attacks them personally or the broader society belittles their profession.
- Not being afraid of the community and consequently building relationships with parents, siblings, families, and the broader community.
- Describing teaching in urban schools as ‘a way of life’ rather than as a job.
- Associating their teaching with ‘the struggle’ for human dignity and justice.
- Describing being a teacher as ‘who I am, not what I do’. (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 628)

Critical educators have a sense of duty and commitment to every student because they see teaching as a means of effecting justice and social change. While not mutually exclusive, this often contrasts with the traditional teacher candidate who is accepted on the basis of grades, test scores, and wanting to help or save children. We need to examine critically our teacher education program admissions standards if we want to produce long-term teachers devoted to critical pedagogy and social justice. Haberman's (1995, 1996, 2005), Haberman & Post's (1998), and Duncan-Andrade's (2007) characteristics of effective teachers are places to start looking at possible selection criteria.

In addition to reexamining the way we do admissions, we ought to rethink recruitment. Instead of waiting for teacher candidates (many of whom are middle to upper class, conservative, White females) to select our programs, we can take action to recruit those who are already radicalized. Most of these teachers made the decision to teach because of their participation in activist groups and radical networks. We might tap into such groups as sources of teacher candidates (see Chapter 5), and we will likely find ways to build reciprocal relationships in the process. Teacher education programs might try to find new audiences by setting up tables or booths at activist events, advertising in activist journals and newspapers, and making more cross-

disciplinary connections between education and other justice fields. Teacher education and education in general needs to make every effort not to be separate and isolated from other movements for progressive social change.

Radicalizing events and mentors are powerful forces in critical educators' lives and teaching practices. We have explored how these factors played a role in shaping these eight P-12 educators across the United States, and we have examined some of the ways in which teacher educators and teacher education programs might use these events and mentors to develop future radical teachers committed to justice.

## CHAPTER 5

### INCUBATING AND SUSTAINING: HOW TEACHER NETWORKS ENABLE AND SUPPORT CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Abstract: Teacher networks play important roles both in helping people decide to become critical educators and in sustaining their critical teaching once they are in the classroom. Using data from an in-depth qualitative interview study with eight critical P-12 teachers across the United States, the author argues that it is imperative for teacher educators to use social justice networks to recruit prospective teachers and to help existing teacher candidates form and connect with networks.

“The idea that this work is too difficult and too important so it needs collaboration, reflection, and help was something we understood from the very beginning.” –Bill Bigelow

“It is our responsibility to establish ways for teachers to connect to other activists, organizations and networks that will support their social justice work,” (Montaño & Burstein, 2006, p. 186).

Many teacher educators (e.g. Ayers, Michie, & Rome, 2004) have found that when beginning teachers enter the profession, whatever commitment they had to critical pedagogy, equity issues, and social justice as preservice teachers often seems to disappear. Even in teacher education programs with explicit emphases on social justice, not all graduates enact critical pedagogies in their classroom. This study sought to find out what kinds of experiences influence

educators to teach for social justice by starting with educators who have been teaching critically for several years and tracing their critical practice back to impactful life and teacher preparation experiences.

After synthesizing years of research on teacher education for social justice, Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) put forth a call to action that included the “development of a diversified and rigorous program of empirical research regarding teacher education that rationalizes and operationalizes social justice as an outcome” (p. 157). In the context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century American schools, where we see a relentless focus on high-stakes tests (Nichols & Berliner, 2007), a narrowing of the curriculum (NCEE, 2007), and greater economic disparity between social classes (Feller & Stone, 2009), increasing the knowledge base on teacher education for social justice has become increasingly important.

Cochran-Smith (2004) suggested a promising way to heed the call to action for more social justice teacher education:

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.

Studies that map backward from successful teaching in diverse settings would begin with successful classroom practice and trace connections back to teacher learning experiences and varying modes of teacher preparation. (p. 164)

By starting with currently-practicing teachers who have achieved success—determined by traditional means such as student achievement and other indicators such as students’ sociopolitical awareness and agency for social change—teacher education research can identify the conditions that lead to teachers’ enacting critical pedagogy in their classrooms and beyond.

This article reports on a study that responds to Marilyn Cochran-Smith's call for "backward-mapping" teacher education research. As I interviewed eight P-12 educators about their life experiences and teacher preparation experiences that led them to teach critically, I identified three major themes or influences on their teaching: politicization through global and local events, forming and joining social and professional networks, and learning from near and distant mentors. I focus here on the second theme: the role of forming and joining social and professional networks and implications for teacher education. I start by defining briefly the way I am using critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice. Then I take a quick look at different kinds of teacher networks before describing the methodology used in the study. Next, I present data from participants and close with implications for teacher education.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

*Critical pedagogy* and *teaching for social justice* have been criticized for being overused and undertheorized (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; North, 2006). In this paper, I use these terms to mean educational practices that both critique societal structures perpetuating injustice and put students and teachers in agentic positions to effect change. Following Freire (1970/2005; 1997; 1998; 2004;) and Freire & Macedo (1987), I understand that "The progressive educator...never accepts that the teaching of any discipline whatsoever could take place divorced from a critical analysis of how society works" (Freire, 2004, p. 20), that we need to situate students' worlds and inequities within a systemic sociopolitical analysis. It is this sociopolitical analysis that sets critical pedagogy and social justice education apart from other forms of multicultural education that celebrate diversity and focus on individual prejudice without attempting to transform inequities by engaging in efforts toward systemic social change (Howard & Aleman, 2008; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2004).

