

Critical Pedagogy as Praxis

by

Mary C. Breunig

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, Lakehead University

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ISBN: 978-0-494-31178-3

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ISBN: 978-0-494-31178-3

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year of convocation: 2006

ABSTRACT

While there is a body of literature that considers the theory of critical pedagogy, there is significantly less literature that specifically addresses the ways in which professors attempt to apply this theory in practice. Indeed, some of the best writings of critical theorists offer little in reference to strategies that teachers might use in practice. Furthermore, many of these writings provide too little explication of what attempts are made within these educators' own classrooms to implement the critical pedagogy that they espouse. My study was designed to address this gap. I explored the successes and challenges that critical pedagogues encounter as they endeavour to turn the theories of critical pedagogy into post-secondary classroom practices in 17 interviews and one focus group session with self-identified critical pedagogues from the Critical Educators for Social Justice Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association. I employed an Appreciative Inquiry framework as a means to examine several key objectives, including: 1) what are some of the ways in which professors who espouse critical pedagogy practice it within the classroom?; 2) what are some of the successes that critical pedagogues experience as they engage in forms of critical classroom praxis?; and 3) what are some of the challenges to engaging in the praxis of critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom? The key findings from my study include: 1) Some of the "easy" claims related to purposes of critical pedagogy need to be troubled; 2) There exists a need for ongoing articulation of "critical classroom practices" and how to implement these within the post-secondary classroom despite

some of the challenges; 3) Some of the specific claims regarding participants' success with critical praxis require further critical interrogation; 4) Approaches to research about/in/for critical pedagogy need to be troubled and complicated; and 5) Some of the critical questions that have arisen as a result of this study can serve to inform future studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of Purpose	6
Underlying Assumptions	7
DEFINITION OF TERMS	11
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	14
Introduction.....	14
Historical Roots of Critical Pedagogy	14
The Theory/Practice Bifurcation.....	25
Theory vs. Practice.....	26
Theory/Practice – A False Dualism?	27
Critical Pedagogical Praxis.....	29
Praxis.....	29
The Post-Secondary Classroom	30
Critical Classroom Practices.....	31
Critical Pedagogical Praxis within the Post-Secondary Classroom.....	33
Dialogue	34
Examples of Critical Classroom Praxis	38
Research of Student-Centred Classroom Praxis	43
Challenges to Praxis.....	47
A Repressive Myth	48
Tokenism.....	50
Lack of Preparation.....	51
Student Resistance	52
Time Constraints.....	54
Institutional Constraints.....	55
Concluding Remarks.....	59
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	60
Introduction.....	60
Locating Myself.....	60
Methods.....	63
Appreciative Inquiry	64
Data Sources	65
Participants.....	66
Ethical Considerations	67
Procedures.....	68
Data Analysis.....	80
CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEW RESULTS	84
Introduction.....	84
Recap of Interview Participants	85

Interview Participants	85
Course Syllabi and Assignment Descriptions.....	87
Critical Pedagogy – Self-Identification, Definitions, Purpose, Influential Theorists and Related Pedagogies	87
Self-Identification	88
Definitions of Critical Pedagogy	91
Central Aims and Purposes of Critical Pedagogy.....	96
Critical Pedagogy Theory and Influential Theorists.....	96
Related Pedagogies	99
Post-Secondary Classroom Praxis	101
Examples of Post-Secondary Classroom Praxis	102
Examples of Post-Secondary Classroom Practices from Course Syllabi and Assignment Descriptions	120
Concluding Remarks – Examples of Classroom Practices	123
Pedagogical Decisions	124
Experience.....	125
Research and/or Theory-Based	126
Student Feedback	127
Intuition and/or Serendipity	128
Mentors	129
Success with Praxis.....	130
Congruence with Theory and Practice	131
Real World Connection.....	134
Anecdotal Examples of Success	137
Empirical Examples of Success	140
Challenges to Praxis.....	142
Lack of Congruence Between Theory and Practice and “Real World” Constraints.....	143
Institutional Obstacles.....	146
Lack of Preparation.....	150
Student Resistance	154
Other Challenges to Praxis.....	157
Critical Pedagogy and Change within Post-Secondary Classrooms and Universities.....	160
Concluding Remarks.....	166
CHAPTER 5: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS	167
Recap of Participants	167
Purpose of Critical Pedagogy and Praxis.....	168
Social Action Pedagogy vs. Critical Praxis	169
Purpose of Critical Pedagogy.....	169
Post-Secondary Classroom Praxis	172
Dialogue, Curriculum Negotiation, and Classroom Community.....	172
Assessment and Evaluation.....	176
Success with Praxis.....	178
Challenges with Praxis.....	181
“No Child Left Behind” and “Real World” Constraints.....	182
Institutional Obstacles.....	185
Time Commitment.....	188
Concluding Remarks.....	189

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION	191
Critical Pedagogy - Definitions and Purpose and Influential Theorists and Related Pedagogies	194
Definitions and Purpose of Critical Pedagogy.....	195
Influential Theorists and Related Pedagogies.....	202
Post-Secondary Classroom Praxis	210
Examples of Critical Classroom Practices	212
Assessment and Evaluation.....	233
Summary of Critical Classroom Practices	243
Success with Praxis.....	251
Theory/Practice Congruence.....	251
Anecdotal Examples of Success	252
Empirical Examples of Success	253
Challenges with Praxis.....	260
Institutional Obstacles.....	261
“Realities” of the K-12 Classroom and “No Child Left Behind”	271
Student Resistance	274
Lack of Preparation.....	276
Concluding Remarks.....	278
 CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.....	 281
 REFERENCES.....	 294
Appendix A – Interview Consent Form	313
Appendix B – Focus Group Consent Form	316
Appendix C - Script for phone interviews	318

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

1. Overview of Historical Roots – Critical Pedagogy.....	23
2. Overview of Demographic Information for Interview Participants.....	86
3. Overview of Self-Identification, Critical Pedagogy Definitions, and Influential Theorists...	90

FIGURES

1. Sample Illustration of Network View.....	83
2. Purpose of Critical Pedagogy.....	96
3. Influential Theorists.....	99
4. Classroom Practices.....	102
5. Theory/Practice Congruence and Success with Praxis.....	130
6. Challenges to Praxis.....	142

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On a recent trip to Minneapolis, my friends and mentors, Kay and Sandra, asked me how my dissertation was progressing. I informed them that, as I was sitting there visiting with them, the transcriber was in the process of completing the transcription of the focus group session, my PhD supervisor was editing Chapter 4, and I had a number of articles on request through interlibrary loan. We all agreed that it takes a small village to complete a PhD. I am extremely grateful to have had the support of the Faculty of Education and Lakehead University (particularly John O'Meara, Fiona Blaikie, Diana Mason) and numerous friends, family members, and mentors during this time.

I am grateful to my PhD committee members: Dr. Lori Chambers (Women's Studies, Lakehead University); Dr. John Novak (Faculty of Education, Brock University); and Dr. Alex Lawson (Faculty of Education, Lakehead University). The feedback provided to me by the internal examiner (Dr. Gillian Siddall, Lakehead University) was helpful. I am particularly grateful for the support provided by my PhD supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell. Connie has been such an integral part of this process. She has served as editor, friend, mentor, and muse. As a supervisor, she provided me with insightful feedback that brought out the best in my writing. As a colleague and academic she imparted upon me a deepened understanding of university life and how to work within the system with integrity and passion. As a friend, I have witnessed time and again her ability to bring out the best in those around her and I appreciate her grace, humility, sense of humour, and commitment.

I am grateful to the study participants for their investment of time and energy and to Sheila Wilson for her excellent transcription services. I thank the internal and external examiners for their feedback.

I am extremely grateful to my students within the School of Outdoor Recreation, Parks, & Tourism who provided some of the inspiration to pursue this study and who provided much inspiration and support throughout the writing process.

Finally, I thank my husband Tim O'Connell who provided me with much love, support, and mentorship throughout this journey.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AS PRAXIS

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

During the middle of the 2003 winter semester, one of the more outgoing students in a course that I taught on experiential education raised her hand and keenly queried, “If the potential for learning in a student-directed classroom is so great, why are we learning the theoretical concept and not actually experiencing a student-directed classroom firsthand?”

This question came as a direct response to our discussion about an article that we were reading about the value of student-directed classrooms. The fourth year, undergraduate experiential education course that I instruct introduces students to issues of hegemony, commonly-held assumptions in education, how to develop radical classroom practices, and the value of student-directed classrooms. Students are then encouraged to critically think, read, and write about how these topics inform classroom practice. The overarching purpose of the course is to impel students to use experiential education and critical pedagogy to begin to develop ideals about their own teaching and leadership practices.

While the course content introduces a variety of non-traditional (or radical) philosophies and methods of teaching and learning, the class structure itself is quite traditional. The class meets twice a week for 1 hour and 20 minutes each session; on most days, the students read an article or a series of articles related to the above topics and through guided discussions they learn about the topic. I call these moments of didactic teaching, of which there are far too many, a mini-lecture. On occasion, I present an activity that relates to the topic. Clearly, these paltry efforts did not go unnoticed by the student quoted and her query, in essence, addressed my own

long-standing concern about the gap between *what* I teach and believe and my pedagogical practice, *how* I teach. More specifically, I am interested in how to develop a more purposeful classroom practice that acts on the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy.

My research developed, in part, out of this lived experience. How do professors who teach about critical social theory and critical pedagogy attempt to practice it within the post-secondary classroom? I wonder about the degree to which their pedagogical approaches correspond with their critical curricula. The purpose of my study thus is to examine the following: **what are the successes and challenges that critical pedagogues encounter as they endeavour to turn the theories of critical pedagogy into post-secondary classroom practices?**

While there is a body of literature that considers the theory of critical pedagogy, there is significantly less literature that specifically addresses the ways in which professors attempt to apply this theory in practice (Shor, 1996; Sweet, 1998). Jennifer Gore (1993) argues that, in fact, some of the best writings of critical theorists offer little suggestion of strategies that teachers might use in practice. Furthermore, many of these writings provide too little explication of what attempts are made within these educators' own classrooms to implement the critical pedagogy that they espouse.