Critical pedagogy and social justice education teach students to read their world by analyzing the social, cultural, historical, and political context of their lives. By engaging students in a critical awareness of their world, critical pedagogy “challenges us to recognize, engage, and critique (so as to transform) any existing undemocratic social practices and institutional structures that produce and sustain inequalities and oppressive social identities and relations” (Leistyna & Woodrum, 1996, p. 2). But merely engaging in a critique and stopping there leads to despair, hopelessness, and a deterministic sense that things cannot be changed (Bigelow, 2002; Freire, 1970/2005). Therefore, critical educators critique undemocratic and inequitable practices and structures *so as to transform them*. Critical teachers put their students in agentic positions, through in-class simulations, roleplays, and taking action to address school and community issues.

The teachers in this study were all invited to participate because they had published articles, book chapters, and books about how they enact critical pedagogy and social justice education. One of the things that most influenced these teachers to become teachers and to teach from a critical perspective was networks of likeminded others who supported their work. Before I describe the research design of the study, let us look briefly at some of the different kinds of teacher networks for social justice.

### **Networking for Social Justice**

Social justice networks take several different forms, from a gathering of a few teachers in the hallway or progressive friends at a shared meal to structured inquiry groups that follow strict protocols for their work together. These groups exist wherever people get together to collaborate and support each other around their critical teaching practice or activism for social justice. In this

section we will look at two types of networks: justice-oriented teacher networks and social justice networks outside education.

### **Justice-Oriented Teacher Networks**

Informal teacher networks exist within many P-12 schools, where one teacher collaborates with others to prevent isolation, offer emotional support, and share teaching ideas around social justice themes. This will commonly take place between classes, at lunch, and before or after school as teachers gather to check in with one another and share resources. These networks are informal in that they are not on a fixed timeline, do not have regularly scheduled meetings, and are composed solely of teachers without the presence of a university researcher.

Many researchers have written about teacher inquiry groups (Duncan-Andrade, 2004, 2005; Luna, et al., 2004; Nieto, 2003; Quartz, Olsen, & Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Van Sluys, Lewison, & Flint, 2006), teacher research groups (Aaron et al., 2006; Long et al., 2006; National Writing Project, 2005; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006), study groups (Allen, 1999; Carter, Mota-Altman, & Peitzman, 2009; North, 2009), culture circles (Souto-Manning, 2009), professional development networks (Thomas, 2007), and learning communities (Niesz, 2010) in which the collaborative work is conducted around issues of equity, culturally relevant pedagogy, and social justice. These kinds of groups are often based at a school site or across multiple schools in the same city or geographic area and include both teachers and a university researcher who facilitates the group. Some of these groups (Fecho, 2000; Picower, 2007, 2009) have been designed to support preservice teachers as they transition into their first year as teachers. What these groups have in common is that they come together for a finite time period, often determined by a grant or research agenda (for an exception, El-Haj, 2003), around a specific line or lines of inquiry.



In addition to informal networks and teacher inquiry groups, other teacher networks include teacher activist groups (TAG) or inquiry-to-action groups (Au, Bigelow, Burant, & Salas, 2005; Childs, 2004; Doster, 2008; Mangual & Picower, 2007; Nagaoka et al., 2011; Rogers, Mosley, Kramer, & The Literacy for Social Justice Teacher Research Group, 2009; Tucker, 2007) where members engage in inquiry that leads to action, usually in response to educational policy that negatively impacts children and teachers. These groups often include members from multiple schools in the same city or geographic region, which is particularly helpful to teachers who do not feel their school-based colleagues share their commitment to social justice. Several TAG organizations have joined together in a national coalition (see <http://teacheractivistgroups.org/>).

Finally, national networks (Au, Bigelow, Burant, & Salas, 2005; Jehlen, 2004; Kasprisin, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; National Education Association, 2006) and special interest groups of national and international education organizations (Andrzejewski, 2005) offer opportunities for individuals and members of local networks to collaborate, offer support, and share ideas about critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice across geographic boundaries. Although members meet less frequently than in smaller networks, national and international networks help teachers see themselves as part of larger social movements for change.