There is some irony in the fact that this focus, the articulation of a theory of critical pedagogy rather than pedagogical practices, exists. Peter McLaren (2003) maintains that critical pedagogy represents a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationships among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relation of the wider community and society. Roger Simon (1987) asserts that pedagogy itself is "the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, and evaluation, purpose, and methods" (p. 370). Yet, David Lusted (1986) maintains that, "The problem with a great deal of cultural and

educational theory alike, shared even by critical/radical theory which should know better, is that it makes ritual nods in the direction of acknowledging a pedagogy of sorts in its production while, in its form, disavowing its importance entirely” (p. 5). Linda Keesing-Styles (2003) argues that one of the key issues still facing the field of critical pedagogy is its implementation. Lusted’s pointed critique and Keesing-Styles’ argument represent a “call to action” for those professors who teach about critical pedagogy to continue to examine their own classroom practices.

It may not be enough for an educator to teach about dominant paradigms and the social construction of knowledge without engaging students in a project that provides them with an opportunity to experience these concepts (Sefa Dei, 1996). Mary Boyce (n.d.) goes so far as to conclude that without a critical and liberatory teaching practice, it is impossible to consider oneself a critical or liberatory educator. Counter-hegemonic pedagogies must practice what is preached and conversely preach what is practiced (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002).

While the majority of writing to date has focused on theoretical knowledge, there have been few studies conducted which offer insight into the theory/practice relationship. One study reviewed articles published in the journal, *Teaching Sociology*. Stephen Sweet (1998) searched for articles that detailed professors’ experiences as they tried to teach about issues related to radical social theory. He sought out articles that contained the following words: radical, critical thinking, critical awareness, Freirean, humanist, or liberation. He selected only those articles that detailed actual classroom experiences. In particular, he was intrigued by those sociology professors who espoused the theory of radical pedagogy but who maintained classroom practices that Sweet labeled “conservative.” While illuminating, there were a number of problems with Sweet’s study (Long, 1998; Gimenez, 1998), mostly focused on the generalizations he made. David Long (1998), for example, argues that it is a “fallacy to make a blanket generalization about the pedagogical perspectives and practices of the whole population of sociology instructors

from data gathered from a proportionately small number of articles that discuss only a select number of radical ideas and practices” (p. 112).

Another study, by Bruce King and Roberta Ahlquist (1990), entitled “Developing Generative Themes for the Teaching of Biology,” was based on a 15-item questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations that examined the ways in which pedagogical theory was linked to practice in science education, specifically how problem-posing critical education took place within a high school biology classroom. King and Ahlquist (1990) concluded that despite the numerous challenges that critical science teachers face, learning is meaningful and significant for students when they engage in a “participatory, hands-on, minds-on, cooperative environment in the classroom” (pp. 19-20) that incorporates action in the community as part of the curriculum.

Two studies examined the attempts of physical education professors to implement critical pedagogy. Beatriz Ruiz and Juan-Miguel Fernandez-Balboa (2005) conducted a study with 17 physical education teacher educators and their personal perspectives regarding their practice of critical pedagogy. They concluded that 11 of the 17 self-identified critical pedagogues in the study had vague definitions of critical pedagogy, its principles, and its purpose and three of the study participants had no definitions for it at all. For this reason, Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa (2005) concluded that it was no wonder that many of the physical education teachers “floundered” and reverted back to the type of transmission-based pedagogy they knew best from their own formal school experiences. “As a result, their emancipatory intentions sometimes translated into oppressive practices” (p. 258).

A two year study of 67 physical education (PE) teachers and their use of critical praxis was conducted by Doune Macdonald and Ross Brooker (1999) who examined physical education teachers’ reactions to a critical pedagogy that focused on negotiation, reflection, and praxis in working to develop professionals who were socially responsible. The students engaged in a process of curriculum negotiation that included journal writing, alternative methods of

assessment and evaluation, and reflection upon their learning. These classroom practices were designed to engage students in examining taken-for-granted assumptions and dominant educational practices, including responding to queries, such as: “What is worthwhile PE knowledge in schools? and What is the function of PE in schooling (p. 56)?” According to Macdonald and Brooker (1999), these queries were designed to assist students in broadening their understanding of educational hegemony and to engage in the ideals of critical pedagogy.

At the end of the study, Macdonald and Brooker (1999) claimed that the student teachers in their study were more confident, socio-politically aware, innovative, and caring when they move into their subsequent major practice. They also concluded that the findings within their study point to a need for the development of a research-based discourse to contest and extend a framework of how to employ critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom.

The most extensive study that I found related to critical pedagogical praxis was a qualitative study, entitled, “Finding Oneself in the Classroom: A Critical Autoethnographic Narrative Chronicling the Risks and Rewards of a Teacher and Her Students as They Engage in the Practice of Critical Pedagogy” (Horan, 2004). In her study, Nancy Horan identified some of the successes and challenges that she and her students experienced when attempting to put the theory of critical pedagogy into practice. These included many similar themes to participants’ responses in my study regarding examples of classroom practices and her and students’ accounts of success and challenges to critical pedagogical praxis.

Apart from these studies, little research has been conducted on the theory/practice relationship within post-secondary classrooms. My initial intent for this present study was to adopt a mixed-methods approach to examining both the extent to which critical pedagogues engage in praxis as well as the ways in which they practice. While looking for a survey or questionnaire that had been used previously, both I and the education librarian were surprised to discover that no survey existed to do a broad-based examination of the extent to which educators

engaged in critical pedagogical praxis. In fact, our search for past studies clearly stumped the librarian and she expressed her surprise, stating that it is very rare to find so few studies on a given topic (G. Scalese, personal communication, January, 2004). The intent of this study was, in part, to address that gap in the research.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the successes and the challenges that critical pedagogues encounter as they endeavour to turn the theories of critical pedagogy into practice within the post-secondary classroom. The following objectives guided the research:

1. To determine the ways in which professors who espouse critical pedagogy practice it within the classroom;
2. To identify and better understand some of the successes that critical pedagogues experience as they engage in forms of critical classroom praxis;
and
3. To identify and better understand some of the challenges to engaging in the praxis of critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom.

I conducted 17 interviews and one focus group to answer these questions. The participants represented a convenience sample (Gay & Airasian, 2003) of 17 self-identified critical pedagogues from the Critical Educators for Social Justice Special Interest Group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Participation in both interviews and focus groups was voluntary. I conducted the interviews via telephone, because of the geographical diversity of the participants, between October, 2005 and February, 2006. Four of these 17 interview participants participated in a follow-up focus group session, which was held at the AERA conference in San Francisco on April 10, 2006.

Underlying Assumptions

I had included the following underlying assumptions in the original research proposal for this study and had considered removing them from this dissertation. I have decided to keep them in because they continue to help contextualize the study and to highlight some of my ongoing concerns with some of the limiting factors related to this study.

1. The results from this study are not generalizable because of the methodological limitations related to qualitative research, including small sample size. Because of the nature of the topic and the nature of the qualitative data (richer in content), I am only somewhat concerned with this limitation.
2. People may describe their practice in one way but may actually practice it in another way. Since I am not using direct observations or student responses, this difference will be hard to identify. The data that results from this will therefore be limited by any lack of congruence between what is self-reported and what is actually practiced (Scott, 1997).
3. I am operating on the assumption that employing critical classroom practices, rather than simply teaching about the theory, will in fact serve to more fully attain the objectives that the theory of critical pedagogy espouses. This may not be the case. In fact, Martha Gimenez (1998) disagrees with my assumption arguing that simply adopting critical teaching practices does not presuppose the attainment of the goals voiced in critical pedagogy. Long (1998) argues that some of the most intellectually disengaging and irrelevant undergraduate courses that he took were taught radically, while some of the most intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking classes he participated in were led by pedagogically conservative professors. Indeed, these conservatively taught courses engendered some of the better dialogue that he experienced in his undergraduate program, compelling him to become involved in

social activism and change. In essence, both Gimenez and Long counter my assumption that critical classroom practices will necessarily lead to the attainment of the objectives of critical social theories.

4. I am further assuming that the act of self-scrutinizing one's own pedagogical philosophy and practice with a critical eye, highlighting the successes and challenges, may improve professors' practices. As previously stated, I am operating on the assumption that by improving their practices, professors will in turn come closer to the attainment of the educational aims of their practices. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992) argues that, in fact, "while the literature states implicitly or explicitly that critical pedagogy is political, there have been no sustained research attempts to explore whether or how the practices it prescribes actually alter specific power relations outside or inside schools" (p 93). While responding to this concern will not be the main focus of my study, it points to another important query within the field of critical pedagogy – will attempts to bring the theory of critical pedagogy and the praxis of critical pedagogy into better congruence actually help to unravel dominant discourses and lessen oppression and marginalization?
5. While most critical theorists would argue that intention and purpose are key elements of the theories of critical pedagogy, there is less agreement, and in fact little interest, in establishing one overarching purpose of critical pedagogy. Many argue that the establishment of the one "right" educative aim is, in fact, counter to the very notions of partial perspectives, situated and contextual knowledges, and varying epistemologies that the theory itself purports (Britzman, 2003; Kohli, 1998; Lather, 1991, 1998). Some of the educational aims appearing in the critical pedagogy literature include: developing students' critical thinking ability (Brookfield, 1987, 1995); social and political activism and change (Giroux, 1981, 1988, 1997; McLaren,

2000, 2003); political emancipation and liberation (Freire, 1970, 1994, 1998); and construction (reconstruction) of knowledges and truths (Britzman, 2003; Haraway, 1991; Lather, 1991). Long (1998) argues that the primary call of critical pedagogues is to enable students to take responsibility for their own education so that they become able to make difficult and sometimes life changing decisions. Other critical pedagogues take this further, positing that one of the main goals of critical pedagogy is to impel students to question and examine assumptions as a means to developing themselves as agents of social change (Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003). One of the most commonly cited aims of critical pedagogy is to bring about a more socially just world (Freire, 1994; Gore, 1993; Shor, 1996). While recognizing that there are multiple and varied educational aims in critical pedagogy, it is the latter one, working toward a more socially just world, to which I will be referring in the review of literature and in my study.

6. My own bias and my own hypotheses will reveal themselves in both the questions and in the telling. Rather than trying to position myself as an unbiased researcher, I am choosing to “locate” and “name” my own “positionality” as a researcher. More will be said about this in Chapter 3. In the poststructural spirit, I want to acknowledge that all that I can offer here is partial truth and interpretation and my own readings of other people’s stories. Deborah Britzman (2003) agrees that one of the major challenges to reading and telling other people’s stories is the impossibility of telling everything.