### **Other Social Justice Networks**

In addition to being members of teacher networks, many critical educators are also involved with activist groups composed of people from a variety of careers and addressing issues besides education. Like the teacher groups described above, these networks range from small, informal groups to larger, more formal ones and address a multiplicity of issues, including

economic issues, human rights, peace, environmental justice, and other concerns. As we will see, like teacher networks, these networks play an important role in *incubating* new teachers as well as *sustaining* current teachers. They offer teachers who see education as one vehicle among many for social change to connect to others doing social justice work, locating education within a broad movement that seeks to make society more democratic, equitable, just, and humane.

### **Research Design**

In this qualitative in-depth interview study, I asked eight critical P-12 educators across the United States to describe their critical teaching practice and experiences that they felt influenced them to teach critically. I identified three themes or key influences on participants: politicization through global and local events, forming and joining social and professional networks, and learning from near and distant mentors. This article focuses on the how the second theme, forming and joining networks, helps teachers decide to teach in the first place and, once they become teachers, sustain their critical teaching practice and focus on issues of equity and justice. The study addresses the following questions:

1. What life experiences have enabled teachers to adopt a critical stance in their classrooms?
2. In what way, if any, did their initial preparation or ongoing teacher education influence these teachers to teach critically?

### **Participant Selection**

My selection criteria for study participants included (a) currently practicing educators in P-12 classrooms, (b) who enacted critical pedagogy, especially in English/Language Arts, (c) as evidenced by prior publication about their critical teaching practices, with (d) attention given to a variety of geographic areas of the U.S., experience levels, race/ethnicity, and ages/grades taught. Using a purposeful and snowball sampling strategy (Patton, 2002), I identified participants

through published works in edited books and journals about critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice as well as existing networks of critical educators such as National Writing Project and Rethinking Schools.

A total of eight teachers participated, and all have given permission to use their real names and other identifiers (see Table 1, p. 30). Although Bill Bigelow had left the classroom more than a year before the study started, I included him because of his substantial contributions to the field of critical pedagogy.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted a series of three in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants for around 90 minutes per interview (see Seidman, 2006). For the first and second interviews, I traveled to participants' classrooms, homes, and nearby cafés so we could talk in person. The first interview focused on current teaching practices. The second interview addressed life history and other experiences leading teachers to teach critically, and the third consisted of a member check in which participants reflected on transcripts and preliminary analysis of previous interviews, which they had been sent prior to the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Rather than analyzing data for case studies of individual participants, I wanted to draw out patterns and themes that might help current and future critical teachers and teacher educators. I used an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ezzy, 2002) that started with my becoming familiar with the data by listening to the 16 first and second interview recordings several times as well as reviewing and re-reviewing my notes from the third interview to get a complete picture of the body of data. Then I transcribed the interview conversations, often listening to the audio-recordings several times to ensure the accuracy of my transcription. Once I

had a good overall picture of the content of the transcripts, I generated initial codes and applied these codes to each data extract or unit.

After I systematically applied initial codes to the data set, I grouped these codes into categories that cohered or clustered together, what Braun and Clarke (2006) called “searching for themes” or what grounded theory researchers might call axial coding. I cut apart the entire data set and reorganized it by collating data items into categories.

Next, I developed themes by collapsing categories and judging for internal and external homogeneity (Patton, 2002). This was accomplished first by checking to see that all coded data extracts appeared to form a coherent pattern and second by rereading the entire data set and re-coding data extracts with the three identified themes to test them for accuracy. Then I cut apart this re-coded data set at the data extract level and physically reorganized by theme and sub-theme, which produced a visual thematic map of the entire data set. I reassessed this reworked map to ensure that the themes were not redundant and did not leave gaps.

In the section that follows, we will take a look at study data that show how for these eight teachers, forming and joining networks played a role both in helping them decide to become teachers and in helping them sustain their social justice teaching once they were in the classroom. For some, a social or professional network served as an incubator, helping them develop into a critical P-12 educator. And for all participants, networks played a role in supporting their critical teaching practice as they came together to share resources, teaching strategies, and take action in the community around social and political issues.

### **Forming and Joining Social and Professional Networks**

These eight critical educators’ participation in social and professional networks was an important influence on their teaching. Because “teaching against the grain” (Simon, 1992)

requires both courage and access to resources beyond the traditional curriculum, critical educators like the participants in this study ally themselves with others—teachers and people in other professions—as a form of support for the work they do. As we will see, for many of these teachers, networks helped them decide to teach. I use the metaphor of networks as *incubators* to represent the brooding function that progressive networks played.

### **Networks as Incubators**

For some, forming alliances and networks came naturally, even before they decided to teach. In fact, creating and joining networks had a large role in helping these critical educators decide to become teachers in the first place.