The chapters of this dissertation will include a review of related literature (Chapter 2), the research methodology (Chapter 3), research results from the interviews and course syllabi and assignment descriptions (Chapter 4), research results from the focus group session (Chapter 5),

discussion (Chapter 6), and conclusion (Chapter 7). The definition of terms precedes these chapters.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms will be used throughout this dissertation. It is important to note that there are different interpretations and therefore definitions of each of these terms, which will be further explored in the review of related literature. The definitions that are offered below do not represent the only “true” definitions of these terms but provide me with a place to start.

Pedagogy: Pedagogy is often regarded simply as the study of teaching and learning (Knowles, 1973). According to Giroux (1997) and McLaren (2003), however, understandings of what constitutes pedagogy are more complicated and embody assumptions about how one teaches, what is being taught, and how one learns.

Traditional Pedagogy: Although it is difficult to ascribe any one definition to this term, Freire (1970) referred to this as the banking model of education whereby:

- the teacher teaches and the students are taught
- the teacher is the “knower” and the student is the “open repository” into which the teacher pours knowledge
- the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined
- the teacher (or institution) chooses the curricular content, and the students adapt to it
- the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the students are mere Objects
- knowledge is assessed through standardized exams
- the act of knowing is assessed through a student’s ability to recite and memorize the information that is transmitted.

Traditional Classroom and Institutional Practices may include: lecture, multiple-choice exams, “surprise” quizzes, antiquated facilities and supplies, large class sizes, pressure to teach the same thing, the same way, on the same day, the teacher standing at the front of the room, and the administrative offices filled with mostly white men (Kohn, 1996; Scott, Buchanan, & Haigh, 1997).

Critical Pedagogy: Simon (1992) asserts that critical pedagogy is best described as an educational “project of possibility.” This “project” constitutes a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relation of the wider community and society (McLaren, 2003). Jodi Kaufmann (2000) asserts that “critical pedagogy focuses on educating the subject to think, to reflect, and to act, in order to create a more democratic egalitarian society” (p. 432). The main purpose of critical pedagogy is to use education as a means to bring about a more socially just world (Kanpol 1999; Keesing-Styles, 2003; Kincheloe, 2004).

Praxis: Freire (1970) maintains that praxis involves both action and reflection. Praxis starts with an abstract idea (theory) or an experience and incorporates reflection upon that idea or experience that then translates into purposeful action. “Praxis in education aims to bridge the gap between theory and transformational action that effectively transforms human existence” (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998, p. 467).

Postmodernism: “Postmodernism argues that reason and science can only be understood as part of a broader historical, political, and social struggle over distinctions between language and power” (Giroux, 1997, p. 195). A central feature of postmodernism has been its critique of totality, absolutes, the primacy of reason, and universality (Lyotard, 1993).

Poststructuralism: Poststructuralism in education takes up the postmodern notion of “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1993, p. xxiv). The project of poststructuralism then is to

critique these grand narratives and universal notions of reason and truth and begin to engage in discursive practices that focus on deconstructing the hierarchies of knowledge that constitute notions of reality, objectivity, and truth.

Hegemony: Hegemony suggests that as a culture develops, systems of meanings and values are actively created by both groups and individuals (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony explains how dominant meanings and interests, which are inherited from past tradition, explain our present condition and provide an understanding of certain “taken-for-granted” assumptions.

Counterhegemony: Aware of the effects of the dominant discourse and the “taken-for-granted” assumptions of that discourse, counterhegemony proffers a counter-discourse that includes the voices and epistemologies of those individuals or groups of people who have been marginalized by the dominant discourse (Gramsci, 1971).

Epistemology: Epistemology is defined as “ways of knowing.”

“No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) U.S.-based educational initiative: NCLB is an educational reform effort that President Bush proposed and that Congress passed into law on January 8, 2002. The initiative is based on four principles: accountability for results; more choices for parents; greater local control and flexibility; and an emphasis on what works based on scientific research (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of related literature serves to provide background for the areas related to the study and research question. The areas examined in this chapter include: the historical roots of critical pedagogy, the theory/practice bifurcation, critical pedagogical praxis, and challenges to praxis. The review of literature also serves to identify and highlight some of the gaps in the literature with a view to justifying the importance and significance of the proposed research.

Historical Roots of Critical Pedagogy

While an attempt to seek out the “founding fathers” of critical pedagogy has come under some criticism (Giroux, 1992; Lather, 1998) and attempts to establish an “authentic” version or definition of critical pedagogy through this means simply reinforces the patriarchal notions that critical pedagogy is, in part, attempting to negate, it would be an oversight to wholly ignore the historical roots of critical pedagogy. I will thus provide my version of an historical overview, which will function as a mini-literature review within this broader review of literature.

While there are numerous definitions and versions of present day critical theory and critical pedagogy (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998), most of the related literature begins with a discussion of the roots of the theory of critical pedagogy. Historically, critical pedagogy was perceived to be one realization of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998, Kincheloe, 2004; Lather, 1998; McLaren, 2003). The critical theoretical tradition developed by the Frankfurt School was greatly influenced by the work of Karl Marx, particularly his views about labour. According to Marx, the essential societal problem was socioeconomic inequality. Marx believed that all people needed to work toward a socialized economy within which each individual

received according to her needs and contributed according to her ability (Eisner, 2002). Marx argued that social justice is essentially dependent upon economic conditions.

The “Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School,” established in 1923, adopted a less doctrinaire view and a less unified social criticism, while still embracing some of Marx’s views as they related to schools and education. In its beginnings, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and perhaps most significantly, Herbert Marcuse, argued that the process of schooling withholds opportunities for students to formulate their own aims and goals, and essentially serves to deskill students (Apple, 1982; Kincheloe, 2004). The “Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School” argued that schools encourage dependency, a hierarchical understanding of authority, and provide a distorted view of history and other “taken-for-granted truths” that in turn undermine the kind of social consciousness needed to bring about change and social transformation (Eisner, 2002).

This argument echoed the sentiments of Antonio Gramsci who was a political activist in Italy involved in worker movements and other left-wing causes and was considered to be a neo-Marxist (Kincheloe, 2004). He introduced the concepts of hegemony, subjects, counter-hegemonic practices and the role of phenomenological critical theory (Gramsci, 1971; Luke, 1992). If hegemony represents not only political and economic control of one social class over others but also the ability of the dominant class to inject its ways of knowing so that those who are oppressed by it begin to accept it as common knowledge (Giroux, 1997), then counter-hegemony offers a vision of what “could be” different if less oppressive ways of knowing and institutions were in place.

Gramsci (1971) believed that although dominated, people can find places for counter-hegemonic practices and solidarity, and that the university can be one such place for the exercise of these practices. Schools and universities could thus serve as sites in which people could be critical, subvert the dominant paradigm, amplify stories of subordinated experience, and practice resistance and solidarity (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994). The ultimate goal of

education, for Gramsci, was to form people who would be able to rule or have the intellectual skills to see through the ploys of the rulers (Gimenez, 1998).

Many of the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School moved to the United States as a result of Nazi control of Germany. They were shocked by American culture, particularly by the contradictions between the progressive American rhetoric of egalitarianism and the reality of racial and class discrimination (Kincheloe, 2004). In the 1960s, Marcuse came to be seen as one of the key philosophers of the student movement in the United States. Based on his belief that political and personal emancipation from the conventions of dominant power was possible, Marcuse became the voice of the “New Left” (Kellner, 2004). The critical theory of the 60s provided the philosophical voice of the “New Left” and was politically influenced by the anti-colonial liberation movements breaking out in Africa, Asia, and perhaps most notably Latin America (Kincheloe, 2004).

One of the key figures in the Latin American liberation movement was Paulo Freire, who is commonly regarded as the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy (McLaren, 2000). Freire’s work with the poor in Brazil introduced him to the lives of impoverished peasants. His experiences compelled him to develop educational ideals and practices that would serve to improve the lives of these marginalized people and to lessen their oppression. Freire (1970) began to explore an approach to teaching and learning that would in essence dismantle the “banking model” of education which supported the dominant ideological perspective that students were open repositories to whatever knowledge the teacher deemed important and noteworthy to deposit on any particular day (Freire, 1970). Freire’s (1970) problem-posing model of education, in contrast, valued the importance of student experience and a dialogical method of teaching and learning whereby the student and the teacher were mutually engaged in the production of knowledge and the process of teaching and learning.

Freire's lived experiences helped him understand the ways that schooling was often used by dominant interests to validate their own privilege and to maintain the marginalization of others' interests. As Joe Kincheloe (2004) suggests, Freire understood schools to be impediments for the education of the poor, and thus sought to find strategies for students to intervene in what he considered to be a dehumanizing process. Freire (1970) referred to this educative process as liberatory action or praxis. He argued that people need to engage in a praxis that incorporates theory, action, and reflection as a means to work toward social change and justice and devised a literary program that was based on this ideal as well as the practical needs of his students. Reading materials were directly related to the world of work his students knew firsthand. He encouraged his students to use their newly acquired literacy skills as a means to understanding the conditions of their labour and the interests being served by their work. Freire developed the notion of reading the word and the world as a means to the possibility of "rewriting" a less oppressive world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Back in North America, the "New Left Scholars" were increasingly focusing their attention on critical pedagogy as well. They were frustrated by the capitalist discourse that seemed so predominant. These scholars saw the potential of some of the progressive educational ideals to provide a counter discourse to the capitalist one (Kincheloe, 2004). In the late 1970s and 1980s, Henry Giroux (1981) began to formulate a critical pedagogy that synthesized the more progressive elements of the philosophy of John Dewey and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Giroux was particularly influenced by Dewey's (1916) insistence that education is not a process of telling and being told, but an active and constructive process of mutual exploration. Giroux synthesized the work of the Frankfurt School theorists employing a mode of critique used to reshape and extend the notion of the political. Giroux set out to bring the insights of the newly developed field of cultural studies into pedagogy.

From the 1980s on, Giroux (1986) constructed a version of critical pedagogy that develops around a “language of possibility” that explores a more optimistic and utopian vision of pedagogy than the “negative pedagogy” of the theorists of the Frankfurt School. This “language of possibility” is founded, in part, on the educational ideals of a number of educators and theorists, including Nicholas Burbules, Freire, and Michael Apple (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998). In this version of critical pedagogy, Giroux (1992) emphasizes the importance of differences among groups, persons, knowledge and needs. His educational project is to reconstruct or decipher the power relations that produce the subject, consciousness, identity, knowledge, and possibilities that act in and change reality. In other words, Giroux was and is recognizing the ways in which the dominant paradigm and hegemony influenced individuals’ identities as well as their ways of seeing and knowing the world. He argues for a pedagogy that would allow individuals to both identify the effects of the dominant ideology as well as disrupt and dismantle these influences (see Giroux, 1981, 1988, 1997).