Terry Moore (Moore, 2004), a third grade teacher in Tenafly, NJ who majored in sociology as an undergraduate, discussed how in college he networked with other college students and professors to form a progressive activist group. This network would help him choose a career in education:

We formed an organization with the professors called *People for Radical Political Action*. We did a number of activities on campus, you know, protests, guerilla theater, talks, study groups. Nicely enough, when we graduated, we decided we wanted to stay together as a community because the professors were living in the area and the students wanted to. So we formed this group of 25 people, which surprisingly enough still exists today. The sixties had greatly influenced all of us, so we started choosing occupations that would—not to seem haughty about it—improve the world. So that’s why I started to go into teaching.

In this case, Terry’s network, influenced by the social and political climate of the time period, served as an incubator for various careers like teaching that shared a vision of social change.

Bill Bigelow (1985, 2006, 2008; Bigelow & Diamond, 1988; Bigelow & Peterson, 1998, 2002), a former high school social studies teacher, discussed a similar story where he and other students of Antioch College professor Norm Diamond formed an organization called *Praxis*. Like Terry's network, Bill's group also met and discussed "what we were going to do and where we were going to go." Members of Praxis wanted to make collective decisions as much as possible in order to effect the most social change and stay together as a group. Bill graduated with a degree in political science and had not yet decided to become a teacher. His undergraduate experiences teaching in an alternative high school, as well as experiences teaching a slideshow he and his colleagues had developed, called "A People's History of Dayton," (a predecessor of Howard Zinn's work) had given him a taste of what teaching was like, but at the same time, Bill grew frustrated with the short-term, one-shot nature of the work. Partner Millie Thayer helped Bill decide to go back to school to become certified as a public school teacher. Collaboratively, the two of them went through the thought process of how best they could contribute to their vision of social justice:

You know, what were we good for? We wanted something that connected to our social justice passions, where we could feel some efficacy. A lot of our friends were going off to work in factories to try and do union organizing and various things like that. We actually toyed with that idea for a while. But it seemed like teaching was the clearest alternative, that you could do good social justice work with other teachers, with students, with parents, within teacher unions. So it seemed like it offered a lot of different possibilities.

As was the case with Terry, Bill networked with other activists and *through the network* decided to become a teacher, because teaching fit his vision of social justice.

Like Terry and Bill, high school social studies teacher Hyung Nam (Nam, 2006) had a bachelor's degree in something other than education—philosophy—from Reed College. Working as an educational assistant in an alternative high school for girls who were adjudicated or who had mental health issues, Hyung got his feet wet teaching. He became involved with the Portland Area Rethinking Schools (PARS) network after a colleague at the high school returned from a workshop with Bill Bigelow on *Rethinking Columbus*. At the time, PARS was just starting a group around the topic of sweatshops, which later turned into a globalization group that Hyung joined.

While Hyung had been toying around with the idea of “unschooling” after reading Gatto’s (1992) work, he discussed how his participation in PARS that led him to become a certified teacher in a public school:

After I was part of that group for a year, reading Rethinking Schools’ materials and meeting all these teachers, that’s when I decided I really want to be a teacher, and I want to be a public school teacher, and I want to go back and get teacher education.

For Hyung, Rethinking Schools served not only as an incubator for teaching but steered him away from the alluring unschooling movement led by former educators like John Taylor Gatto: “I think the biggest thing has been Rethinking Schools. Without that, I wouldn’t have become a teacher. I kind of battled with it, and I would have been stuck with the whole John Taylor Gatto kind of thing.” This network of critical educators allowed Hyung to see “the big picture, beyond just thinking about whether the individual child is oppressed with authoritarianism,” which Hyung argued was a “very liberal critique of education as opposed to looking at it much more structurally and on a societal level.”

The Portland Area Rethinking Schools network also played an important role in incubating third grade teacher Mark Hansen (Hansen, 2005), an anthropology and sociology major, into teaching. Like Hyung, Mark became a teaching assistant at the advice of a friend and was placed in an elementary special education classroom. After transferring to Franklin High School in Portland, Mark found out about Rethinking Schools and a trip to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle that Bill Bigelow and Linda Christensen were making with other teachers. Mark remarked about how he “caught wind of this whole progressive, radical social justice teaching community that was going in Portland,” a network that influenced him to go back to school to become certified.

These four teachers had engaged in activism prior to becoming teachers. Terry and Bill were involved in anti-war and peace groups during the Vietnam War and afterward. Hyung had canvassed for California Public Interest Research Group (CalPIRG) around environmental issues and had become further politicized during the Iran Contra Scandal. Mark became an activist through his work around HIV and AIDS as a college student. Terry’s and Bill’s participation in broad social justice networks around a variety of issues helped them decide that teaching was an effective vehicle for social change. Hyung and Mark became teachers through their participation in a network of critical educators.