Roger Simon built upon Giroux’s “language of possibility” in his articulation of a vision of critical pedagogy as a “project of possibility.” Simon (1992) adopts a utopian stance in his book *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility*, suggesting that critique alone is not the project. Rather, *Teaching Against the Grain* is an attempt to encourage and articulate a framework that might aid in constructing educational practices that both express and engender hope. Simon argues that schools represent one site for a utopian praxis but that the ultimate aim is to extend the notion of a pedagogy of possibility to a wide variety of sites of cultural practice. He cautions educators that his theory is not a universal abstraction, but must be regarded as a “discursive practice whose political value and interpretive authority is subject to the particular circumstances that will give these ideas their limit and cogency” (p. 7). Simon also emphasizes that the praxis of critical pedagogy represents an ongoing project rather than a prescriptive set of practices or the achievement of an ideal end-state.

Michael Apple and Peter McLaren build on many of the above ideals emphasizing that education extends to privilege individuals and groups already in power (Kincheloe, 2004). Apple (1990) focuses his efforts on the role that schools play in transmitting certain messages about political, social, and economic life. He argues that the entire process of education is political in the way it is funded, its goals and objectives, the manner in which these goals and objectives are evaluated, the nature of the textbooks, who attends and who does not, and who has the power to make decisions. Apple examines these issues through the fields of curriculum studies and educational theory and policy.

As McLaren began to read about critical theory, cultural studies, and feminist studies, he determined that teachers had to be grounded both theoretically and politically (Kincheloe, 2004). McLaren (2003) developed the belief that critical teachers need to engage in developing a coherent philosophy of praxis that focuses on political, cultural, racial identity, anti-racist multicultural education, the politics of whiteness, white supremacy, modes of resistance, and popular culture. McLaren (2003) believes that a revolutionary critical pedagogy will allow educators to realize the possibilities of democratic social values within their classroom.

Apple (1990) and Giroux (1981) argue for a somewhat similar philosophy of praxis, noting that the ideals and culture associated with the dominant class are purported to be the ideals and content of schooling. Therefore, knowledge and classroom practices affirm the values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society (McLaren, 2003). Elliot Eisner (2002) refers to this as the “‘hidden curriculum’ which consists of the messages given to children by teachers, school structures, textbooks, and other school resources” (p. 73). This curriculum is often believed to serve the interest of the power elite of the school and society and is therefore inherently unable to support an equitable school system or society (Apple, 1975; Eisner, 2002).

The reconceptualization of critical pedagogy as a pedagogy of possibility parallels and is affirmed by some of the other educational theories that were evolving during this time, including postmodernism, poststructuralism, and feminist pedagogy. Postmodernism originated in response to the hierarchies of knowledge, the idea of the “grand narrative,” absolute truths, “disinterested knowledge,” and the theoretical hegemony of modernism (Lyotard, 1993). Giroux (1997) summarized postmodernism in the following way: “Rather than separating reason from the terrain of history, place, and desire, postmodernism argues that reason and science can only be understood as part of a broader historical, political, and social struggle over distinctions between language and power” (p. 195).

Postmodern ideas therefore challenge existing concepts, structures, and hierarchies of knowledge and recognize that education is connected with the production and organization of knowledge (Lyotard, 1993). Acknowledgement of differences, partial perspectives, situated knowledges, and the rejection of ultimate truths lie at the heart of this postmodern view of critical pedagogy (Britzman, 2003; Haraway, 1991; Kohli, 1998).

While the term postmodernism is often used to describe the larger cultural shift of a post-industrial, post-colonial era, poststructuralism is employed to describe those shifts as they relate to academic theory (Lather, 1991). The terms are often used interchangeably as well. Wanda Pillow (2000) argues that poststructuralism offers critiques and methods for examining the functions and effects of any hegemonic structure that exists. The project of poststructuralism, then, is to critique universal notions of reason and truth and begin to engage in discursive practices that focus on deconstructing the hegemonic structures and hierarchies of knowledge that constitute notions of reality, objectivity, and truth (Haraway, 1991; Lather, 1991; Pillow, 2000).

Patti Lather’s work in the field of critical education has revolved around characterizing the relationship between feminist and critical pedagogy, feminist ethnography, and

poststructuralism (Kincheloe, 2004). Lather (1991) examines the ways in which many of the postdiscourses can help critical pedagogues explore and critique the role of power and hegemony in research methods and modes of knowledge production.

While not working in critical pedagogy per se, Donna Haraway's (1991) work has been influential. She developed the notion of partial perspectives, situated knowledges, and contextualized objectivity. Haraway argues for "a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" (p. 192). Through this process, Haraway hopes that researchers and teachers will be more likely to seek perspectives from those points of view which may be in disaccord with their own ways of seeing and knowing. Haraway suggests that this process of inquiry will lead toward constructing worlds that are less organized by hegemony and "axes of domination" (p. 192). Haraway's ideas have influenced many feminist pedagogues, who have brought her ways of knowing into the post-secondary classroom.

Caroline Shrewsbury (1987), bell hooks (1994), and Kathleen Weiler (2001), alongside other feminist pedagogues, argue that education should serve to challenge the structure of the traditional canon and should develop and offer alternative classroom practices. Feminist pedagogy reinforces the idea that both the content of the curriculum and the methods of pedagogy employed teach lessons. Feminist pedagogy "emphasizes the importance of consciousness raising, the existence of oppressive social structure and the need to change it, and the possibility of social transformation" (Weiler, 2001, p. 68). Feminist pedagogy begins with a vision of what education might be like if an ideology of domination did not exist. It is a vision of the classroom as a liberatory environment. hooks (1994) implores teachers to "teach in a manner that works to transform consciousness and creates an atmosphere of open expression that is the mark of an emancipatory education" (p. 84).

Influenced by both feminism and poststructuralism as well as psychoanalytic theory, Deborah Britzman's (2003) work has focused on the need for both teachers and students to develop a "voice" that allows them to "locate" and "situate" themselves in relation to the dominant ideology that invokes authority, a narrow way of knowing, and power. Britzman has examined the ways in which secondary education abstracts knowledge from its social context and marginalizes students and certain "ways of knowing" through the construction of canons and through certain institutional values. Through an exploration of one's own "situatedness" in relation to the dominant ideology, critical pedagogy challenges the role of schooling in the production of dominant discourses, meanings, and subjects, as well as in their control and distribution.

Ira Shor (1996) explicitly brings the theory of critical pedagogy to the post-secondary classroom, attempting to address similar concerns to those that Lather expressed regarding the shortcomings of transmission-based pedagogies. Shor became fascinated with the work of Freire and worked to integrate notions of social critique with classroom techniques of pedagogy in ways that create new educational possibilities (Kincheloe, 2004). In *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy*, Shor (1996) explores the ways in which classroom practices can reflect the theoretical ideals of critical pedagogy by employing a dialogical pedagogy that incorporates a set of student-directed classroom teaching techniques that include the co-creation of the syllabus, learning contracts, and shared power, authority, and voice, among others. Shor integrates instruction about the theory of critical pedagogy with a classroom praxis that emphasizes the potential for teachers and students to act as agents of social change.

While this historical overview is not comprehensive, it does serve as a sufficient starting point for the remainder of this literature review. I have attempted to summarize the main schools of thought and the main theorists/pedagogues that I have chosen to include in this historical overview in the table below. Despite the fact that this table may represent an oversimplification

of many aspects of the historical roots of critical pedagogy, it does provide one way to view some of the pedagogies that are central to this review of literature.

Table 1

Overview of Historical Roots- Critical Pedagogy

Critical Social Theorists- social and economic equality	Neo-Marxists- multiple “ways of knowing”/ counter-hegemony	Liberatory Education emancipation from oppression	Pedagogical Project of Possibility- disrupting the dominant (socioeconomic privileged) discourse	Feminist Pedagogy disrupting the dominant (male privileged) discourse	Post-structuralism multiple “ways of knowing” that are situated, contextual, and partial	The Possibility of Pedagogical Practice- employing the theory of critical pedagogy in praxis
Max Horkheimer	Antonio Gramsci	Paulo Freire	Henry Giroux	bell hooks	Patti Lather	Paulo Freire
Theodor Adorno	Patti Lather		Peter McLaren (cultural studies)	Caroline Shrewsbury	Donna Haraway	Ira Shor
Herbert Marcuse			Michael Apple (curriculum studies)	Kathleen Weiler	Deborah Britzman	
			Roger Simon			

Within this “history,” there is contradiction, overlap, and resistance to the attempts of some critical theorists and pedagogues to identify the “one perfect” definition or a narrow set of prescriptive practices that constitute the field of critical pedagogy. Some of this contradiction and overlap centers around an approach to critical pedagogy that adopts a positive, revolutionary utopian approach (Britzman, Freire, Giroux, hooks, McLaren, Shor) versus a negatively critical approach (Gur-Ze’ev). Each approach offers both possibilities and limits. I wish to heed Eisner’s (2002) warning against the “half-empty character” of a critical pedagogy that builds its theory around the negative aspects of schooling and critique, cautioning that “although pulling weeds is helpful, their elimination in a garden does not ensure the presence of flowers; flowers have to be planted” (p. 75). Similarly, Britzman (2003) suggests that, “Without any meaningful pedagogy and without a range of discursive practices, skepticism as a stance can easily give way to

cynicism” (p. 213). She also suggests that critical pedagogues need to be hopeful about enacting change and about the ways in which their teaching practices can be transformative.

Some of the contradiction and overlap can be linked to McLaren’s (2003) concern that critical pedagogy is being diluted not only by postmodernism but also the synthesis of critical pedagogy with other counter-hegemonic pedagogies, including radical pedagogy, cultural studies, feminist pedagogy, critical literacy and media literacy, and anti-racist education. In McLaren’s view, this synthesis may temper the “real” project of critical pedagogy, which in his opinion is its connection to Marxist social theory. In the most recent edition of *Life in Schools* (2003), he vigorously reasserts the Marxist roots of critical pedagogy, emphasizing the need for a revolutionary critical pedagogy, informed by a “class-conscious ideology,” to disrupt the “bourgeois knowledge by utilizing critical knowledge that *is transformative* as opposed to *reproductive*, that is *empowering* as opposed to *oppressing*” (McLaren, 2003, p. xv).