All four of these critical teachers decided to teach as a result of their membership in various political and educational networks. For them, networks served an incubating role, both in helping them become teachers and in helping them become *critical* teachers. However, the role that networks played in supporting them did not stop there. After they became teachers, the networks that Mark, Hyung, Bill, and Terry were part of continued to sustain their social justice



teaching. Now let us explore how networks also sustained the other four educators: Jennifer, Maria, Lisa, and Ann.

### **Networks as Sustainers**

All eight of these critical educators discussed the importance of being a part of social and professional networks *after* they started to teach. These networks helped sustain their work as teachers, especially considering how for many teachers, critical work can become lonely or isolating.

Jennifer Aaron (Aaron et al., 2006), a first grade teacher in New York City, had gone through both bachelor's and master's degree programs in education without discovering the importance of teaching students to engage in sociopolitical analysis of their world in order to change it. It was not until she enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Georgia that she found a network to support critical ideas. She talked about the influential role of a critical inquiry group she formed with professor Bob Fecho and other students, saying "I think that's where I tend to do the best, when I can bounce ideas off other people."

For Jennifer, this network of other progressive educators helped her engage in academic service learning projects with her upper-elementary students. Having colleagues from the inquiry group visit her school and give her feedback proved beneficial: "Having that was as valuable as having the literature and the new ideas and philosophies. Anybody can read a book but to be able to then play it out was what ended up being most important for me." Visiting Jennifer's Hamilton Heights classroom demonstrated the influence of this network, as I looked around and saw posters where students had analyzed television commercials for gender and racial bias, as well as charts showing the results of students' inventory of family and community assets. In this

case, Jennifer had been teaching prior to joining a justice-oriented network, but having the network sustained her critical teaching practice.

Maria Sweeney (Sweeney, 1999, 2002), a Title I and Reading Recovery teacher in Ridgewood, NJ, also benefited from being a member of a network, one that she helped form. She remembers how during her first year of teaching she read Jesse Goodman's book, *Democratic Teaching in Elementary Schools*, and wanted to build a network with other social justice-oriented educators.

At that time, I couldn't find anybody who was trying to teach for social justice. I was always making phone calls: "Do you know anyone who's doing this? Do you know anyone who's doing this?" So somehow I found Bob Peterson. We knew each other through a few phone calls, and he helped me get out to this founding conference in St. Louis. And then we stayed good friends for a long time, really good friends. He was a big influence on me, he was a huge influence.

In this case, Maria formed a reciprocal relationship with one of the founders of Rethinking Schools in 1983, someone with whom she would later form another organization, National Coalition of Education Activists in 1988. Maria talked about how through these two organizations, she met influential educators like Rita Tenorio, Bill Bigelow, Linda Christensen, and Teaching for Change founder Deborah Menkhart and reached beyond the confines of her own school and district. She remarked at how "that was a very big impression on me" and how "I am very thankful to them that they took me seriously," since she was in her mid 20's at the time. Because of the support of these networks, Maria was able to engage her students in social justice work year after year, including producing a Broadway play about Nike and Disney sweatshops (Sweeney, 2002).

Like Maria, shortly after becoming a teacher, Lisa Espinosa (Espinosa, 2003, 2008, 2009), a seventh grade science and language arts teacher in Chicago, got involved with two teacher networks, the Teachers for Social Justice teacher activist group and Rethinking Schools. These networks supported Lisa as she put into practice the social justice strategies she learned as an education major at the University of Illinois in Chicago. She described these alliances with other critical educators as a source of sustenance for her:

All of that really helped me a lot to give me support or nourishment. Most of the time you're just alone in the classroom. But just having somewhere outside of the classroom that was supporting me in that way, too, was really important.

While there was an eighth grade teacher at Lisa's middle school who also taught from a critical perspective, most of her colleagues did not share her philosophy. She remarked:

For a while, if teachers got some lesson plan on peace or social justice, they would give it to me, like I'm the only person that would use it...They meant well, but it just totally showed me they didn't get it, that they think it's my thing, I do this, but it's not something that should be part of our curriculum.

In this context, networking with other critical teachers outside the school became necessary to maintain a teaching practice devoted to social justice.

Ann Pelo (Pelo, 2007, 2008; Pelo & Davidson, 2000), a preschool teacher and teacher mentor in Seattle, discussed networking with Rethinking Schools and how being a part of that group sustained her, "I feel like Rethinking Schools really nurtured me along." She discussed how Bill Bigelow, an editor of *Rethinking Schools Magazine*, had read her book, *That's Not Fair! A Teacher's Guide to Activism with Young Children*, and had contacted her shortly after 9/11 asking her to contribute to a special issue of the magazine. Ann talked about how "It was

just pure luck that they didn't have any early childhood people they were aware of back then.” She acknowledged how she benefited from this network “because early childhood has been so ghettoized, and anti-bias work within early childhood has been so ghettoized and so dominated by a handful of voices and this pretty stale script of putting out brown Play Doh” and having multiracial dolls for the children to play with. This network of “people who are such smart thinkers and who are lifetime activists, educational activists and community organizers and people who are walking the walk so much” has affirmed and challenged Ann’s thinking and has helped push her field of work, early childhood education, to a new level.

As we have seen, whether serving as incubators or sustainers, social justice networks played an instrumental role in developing these teachers’ critical practice. In the next section we will explore implications these understandings have for teacher education.

### **Implications: Using Networks to Develop Social Justice Educators**

Social justice networks are important in both the recruitment and retention of critical educators. In what follows I make the argument that in order to develop more teachers committed to critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice, as teacher educators we need to tap into networks as sites of recruitment and teach the teachers with whom we already work to form and join networks.

### **Networks as Vehicles for Recruiting Critical Teachers**

Starting with teachers who have demonstrated a commitment to teaching for social justice years into their careers, this study traced support for their critical teaching to the social justice networks in which they were members. Half of these participants became teachers because of their involvement in social justice networks. This finding has implications for the recruitment of critical educators. Rather than admitting to teacher education programs only those students who

typically seek careers in education—White candidates who usually hold deficit views toward children of color and who have not interrogated their own privilege (King, 1991; Sleeter, 2008)—it is essential for teacher education programs to reach out to activist and justice-oriented networks to identify potential candidates.

Haberman’s (1995, 1996, 2005; Haberman & Post, 1998) research has shown that effective teachers in racially and socioeconomically diverse schools share many of the characteristics of the teachers interviewed here: they majored in something other than education as an undergraduate; are between the ages of 30 and 50 years old; are aware of their own racism, sexism, classism, and other prejudices; live in the city or would have no objection to moving into the city; and expect to visit the homes of the children she or he teaches. While others (e.g. Irvine, 2003; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; Sleeter, 2009) have called for recruiting more teachers of color to address the need for more teachers who “bring a commitment and sense of urgency to multicultural teaching, social justice, and providing children of color with an academically challenging curriculum” (Sleeter, 2009, p. 617), what gets overlooked is the importance of tapping into social justice networks as a source of new teacher candidates.

If we want more teachers who are in it for the long haul, who, rather than bringing a paternalistic zeal to “save” the children, choose teaching because it is a path toward greater justice for all members of society, then as teacher educators we need to connect with social justice networks. By participating in these networks, we are likely to meet people who have already developed a commitment to equity and justice but who have not yet settled on a career path that will allow them to do important justice work. As we share our passion for our work and vision for education as a means of effecting social change, we may influence others to become

teachers. In this reciprocal relationship, we may also build bridges between education and other movements for justice so that our work is mutually beneficial to all involved.

### **Teaching Teachers to Network for Justice**

In addition to participating in social justice networks, it is the responsibility of teacher educators, both in preservice teacher education and in ongoing professional learning, to teach prospective teachers to form their own networks and to establish ways for them to connect to existing networks that will support their social justice work (Montaño & Burstein, 2006). First let us explore helping teachers form their own networks.

When critical educators feel isolated, they form support networks. Maria, Bill, Ann, and Terry all worked with others to create groups that would help sustain their work toward social justice. As Bill (Bigelow, 2004) has written, it is important for teachers not to be “The Lone Ranger,” to create a network, however informal, with other teachers who share a common vision of teaching. One way for teacher educators to do this is to tap into our teachers’ and teacher candidates’ prior histories with networks. How can we learn about the groups in which they have been involved? How can we find out how they have effectively worked for things they believe in as a way to help them see the benefits of networking to support critical teaching? It is our role to learn from the teachers with whom we work about their prior histories with supportive networks so we can use this information to help them see the need for creating networks to sustain them. In a climate where 40 to 50 percent of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) and where few teachers engage their students in critical pedagogy, it is especially incumbent upon us to help teachers develop their own networks.

Besides creating new networks, it is also our responsibility to help teachers connect to existing social justice networks. All eight of these critical educators participated in social and

political networks outside their schools that led them to and supported their critical teaching practices. As we have seen, some of these networks (Bill's Praxis group, Mark's National Writing Project site, and Jennifer's Critical Inquiry Pedagogy group) were affiliated with universities, while others (Rethinking Schools, Teachers for Social Justice, People for Radical Political Action, National Coalition of Education Activists) were not. Much of what happens in initial and ongoing teacher education is teaching teachers content knowledge, habits of mind, and pedagogical strategies. What is missing is giving teachers the tool of networking to sustain their critical practice. Some ways we might help teachers network are to sponsor writing groups or start critical inquiry groups with teachers, invite teachers to join the networks in which we participate, and help teachers connect to teacher activist groups, National Writing Project sites, and teacher unions. Teacher education programs that fail to give teachers the tool of networking only go halfway toward developing social justice educators. In the context of high-stakes testing and accountability, teacher attrition, and the cultural divide between teachers and students, it is crucial for us to give teachers this tool to help them sustain critical education.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **MOVING FORWARD**

We have seen how the teachers in this study teach their students to read the word and the world in order to take action for social justice. We have also seen that these teachers were most influenced to teach critically by politicization through global and local events, forming and joining social and professional networks, and learning from near and distant mentors. And we have explored implications for teacher education, looking at how progressive networks can help us recruit new teacher candidates and how we can teach teachers to form their own networks and join existing ones. In this concluding chapter, I will discuss what I have learned from the process of conducting and writing my dissertation that I will use in my new role as an assistant professor.