Gore (1993), Lather (1998), and Wendy Kohli (1998) all offer counterpoints to McLaren’s argument, reasserting the potential for critical pedagogy to critique broader issues of hegemony that relate to race, gender, sexuality, as well as class. For me, and for the purposes of this present study, the intersection and overlap between the discourses of critical pedagogy and the poststructural discourses help to assimilate the multiple and varied meanings of the theories of critical pedagogy. The overlap of these discourses also reaffirms the poststructural insight that knowledge, and hence theories themselves, are always partial, situated, and contextual (Haraway, 1991). Despite these multiple and varied meanings, to me, the central focus of critical pedagogy appears to remain the use of education as a means to bring about a more socially just world (Kanpol, 1999; Keesing-Styles, 2003; Kincheloe, 2004).

The Theory/Practice Bifurcation

To my mind, perhaps one of the most significant examples of a contradiction that exists within the field of critical pedagogy is the theory/practice bifurcation. Sweet (1998) argues that the overarching purpose of critical pedagogy centres on the ability of teaching and learning to effect social change and this can only be done through practice. Over the years, there have been continual calls for critical pedagogy to move beyond theory and focus on the formulation of a critical praxis that acts on the possibilities of this pedagogy, including within the post-secondary classroom (Gore, 1993; Keesing-Styles, 2003; Simon, 1992). Ken Osborne (1990) echoes these sentiments suggesting that, “as valuable as its contribution has been in placing pedagogy in the forefront of discussion, it [critical pedagogy] is a theory of pedagogy rather than a practical specification” (pp. 47-48). Critical pedagogues also simultaneously caution against trying to constitute a singular set of prescriptive practices that will work within any given classroom, focusing instead on the development of critical classroom practices that are contextual and situational (Simon, 1992).

Gore (1993) criticizes McLaren and Giroux, among others, for focusing on a “pedagogical project” that fails to address classroom practice. While McLaren (2003) encourages professors to apply the theory of critical pedagogy within their classroom practices and Giroux (1997) suggests that in order to attain the ideal of social justice, educators must not only teach it as a subject, but must embody it in classroom practices, both actually provide few accounts as to how teachers are to move from critical thought to critical practice. McLaren (2000) himself acknowledges this critique. As mentioned, this call to action for professors who espouse critical pedagogy to no longer merely theorize about liberating practices but to begin to adopt classroom practices that are congruent with the goals of critical pedagogy theory itself (Keesing-Styles, 2003) provides the impetus for this present study.

Theory vs. Practice

Simon (1992) suggests that educators need to be attentive to students' fear of theory. He believes that the abstraction and language of critical theory can produce anxiety, intimidation, and even cowardice when students are faced with unfamiliar discourse. Theoretical discourse often strikes students as something that is being done to them rather than as a resource for their own practice. Students learn about theoretical concepts, often through a process of rote memorization of the theory that is taught to them, while developing no real understanding of the practical implications of how the theory can be used to inform their work and their lives. Max Van Manen (1999) confirms this by suggesting that developing a theoretical language or a theoretical critique is never sufficient; the relation between the act of theorizing and professional practice is essential and often lacking in post-secondary classrooms. The mere transmission of theoretical knowledge does not ensure that students are learning. Theory needs to be connected to practical, lived experiences both outside and within the classroom.

There is clearly a responsibility on the part of the teacher to create appropriate classroom strategies and practices that incorporate the theoretical insights of critical pedagogy and that are appropriate for the particular classroom context (Keesing-Styles, 2003). As Keesing-Styles suggests, however, "This is not to say that specific 'recipes' for educative practice are required" (p. 6). Rather, classroom practices need to be shaped around the lives of students, the classroom context, the educative aims of the practice, and the institution to construct learning experiences that articulate these. Freire (1998) refers to this form of teaching as a way of living within our educative beliefs and our educative practices. It is one means to bridge the theory/practice gap that appears to be so prevalent within the post-secondary classroom.

Theory/Practice – A False Dualism?

While these various calls to action are clearly resounding ones, it is important to consider that the theory/practice bifurcation may represent an overly reductionist way of addressing the gap between the theory of critical pedagogy and the praxis of critical pedagogy. Historically, knowledge (theory) and practice have been presented as a dualism (Britzman, 2003). The academic separation of theory from practice is a manifestation of the ways in which knowledge has become fragmented from lived experience. In fact, much has been made of the split that divides theory from practice (Lutzenberger & Clark, 1999), with less attention paid to the productive ways that theory can be employed to inform practice. Vice versa, Eloise Buker (1991) would argue that there is nothing quite as practical as a good theory and Gimenez (1998) argues that the acquisition of radical or critical knowledge necessitates the learning of theory.

There is much to be learned from connecting theory with practice. Freire describes his professional mission as a search for unity between the two (McLaren, 2000), as he regards theory and practice as non-dichotomous and complementary. Stephen Brookfield (1995) asserts that “formal theory has an important contribution to make in helping to convert situationally specific, informal hunches into well-framed theories of practice” (p. 30).

Perhaps the very notion and limitations of theory need to be reconsidered as a starting point. Theory represents more than a body of facts or a set of personal opinions; it involves explanations and hypotheses that are based on multiple sources of knowledge as well as experience (Bunch, 1983). Theory is additionally dependent upon both conjecture and interpretation since it reflects the interests, values, and assumptions of those who created it (Bunch, 1983).

Theory allows educators to be aware of the questions that need to be asked so that what is learned from each activity will lead to more effective strategies. A rigorous critical theory is needed so that educators can better interpret, understand, and transform the everyday experiences

within the classroom (McLaren, 2003). As Britzman (2003) argues, “Seen in this way, theorizing is a tentative and potentially transformative instance of practice” (p. 64).

In addition to this reconceptualization of theory, there exists a call to action for critical theory to be incorporated as a means to informing pedagogical practices within the classroom (McLaren, 2003). Shor (1996) suggests that this be done by practicing theory and by theorizing practice. Consideration needs to be given to not only the ways in which theory informs practice, but to the ways that practice can inform theory. Britzman (2003) suggests that narrations of practices be read through theories of discourse. In this sense, experiential and practical knowledge can be employed as a means to understanding and interpreting theory. Britzman suggests that,

The transmission model of theory and of pedagogy, and the assumption that practice either follows theory or is atheoretical, obscures the potential dialogic relations that can produce transformation within the knower and over what is to be known. To move beyond such dualisms, however, teachers, students, and researchers must develop what David Lusted calls a ‘pedagogy of theory.’ (p. 217)

This model is a transactional one, whereby knowledge is produced through the process of thought, discussion, writing, debate, and exchange (Lusted, 1986). These discursive forms of classroom practice, in part, inform and shape the theory that is being learned. Theory thus both grows out of and guides practices and classroom practices guide theory and knowledge construction, in a continuous, spiraling process (Bunch, 1983).

Gore (1993) asserts that Shor is one critical pedagogue who has moved beyond the theorizing “project,” implementing many of the educational ideals of Freire into his own pedagogical practice within the university classroom. In *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy*, Shor (1996) discusses his experiences on the first

day of his class on Utopia that begins with the problem of making critical knowledge with the students, rather than handing this knowledge to them:

In this project, the dissonances I feel with the institution, the students, and the political climate take shape as a clash between a restrictive present and a reinvented future – call it, if you like, the hopeful challenging the actual in the name of the possible. (p. 3)

These words provide sound advice and may perhaps serve as one starting point to examine the potential of a post-secondary, critical pedagogical praxis that works toward achieving some of the central aims of the theory of critical pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogical Praxis

Praxis relies on both theory and practice. Praxis provides a means to transform the world through reflective, critical, and dialogical action (Roberts, 2000). For Freire (1970), critical praxis is characterized by informed action and demands curricular and instructional strategies that produce not only better learning climates but work toward the educative aim of a better society. Freire is advocating for the development of a critical pedagogical praxis.

Praxis

Freire's (1970) conception of praxis lies at the heart of what he refers to as conscientization, which he describes as the praxis of human beings participating critically in a transforming act. He stresses that "there is no conscientization outside of praxis, outside the theory-practice, reflection-action unity" (p. 160). Praxis and conscientization are necessarily intertwined, with conscientization representing the reflective dimension of praxis. From a postmodern perspective, an important aspect of conscientization (or any critically conscious activity) is the process of reflecting on the embeddedness of one's own views within multiple discourses as well as the views of one's students (Roberts, 2000).

Praxis that integrates the intent of theory with purposeful practices emphasizes the potential for this form of critical pedagogical praxis. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (1998) maintains that, "Praxis in education aims to bridge the gap between theory and transformational action that effectively transforms human existence" (p. 467). Direct and purposeful action must be exercised within a meaningful praxis. Thinking and theorizing alone are not enough. This represents a form of praxis that helps us think not only with but in our actions (Lather, 1998). Jennifer Lutzenberger and Elizabeth Clark (1999) recommend that educators can challenge the theory/practice dualism by focusing more concretely on practice as a creative, strategic, and theoretical process as a means to create new possibilities for praxis within the post-secondary classroom.

The Post-Secondary Classroom

"The college classroom is the most experimental, crucial, transitional public space that many of us will ever encounter" (Wakefield, 2001, p. 437). For many students, the classroom represents a threshold to adult life and career. Students enter the post-secondary classroom full of hope, fear, expectations, possibilities, dreams, and previous life experiences. For some critical professors, the post-secondary classroom allows teachers to fully "practice what they preach" (Gimenez, 1998). It represents a safe space to exercise one's pedagogical free will (hooks, 2003). Because "schools have long been one of the central sites in which various groups have attempted to constitute notions of cultural authority and regulate the way people understand themselves, their relationship with others, and their shared social and physical environments" (Simon, 1992, p. 37), they also exist as sites that can model the critical theoretical ideal of a more socially just world (Wakefield, 2001).

Critical Classroom Practices

If one of the main aims of critical pedagogy is to bring about a more socially just world, then what are some of the post-secondary classroom practices that can be employed that would reflect this ideal? What kind of teaching would make critical learning happen? In “Minding the Gap: Introduction to Radical Teaching Practice,” Lutzenberger and Clark (1999) begin responding to these queries, listing some of the practices including: “decentered pedagogy, critical thinking, emancipatory literacy, inclusive texts, reading the word/reading the world, experience-based learning, multiculturalism, writing across the curriculum, problem-posing, sitting in a circle, free writes, contract grading, portfolios, self-assessment” (p. 2). They pose the question, “do your goals for the classroom meet your teaching philosophy?” (p. 6). This question can be extended to include, “are your classroom practices congruent with the theory that you espouse?” Classroom practices tell us just as much about an individual or an institution engaged in the pedagogical process as it does about what is being taught (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002).