#### **Teaching**

As a teacher educator and researcher locating my work in the field of teacher education, this dissertation has increased my knowledge base about teacher education and allowed me to find a social justice niche within it. I connected with the work of social justice teacher educators like Jeff Duncan-Andrade, Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Bill Ayers, Greg Michie, Bree Picower, Christine Sleeter, and Ernest Morrell and will draw upon them as sources of inspiration as I move into a faculty role.

As a teacher, I want my students to take a critical perspective that views education and society not just through the lens of individual accomplishments and failures but also through more macro sociocultural and sociopolitical lenses that examine structural forces at play in society. I want my students to interrogate their own positionalities and how these might inform their teaching. I want to provide opportunities for my students to network with progressive



organizations and find mentors who inspire them. I want to use current events in education such as testing and accountability as a springboard for thinking critically about our role as teachers and how teaching might serve a higher purpose than filling students heads with content knowledge or teaching the word without teaching the world.

I want to team up with other teacher educators interested in critical pedagogy and social justice to examine our own pedagogy and how it affects the students we teach. How can we engage in a critical inquiry cycle of action and reflection that leads to greater equity and justice? How can we support each other in ways similar to the ways in which the networks I studied have supported critical educators? I envision using networks to share teaching strategies, provide emotional support, and connect education to broader movements for social change. In addition to networking at my own university, I will continue my collaborations with AERA's Critical Educators for Social Justice special interest group, Rethinking Schools, and Metro Atlantans for Public Schools (MAPS).

### **Advising**

I feel the process of conducting my dissertation study has prepared me to advise graduate students as they encounter issues similar to the ones I faced as a graduate student. I will advise my students not to select a master's or doctoral committee too hastily so that they get a feel for faculty's personalities and research interests. I will advise them to find faculty members whose work they admire to invite to join their committee. When it comes to choosing a topic to study, I will advise my students to find something about which they are passionate and excited. After three years with my topic, I still find it fascinating, and I want to continue pursuing it. I feel my adviser and committee guided me toward a study that I would find stimulating for years to come, and I hope to do the same with my advisees. One thing that I have found to be important in my

research is becoming familiar with what has already been studied and building upon the body of existing work. I want to help my students identify areas where more research is needed so that they contribute new ideas to the field. While I have no plans to indoctrinate my students, I hope to work with them to engage in research studies for greater equity and social justice.

I hope to work with my students to decide ahead of time the kinds of experiences they will need for their future career and work backward. This may include things like presenting at conferences, teaching university classes, writing for publication, serving as a reviewer, etc. I want to guide them to specific courses that will successively build upon one another toward a coherent program of study.

Even though I situate my work in a particular forms of qualitative research, I hope to keep an open mind and advise students toward epistemological and theoretical frameworks that make sense for them. If I feel I offer limited expertise in a particular area that my students want to study, I hope to guide them toward other faculty who do bring expertise in that area.

### **Research**

I am fascinated by the conditions that enable teachers to teach for social justice, particularly in a climate of high-stakes testing and accountability, and particularly in urban schools. I would like to continue this line of thinking, using some of the following ideas.

Possible next steps in my research:

1. Embed my research in my work as a teacher educator.
  - a. Conduct action research in the courses I teach.
  - b. Study teachers in the schools in which I work.
2. Think of ways to continue my dissertation project.

- a. Create a questionnaire for other critical educators using life history questions similar to those I used before. Maybe team up with a quantitative researcher to design a mixed methods study.
- b. Do individual case studies of critical educators with whom I work in P-5 schools.
- c. Develop a plan to start following critical pre-service teachers forward into their careers.

Now that I have started by studying the critical teaching practices of published authors across the United States, I want to locate my research in more local, embedded contexts. As I move into a university faculty role, particularly in a school with an emphasis on teaching, I hope to integrate my research with the work that I do with preservice teachers as well as teachers in P-5 schools. I envision using what I have learned as a graduate researcher in my work with literacy education students. I hope to inquire into my own teaching practice, looking particularly at critical pedagogical practices I enact to see how students respond to them. I hope to adopt new strategies for helping students interrogate their positionalities and start to think about the sociocultural contexts of learning. As I plan ways to engage my students in a process of self-reflection, I will draw upon what I have learned from my literature reviews on teacher dispositions as well as my dissertation participants' life experiences.