In light of the above, there may be a need for critical educators to begin to identify and communicate their classroom practices. As mentioned earlier, many critical pedagogues are reluctant to directly address classroom practices in their writing. Judith Williamson (1988) believes that this is due, in part, to the fact that although the theory of critical pedagogy is somewhat easy to write about and somewhat easy to discuss in class, actually practicing it within the post-secondary classroom is much more challenging. As well, critical professors want to avoid articulating prescriptive classroom practices and additionally want to avoid any decree that professes the one “right” way to do critical pedagogy (Gore, 1993; Simon, 1992; Shor, 1996). Some professors are reluctant to identify classroom practices because they wish to avoid the kind of prescriptive dogmatism that many “conservative” pedagogies rely upon (Gore, 1993).

That said, avoiding any articulation of critical classroom practices altogether is also problematic. Britzman (2003) believes that there is a problem with the fact that traditional

pedagogues have interpreted the silence of critical educators and their “failure” to articulate educative practices as a sign that there is a lack of critical pedagogical praxis rather than as an effort on the part of critical pedagogues to avoid overprescription. For professors, particularly those new to teaching, this dearth of concrete description can leave them with limited choices. Professors can either take up existing, hegemonic practices or they can attempt to engage in critical praxis, experimenting with it through trial and error. As a result of this process of trial and error, new professors are often left with a feeling of discontent in respect to their own efforts at trying to integrate the theory of critical pedagogy with classroom praxis (Britzman, 2003).

There is clearly a need for some concrete advice and for a set of discursive classroom practices to be formulated. The post-secondary classroom represents one important site of investigation that seeks to identify (some) specific practices that have made pedagogy what it is today (Gore, 1993). Any discussion of critical classroom practices needs to be regarded as the opening up of an area of inquiry and dialogue.

It is additionally important to recognize the difference between critical classroom practices that are liberating and that attend to the ideal of social transformation versus a simple set of teaching techniques or simple reordering of the physical space of the classroom. Incorporating a set of teaching techniques or a token adjustment to the physical environment of the classroom may just reinforce hierarchy and serve to further disempower students (Ellsworth, 1992; Gainguest, 1998). Britzman (2003) refers to this as the “methods as ends” model of teaching which “reduces the complexity of pedagogical activity to a technical solution and ‘forgets’ that methods are a means for larger educational purposes” (p. 62).

The following discussion of critical pedagogical praxis will therefore go beyond this “methods as ends” approach and will touch upon something more than creative teaching techniques, although these are also included as part of the discussion. Classroom techniques and

strategies clearly have a role to play in learning and teaching, but they should not become an end in themselves or be the sole agenda (Danvers, 2003).

Critical Pedagogical Praxis within the Post-Secondary Classroom

This next section will focus on the ways in which a critical pedagogical praxis implies a commitment to act via classroom practices in ways that are in accord with a critical vision of “why” one teaches, including both the political nature of that teaching and the educative potential for social transformation. The first question a critical educator must ask is not what methods should I use, but what human ideals do I (and my students) wish to promote (Roberts, 2000)? By positing these questions, the critical educator will be focusing on both the means (classroom practices) and the ends (educative purpose) of their praxis. McLaren (2003) encourages professors to explore the relationship between what practices they employ within the classroom and their efforts and intent to build a better society. In essence, both McLaren and Peter Roberts (2000) are imploring professors to examine the ways in which their beliefs are congruent with their actions.

Many critical educators believe that students’ lived experiences should serve as the starting point for any examination of critical classroom practices (hooks, 2003; Shor, 1996). McLaren (2003) refers to this as the primacy of student experience. This pedagogy takes the problems and needs of the students themselves as its starting point.

McLaren (1998) calls for a pedagogy that is “less informative and more performative,” less a pedagogy directed toward the interrogation of written texts than a corporeal grounding in the lived experiences of students. Boyce (n.d.) argues that developing a critical consciousness and praxis begins with the opening dialogue of a class in which learners begin to express their experiences and understandings of a theme. This disrupts the hegemonic understanding of

education as being something *done to* students, offering a reconceptualization of education as something that can be *done by and with* students (Shor, 1996).

Dialogue

According to Ellsworth (1992), dialogue is a fundamental imperative of critical pedagogy. Within the field of critical pedagogy, “Dialogue came to be seen as a pedagogical method, to be juxtaposed against oppressive monological methods” (Roberts, 2000, p. 56). Freire (1970) refers to this as the problem-posing method of education. Some manifestations of this approach to teaching and learning, include: teachers as students and students as teachers; teachers encouraging students to become responsible partners in their own learning; students realizing that successful learning results from their own efforts in collaboration with the teacher’s guidance; and students feeling responsible for directing themselves, knowing when they understand, and, if they do not, doing something about it. In order for dialogue to be possible, students need to exhibit trust, sharing, and a commitment to improving the quality of human life (Giroux, 1986).

Student voice

By encouraging students to have a voice and creating the space for them to express that voice, the critical pedagogue is taking concrete, practical steps toward engaging in a form of praxis that underlies the theory of critical pedagogy. The need for student voice to be identified as such has arisen out of the idea that it was never the case that students had nothing to say but rather the question of voice had to do with questions of power, who speaks, who listens, and what gets said and heard (Lather, 1991; Shor, 1996). Through dialogue, students can develop a voice within the classroom that thus represents their interests and needs (Giroux, 1997). Some of the questions that can be asked are: What would an education system look like if the main goal of education was to create a more socially just world? What would a more socially just world

look like? In what ways, can we work toward attaining a vision of “that world that ought to be” within this class? What can we do within our own class to begin to create that vision?

Dialogue can be employed within the post-secondary classroom as one means to bring about a vision of a more socially just world, while simultaneously exercising some of that vision within the classroom itself (Jarvis, 1996). In this way, students are in essence engaging with the theory of critical pedagogy (Shor, 1996). Dialogue can be used to address both the curricular process and the curricular content. Students can become engaged in co-creating the syllabus, co-decision-making about what texts get read and what curricular material gets valued, methods of evaluation and assessment, and decisions about how students want to learn the material, for example. When students are invited into the process of co-constructing the syllabus, they become subjects and constituents of the process rather than just objects or spectators (Shor, 1996).

Freire (1970) and other critical pedagogues do not advocate an “anything goes” style of pedagogy. Roberts (2000) suggests that, “Liberating education, contrary to popular misconception, is structured, purposeful, directive, and rigorous” (p. 59). The teacher’s role is to guide students through a course of study. This requires the teacher to adopt any number of roles based on the students’ needs, the curricular content, and the context. The teacher’s role may include: initiator/coordinator, peer-discussant, convenor, facilitator, advocate, adversary, cheerleader, lecturer, recorder, mediator, and librarian, among others (Shor, 1980). Through an emerging critical, collaborative dialogue between teachers and students, one that is action-based, a more participatory and democratic vision for schools and thus a more democratic vision for society becomes increasingly possible (King & Ahlquist, 1990).

Challenges to dialogue

In “Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering: Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy,” Ellsworth (1992) provides a detailed account of her attempts to bring the concept of dialogue as a critical pedagogical praxis into her curriculum and instruction course. She maintains that “when participants in our class attempted to put into practice prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, student voice, dialogue, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against” (p. 91). The effect of practicing the theory, in this case, “failed” and was disempowering. Ellsworth concedes that acting as if the classroom was a safe space in which dialogue was not only possible but was happening did not necessarily make it so. According to Ellsworth (1992), all voices in the classroom were not equal, in large part, because of the constraints imposed by the dominant culture and larger society.

Additionally, if the intent of employing dialogue and valuing student voice is a necessary condition for engaging in critical classroom praxis, what happens when a student’s voice bumps up against another student’s voice and the two voices disagree? What happens when students’ voices represent the voices of the dominant discourse and when the dialogue itself reinforces the oppression and marginalization of others? Which voices get valued? Who gets heard? This is one instance where the role of the teacher as guide or facilitator (Dewey, 1938; Shor, 1980; 1996) is important. Freire (1994), in particular, asserts that the teacher needs to provide structure and rigour and to assert herself when needed in providing constructive, critical feedback on both written work and thoughts that are shared in dialogue. Roberts (2000) agrees that in this sense not all contributions should be accepted uncritically. All views ought to be open to question and to redirection. The teacher plays an important role in structuring the critical process. For Freire (1994), a critical attitude is not destructive but respectful.

For dialogue to be transformative, it is important that it does not abandon existing knowledge entirely. Roberts (2000) emphasizes that just because ideas are constantly reexamined in a dialogical setting does not mean there is no stability or continuity in what people either know or learn about over time. Dialogue needs to be part of a continuum of knowledge building and information gathering. The professor needs to try to encourage student voice while simultaneously helping students recognize that all voices are situated and partial.

Naming oneself through dialogue

Rebecca Jarvis (1996) highlights the need for both teachers and students to examine the postmodern notion of partial perspectives and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991) through an examination of the “positionality” of their voices within any given dialogue. Jarvis (1996) explains how, “Attempting to teach about positioning and critiquing dominant discourses calls into question my own abilities to examine positioning and to critique dominant discourses” (p. 11). Jarvis recognizes how her own “positionality” as the professor affects the classroom dialogue. The belief that one’s own reality is the only reality worth speaking about can be the most dangerous of all delusions (Sefa Dei, 1996), not only for students but for professors as well. Developing a process of “naming” oneself, including one’s positionality and biases, is an essential first step in the process of authentic classroom dialogue. “Naming” involves a process of both students and professors identifying and defining those social and economic relationships that most clearly affect their lives.

Using dialogue as a means to “name” oneself and to then “locate” oneself in relation to the dominant discourse provides both students and professors with a starting point for them to begin to unravel the power relations embedded in the construction of knowledge. This process can assist students in beginning to question commonly-held assumptions about education, teaching them about how the dominant culture may in fact marginalize certain groups not only

within the school system, but within society. It additionally provides them with a discourse that draws on their own cultural histories and experiences to discuss how they understand and experience oppression and social justice (McLaren, 2003). In this way, dialogue is used as a teaching technique within the post-secondary classroom to provide students with an opportunity to engage in learning about the ways in which the dominant discourse oppresses and marginalizes, as well as a means for them to “locate” themselves within this discourse.

Adding to this discussion through the use of interviews with community members and various workers, as well as other research, could further inform this discussion by providing more data and combining multiples sources of knowledge (Brookfield, 1987). Students can then be given an opportunity to develop strategies for self and social transformation through critical writing exercises and group exercises that provide them with an opportunity to apply some of their newfound knowledge (Brookfield, 1987). Encouraging students to specifically identify what it would take for them to become active agents of social change and to have them participate in some form of social action outside of the classroom is one means to bridging the theory/praxis gap.

Examples of Critical Classroom Praxis

Peter Wakefield (2001) suggests that, “We can advance and embody a form of social justice to the extent that we create an emotional learning space alongside our curricular coverage” (p. 436). Wakefield is suggesting an alteration of not only the physical classroom environment and its hegemonic structure, but an emotional and corporeal space that incites student engagement and imagination. Wakefield argues that a change in the physical environment in the classroom can disrupt the hierarchy of lecturer-authority/student-apprentice. Even more profound is when students have an opportunity to not only move the chairs around to better suit the critical pedagogical intent to encourage dialogue, but are provided with

opportunities to attend to the physical presence of their fellow students through play-based activities and exercises.

Comfort zone activities (Cavert & Frank, 2003), hegemony treasure hunts (Fawcett, Bell, & Russell, 2002), and other experiential activities (Rohnke, 1989) can contribute to counter-hegemonic uses of the physical space and the development of a classroom community. Hegemony treasure hunts that include an examination of commonly-held assumptions about teaching, learning, the role of the student, the role of the teacher, and the structure of the institution additionally allow for a praxis-oriented approach to the aspects of the theory of critical pedagogy that encourage students to question assumptions.

McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur (1999) encourage this praxis-oriented form of pedagogy be utilized to inform and organize students, parents, and teachers at the broader community level and as a means to linking what goes on in the classroom with what goes on in society. Critical pedagogues can teach critical literacy as one means to accomplish this. According to Gary Anderson and Patricia Irvine (1993), critical literacy is the process of using readings and writing as a means to develop an understanding about how one's experience are historically constructed within specific power relations.

For example, McLaren and Farahmandpur (1999) have taught critical and economic literacy using Rick Ayers' (2001) *Studs Terkel's Working: A Teaching Guide* in conjunction with Studs Terkel's book *Working* (1975). The oral histories found in *Working* (1975) provide a window into the lives of working class Americans in the mid-1970s. Students can use these histories and these voices to examine and explore their own neighbourhoods and the economic realities of the lives of people in those neighbourhoods.

Students can interview people within the neighbourhood, as a means to examining local socio-political issues with the wider arena of social life (McLaren, 2003). The typical critical questions that arise are: "Why is there a shortage of community centers in some neighborhoods

and not in others? How can public transportation be made more accessible? Why is there a large police presence in some communities for the purpose of repression and other, more benign forms of police presence in the gated communities for the purpose of protection?” (McLaren, 2003, p. 47). These questions and others that emerge from these interviews provide an experiential starting point to identify the social and economic conditions of people within a given community. This lived experience can be brought back to the classroom where theoretical insights and further community action can be explored. This dialectical approach to teaching and learning can prepare students for critical citizenship through both the content of the teaching and the classroom practices that are employed.

Introducing critical reading, writing, and thinking as a means to examine assumptions and as a means to consider a revisioning of a more socially just world is another means for students to develop critical literacy skills (Brookfield, 1987; Jarvis, 1996). There are many assignments which can enable students to explore the link between critical theory and social action. For instance, a professor can identify a real community need and develop an assignment that integrates both theoretical knowledge and experiential components as a means for students to problem-solve and identify solutions. A professor can also design hypothetical scenarios. Charlotte Bunch (1991) cites one example of this. She encourages her students to imagine a situation in which a women’s centre board of directors has to meet to decide how to use a \$20,000 gift it has just received. Components of this assignment may include: students needing to research social issues within the community; students reading about these issues; students meeting with members of the community; and students engaging in interviews with community members. Students are then encouraged to synthesize their findings in working toward solutions.

While developing critical reading and writing skills may be considered central to a post-secondary education (Brookfield, 1987), critical thinking is still a bit of a “buzz word,” especially on university campuses across North America. Further, it is not always clear what is

meant by this term. According to Brookfield (1987), critical thinking is comprised of a number of elements, including: identifying and challenging assumptions; challenging the importance of context; trying to imagine and explore alternatives; and being reflectively skeptical. His definition of critical thinking offers one suggested framework that can be employed when encouraging students to question commonly-held assumptions through critical reading and writing. Students can be encouraged to examine and identify each of the four components that Brookfield has outlined above as a means to unveil the hidden curriculum and some of the assumptions of the dominant discourse within schools and universities. Using this framework and then encouraging students to consider alternatives to the dominant discourse, by adopting a vision of a more socially just world, is one means for them to employ this theory in praxis.

Media literacy activities provide another opportunity for students to engage in critical thinking. Media literacy is an information and communication skill that is responsive to the changing nature of information in our society. It addresses the skills students need to be taught in schools and the critical competencies that people must possess as they consume information in their homes and living rooms, and the abilities workers must have as they move toward the 21st century and the challenges of a global economy (Considine, 1995).

David Considine (1995) regards media literacy as an interdisciplinary concept that can be explored and developed within the post-secondary classroom through several different approaches. For example, a professor can ask students to read a variety of media sources, including: popular magazines, peer-reviewed journals, textbooks, interview responses, and newspapers. A professor can then ask students some of the following questions: Which of these sources of knowledge provides you with the most useful knowledge? If one source of knowledge contradicts another source of knowledge, how do you know which one to trust? In what ways do these various sources of knowledge serve to further oppress and marginalize certain groups of people while allocating power to other groups? McLaren (2003) argues that all questions of

“truth” are central to a critical examination of knowledge, asserting that knowledge should be analyzed on the basis of whether it is oppressive and exploitative, and not on the basis of whether it is “true.”

There are numerous other critical classroom practices that can have liberating influences within the post-secondary classroom, including: collective and cooperative work styles, peer and group evaluation, self and mutual instruction, and alternative forms of assessment (Shor, 1980). Assessment and evaluation have traditionally been the purview of the professor. Professors maintain authority and power within the classroom, in large part, as a result of their “control” over assessment and marking. The instruments used to assess students can, however, be based in a student-centred, co-operative curriculum (Shor, 1992). Shor promotes not only a dialogic approach to curriculum, but also encourages educators to adopt a dialogic approach to assessment.

Assessment becomes a powerful contributor to the learning process if students are empowered to participate in establishing the assessment criteria (Keesing-Styles, 2003). Some students are immediately capable of defining appropriate, meaningful, and fair (to both them and to the professor) criteria as the basis for assessment; others lack the confidence, knowledge, or experience to do so. The teacher needs to help guide and facilitate this process, ensuring that the students’ expectations for themselves as well as the professor’s expectations for the students represent both a fair and a rigorous approach to teaching and learning. Self-assessment and peer-assessment may also be valuable (Shor, 1980; 1996).

Although this list of classroom practices is not exhaustive, it provides some examples of what is meant by critical pedagogical praxis. While a number of these examples suggest that there are indeed existing classroom practices that bridge the gap between the theory of critical pedagogy and post-secondary classroom praxis, these examples are predominantly anecdotal accounts of the attempts of individual professors to engage in critical classroom praxis. The

successes of these critical classroom practices have been identified predominantly through experiential ways of knowing, student feedback, and intuitive methods of assessing effectiveness, and less on systematic research. In other words, within the critical pedagogy literature itself, there is frequent reference to the successes of these forms of classroom praxis, but little empirical evidence of this success.

Research of Student-Centred Classroom Praxis

It is interesting to note that the critical pedagogy literature seems to focus either solely on practice or solely on “high” theory. The examples of classroom practices are not readily accessible or identifiable within the critical pedagogy literature, but rather, they seem to be somewhat randomly speckled throughout a number of professional journals such as *Radical Teacher* and *Rethinking Schools*. The theory of critical pedagogy is often found in such “academic” journals, such as *Educational Theory*, *Educational Researcher*, and *Teaching Sociology*. Many of the books on critical pedagogy also focus primarily on theory. As previously mentioned, within the literature, then, there has been little attention paid to the ways in which professors can bridge the theory/practice gap within their own practices. This leads me to believe that professors who wish to explore the ways in which the theory of critical pedagogy can be employed in practices need to do a lot of reading and much experimentation to engage in this form of praxis.

Overall, I was struck by the paucity of research related to critical pedagogical praxis. Some of the related research helps inform my study, however. It would therefore be an oversight to not consider some of the other fields of study where research has been conducted on various forms of student-centred learning. It is important to be clear, however, that student-centred classroom practices are not necessarily critical pedagogical practices because as mentioned earlier, critical classroom praxis refers to those forms of praxis that are purposeful in working

toward social transformation. That being said, despite the fact that not all forms of student-centred classroom practices aspire to this aim, the research within the broader field of student-centred learning is compelling. It points to the effectiveness of student-centred praxis and it may serve to rouse the interests of critical pedagogues to more fully consider the ways in which they might assess the effectiveness of their own praxis. In this next section, I have chosen to emphasize studies conducted in post-secondary classrooms as they are most relevant to my own proposed study and allow me to avoid confounds of age and development.

In one study, entitled “See One, Do One, Teach One...Two Faculty Members’ Path Through Student-Centered Learning,” Doug Jacobson, James Davis, and Barb Licklider (1998) provide an account of the journey of two engineering professors, Jacobson and Davis, as they attempt to modify their teaching styles and classroom practices from a traditional lecture format to a student-centred learning experience. The professors attended a workshop that introduced them to cooperative learning and the ways in which this student-centred approach to teaching and learning can be employed within the post-secondary classroom. They then brought this newfound knowledge back to their own university classrooms. The professors used the following student-centred practices: inductive learning, open-ended questions, co-developing course and lesson objectives, and negotiated assessment. Assessing the outcomes, they found that the students experienced an increase in learning and had a strong positive attitude about their courses as a result of this more student-centred approach to learning. Jacobson, Davis, and Licklider (1998) also found that student attendance and participation increased and that the middle range students had higher test scores and a deeper understanding of the material.

There have been similar findings in other studies. According to Richard Felder and Rebecca Brent (1996) and Chet Meyers and Thomas Jones (1993), student-centred instruction involving active learning, student involvement in simulation, role-plays and other experiential activities, cooperative learning, and problems requiring critical thinking all led to increased

motivation to learn, greater retention of knowledge, deeper understanding of the course material, and more positive attitudes toward the subject being taught. Even with studies on student-centred learning in large classes (between 200-300 students), using student-centred practices, including: working in groups, debates, experiential activities, and peer assessment, resulted in students having a more positive response to class, attending class more often, learning the content, developing effective learning strategies, and retaining information better than they do in more “traditionally” taught courses (Scott, Buchanan, & Haigh, 1997).