I am particularly interested in working in professional development school sites under a federal urban education teacher quality grant, where I could teach courses and get to know the teaching practices of my students as well as teachers on faculty in local schools. This would allow me to combine my teaching and research in useful ways as well as keep one foot in local schools so that I stay current in the conditions under which educators must teach and work.

I would gradually like to take more of a leadership role in the local site of the National Writing Project so that I become familiar with teachers doing innovative things in the classroom. In addition to offering me a way to balance out my teaching responsibilities in reading education as well as my service responsibilities, the Writing Project site will hopefully provide a chance to identify potential critical educators whose practices and/or life histories I may study. While not all Writing Project sites are as focused on social justice as Red Clay Writing Project at the University of Georgia, some of the first steps for me to be able to situate and identify areas in which to conduct research include getting to know the community. Professional development school and National Writing Project work offer a chance to get to know area teachers and schools. These sites may also lead to networking with other educators committed to social justice.

Overall, I feel my doctoral studies, dissertation research, and work with my adviser, committee, and other faculty have allowed me to establish a foundation upon which I may start my career as an assistant professor. As I engage in teaching, advising, and research, I hope to build upon what I have learned at the University of Georgia as well as move forward in new directions.

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## APPENDIX A:

### CRITICAL EDUCATORS IN THE STUDY

Jennifer Aaron is a first grade teacher in West Harlem, New York, NY who has previously taught in Athens, GA and Greensboro, NC. A practitioner of academic service learning and native of Miami, FL, Jennifer co-authored *No Deposit, No Return: Enriching Literacy Teaching and Learning Through Critical Inquiry Pedagogy*.

Bill Bigelow is a high school social studies teacher who recently retired but still manages to keep one foot in the classroom. Bill serves as Curriculum Editor for *Rethinking Schools Magazine* and co-teaches with other social studies teachers in Portland when he can. He is the author of *A People's History for the Classroom*, *The Line Between Us: Teaching about the Border and Mexican Immigration*, *Strangers in Their Own Country: A Curriculum on South Africa*, and (with Norm Diamond) *The Power in Our Hands: A Curriculum on the History of Work and Workers in the United States*. Bill co-edited with Bob Peterson *Rethinking Columbus* and *Rethinking Globalization*. He also co-edited *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice* (Vols. 1 and 2) with Wayne Au, Stan Karp, Brenda Harvey, and Larry Miller and has written numerous articles and book chapters.

Lisa Espinosa is a former seventh grade language arts and science teacher in Chicago, IL. She recently left the classroom to start her own therapy practice, and she also supervises and mentors student teachers at Illinois State University. Lisa has been featured on Annenberg Media's Learner.org web site and has published articles and chapters in *Rethinking Schools Magazine*, *City Kids*, *City Schools: More Reports from the Front Row*, and *Rethinking Multicultural Education*.

Mark Hansen is a third grade teacher in Portland, OR. He also serves as Tech Liaison for the Oregon Writing Project at Lewis and Clark College and has served on the steering committee for Portland Area Rethinking Schools. Mark's teaching was featured on Annenberg Media's Learner.org web site, and he has written for *Rethinking Schools Magazine*.

Terry Moore is a third grade teacher in Tenafly, NJ who has taught for over 30 years. Terry has worked with Columbia University's Teachers College Reading and Writing Project to start and maintain a suburban model for the project. The advisor for an afterschool club for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders called World Improvement by Tenafly Students (WITS), Terry has written for *Rethinking Schools Magazine*.

Hyung Nam is a high school social studies teacher in Portland, OR, where he has taught for 12 years and plays guitar in a swing band. Hyung is an active member of Portland Area Rethinking Schools and also serves on the editorial board for *Rethinking Schools Magazine*. Hyung has published lessons in *Whose Wars? Teaching about the Iraq War and the War on Terrorism*.

Ann Pelo is a preschool teacher, teacher mentor, and consultant in Seattle, Washington. She has taught 3, 4, and 5 year old children and offered professional development to childcare teachers for the last 20 years. She is the editor of *Rethinking Early Childhood Education*, the co-author (with Fran Davidson) of *That's Not Fair: A Teacher's Guide to Activism with Young Children*, and the author of *The Language of Art: Inquiry-Based Studio Practices in Early Childhood Settings*.

Maria Sweeney is a former fourth grade teacher who currently teaches Reading Recovery and Title I in Ridgewood, NJ. Maria's credits include producing a Broadway play with her

students about Nike and Disney sweatshops called “Justice, Do it!” She has written chapters in *Making Justice Our Project*, *Controversies in the Classroom*, and *Rethinking Globalization*.