According to Patricia Daniels (1996), some teacher educators have difficulty providing preservice teachers with classroom experiences connecting student-centred learning and constructivist learning theory to teaching practice. Constructivist learning theory proposes that learners construct knowledge for themselves - each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning - as he or she learns (Bruner, 1990); this theory is closely aligned with the student-centred ideal that learning should begin with the primacy of student experience and dialogue. Daniels examined the effectiveness of a constructivist-oriented approach to teaching mathematics that employed students learning in small groups, writing collaborative essays, talking about alternative interpretations of classroom practices, and engaging in dialogue.

In Daniels’ (1996) study, 27 teacher education students used an interactive multimedia environment, *Classroom with a View (CView)*, as a teaching tool to help students build connections between learning theory and teaching practice. The purpose of the study was to determine how *CView* affected beginning teachers’ understanding of employing a student-centred, constructivist approach to teaching and learning mathematics, focusing on interpreting students’ experiences with this form of praxis. The results indicated that this form of student-centred teaching and learning made the coursework more comprehensible and made the classroom environment more hospitable (Daniels, 1996).

Marion Harris Fey (1994) discovered that the use of dialogue and student voice fostered an environment of caring and connection which resulted in life-changing discoveries for the participants in her study, "Finding Voice through Teacher-Student Collaboration in a Feminist Research Project: Long-Term Effects." The participants were students of a feminist composition course. Students were asked to respond to readings through group discussion and to prepare response writings for small-group peer review. It was discovered that sharing personal experiences and struggling to be understood contributed to more developed writing and to the development of students' voices. For example, Fey described the experiences of one Spanish-speaking student who found that peer collaboration "allowed a special in-between space, a site for shaping voice through relationship, for responding through mind and heart" (Fey, 1994, p. 1).

There are numerous other studies, outside of critical pedagogy and in addition to those few listed here, that have explored both the theory/practice gap and the ways in which student-centred teaching practices affect student learning through research. Keith Trigwell, Michael Prosser, and Fiona Waterhouse (1999) investigated both the extent to which a transmission-oriented/teacher-focused approach to teaching is associated with a surface approach to learning, and a conceptual change/student-centred approach to teaching is associated with a deep approach to learning. They surveyed both the students and the lecturer in each of 48 first year science classes in Australian Universities and found that a student-centred approach to teaching and learning resulted in deeper understandings of the course content and a better learning environment (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999).

Alberto Cabrera, Carol Colbeck, and Patrick Terenzini (2001) investigated the relationship between classroom practices and students' gains in professional competencies. More than 1,250 undergraduate engineering students from seven universities participated. Findings show that the instructional practices of instructor interaction, collaborative learning, and student-centred classroom practices were significantly and positively associated with students' self-

reported gains in problem-solving skills, group skills, and understanding of engineering as an occupation.

Other research within the post-secondary classroom has addressed more specific aspects of student-centred learning, including: the effects of valuing student voice and dialogue (Bielman, Putney, & Studler, 2003); the role of the professor (Knowlton, 2000); alternative methods of assessment (Cabrera, Colbeck, & Terenzini, 2001); and the value of creating a classroom community (Dorman, 2002). This research has revealed that these student-centred classroom practices have increased students' interest and engagement with the course, enhanced students' understanding of the course material and increased students' knowledge retention.

These studies, although outside of the field of critical pedagogy per se, nonetheless have examined numerous student-centred classroom practices that relate to a discussion of critical classroom praxis. The research within these fields is surprisingly extensive, especially in light of the limited empirical research within the critical pedagogy literature itself. I believe that these studies point to a need within the field of critical pedagogy to strengthen what is, at the moment, the mostly anecdotal nature of the critical pedagogy literature, by paying more attention to assessing some of the claims that are made regarding successes of classroom practices.

Challenges to Praxis

It is interesting to note that the critical pedagogy literature focuses more on the challenges and constraints of employing the theory of critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom and less on the successes. There may be a number of reasons for this disparity. As previously mentioned, critical pedagogues have avoided articulating a set of prescriptive practices, to avoid dogma (Gore, 1993) and because it may be easier to teach about critical pedagogy than it is to actually practice it within the post-secondary classroom (Jarvis, 1996; Williamson, 1988). Critical educators are also likely to be fairly self-critical about their own

practices and may find it easier to articulate the challenges and some of the “failures” of their praxis, rather than articulating the successes. I also believe that there are many challenges to engaging in critical classroom praxis and for this reason, and at this point in time, there may simply be more examples of challenges than there are examples of successes. I hope that over time that imbalance will change.

In an effort to respond to Kathryn Gainguest’s (1998) interest in identifying some of the constraints that critical pedagogues face that militate against change, the following challenges will be discussed: repressive myth, tokenism, lack of preparation, student resistance, time constraints, and institutional constraints.

A Repressive Myth

Ellsworth (1992) provides one of the most candid and scathing critiques of not only the “repressive myth” of critical pedagogy but of the “repressive myth” of critical pedagogues. Critical pedagogues have acknowledged the socially constructed and legitimated authority that professors hold over their students (Burbules, 1986) and perhaps because of this presence they feel somewhat exonerated from the hegemonic power relationship of the traditional classroom. Yet Ellsworth (1992) argues that, “theorists of critical pedagogy have failed to launch any meaningful analysis of or program for reformulating the institutionalized power imbalances between themselves and their students, or of the essentially paternalistic project of education itself” (p. 98). The student-centred teaching strategies that are then employed, such as valuing student voice, empowerment, and dialogue, give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact.

Shor (1996) is self-implicating about this when he discusses some of the ways in which he facilitates his student-centred class on Utopia. He talks about how he encourages student voice and input and encourages students to engage in contract grading. He concedes that

although contract grading provides them with options regarding assignments, those options are limited to a prescribed list that he himself created. He further implicates himself, and the ways in which his authority gets expressed within the classroom, when he discusses how he is the sole person who gets to choose the texts that are read and often facilitates the ways in which those texts are interpreted. His “teacher authority” finds additional expression in the fact that he grades students and students, fearing the consequences of questioning his teacher authority, may engage in critical praxis as a means to conform to his desires, not necessarily because they choose to engage in this form of counter-hegemonic praxis.

Regardless of the researcher or the text, the majority of literature that relates to critical pedagogy discusses the de-centering and restructuring of the teacher/student relationship but almost always relies on the notion that teachers begin with the primacy of student experience as the means to creating the learning environment, choosing the methodology that will be employed within the classroom, and guiding the “reading” and interpretation of curricular content (Ellsworth, 1992; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003; Shor, 1996). In other words, at the end of the day, the teacher as guide, facilitator, mediator, or any other label chosen, still maintains a position of authority and a degree of power over the student.

Ellsworth (1992) further argues that a critical pedagogical praxis itself is founded on a rationalist assumption - that the teaching of analytic and critical skills for judging the truth and merit of propositions, and the interrogation of potentially transformative moments in the dominant culture are the essential goals of this form of praxis: “As long as educators define pedagogy against oppressive formation in these ways, the role of the critical pedagogue will be to guarantee that the foundation of classroom interaction itself is reason” (p. 96).

The critical pedagogue continues to be seen as the one who enforces the rules of reason in the classroom. By the end of the semester, students in Ellsworth’s curriculum and instruction class, a class that was trying to apply the theory of critical pedagogy in praxis, agreed that a

commitment to empowerment and dialogue was not enough to make the classroom a safe space for speaking out. What was needed was a reconceptualization of the very notions of rationalism and logic as well as greater student preparation to engage in this form of classroom praxis.

Tokenism

Somewhat tied into the discussion of a repressive myth, there exists a concern about the potential for critical pedagogical practices to represent mere token attempts at sharing authority and working toward social change. For example, a circle is not enough to constitute a counterhegemonic, critical classroom praxis (Brookfield, 1995), just as a teacher's decision to move about the classroom, rather than simply stand in front of the students is not enough to create transformative change. Singular classroom practices must be situated in an overall critical praxis that focuses on both curriculum content and methodology and the broader educative intent of the classroom praxis. As Shor (1996) identifies, "Defining circle seating as empowerment by itself is simply too easy and too 'utopian.' It misses the complex strategies and resistances involved in the transformation of students and teachers in the rhetorical setting of a classroom" (p. 65).

Classroom practices are always partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others (Ellsworth, 1992). Solutions do not lie simply in teaching strategies or in more careful use of language (Eyre, 1993). Regardless of emancipatory efforts, professors at some point need to recognize and "name" the ways in which their teaching and research is shaped and limited by their experiences, recognizing it as both partial and biased. For the teacher to pretend that she is neither biased nor an authority is fictitious. hooks (1994) maintains that power in and of itself may be neither good or bad, but rather it is the use of power and its potential to oppress that must be considered.

Some professors question whether a critical praxis is even necessary. These pedagogues offer a critical perspective and encourage critical thinking while using “traditional” methods, which raises the question: does a critical curriculum necessarily call for a critical pedagogy? Gimenez (1998), for example, suggests that a radical curriculum does not require a radical pedagogy.

Radical teachers using conventional pedagogy might be more consistent than radical pedagogy advocates. To make sure students learn the basic intellectual skills necessary to be able to think critically and with self-assurance about their experiences, conventional pedagogy is likely to be more radical – in the sense of challenging the status quo to a higher degree – than student-centred approaches that often cater to student prejudices and reaffirm them in the pragmatic, eclectic, and relativistic ethos dominant today. (pp. 117-118)

There seems to be a number of critical pedagogues who differ in the extent to which they consider radical pedagogy a necessary condition for teaching critical theory. They question, “which, then, is the more effective approach: radical methods, traditional methods, or diverse methods from both the radial and conventional traditions” (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002, p. 28)?

Lack of Preparation

hooks (1994) argues that lack of student preparation represents another challenge to engaging in critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom. Many students have been taught from early on that to be a “good” student means to be silent, passive, and accepting; a “good” student’s primary purpose is to learn the knowledge the educator imparts, in an unquestioning manner. hooks (1994) further argues that even during college, the primary lesson was to learn obedience to authority. Harvey Holtz (1989) and Sweet (1998) agree that students

are often unprepared to participate in “real” critical thinking and dialogue due to inadequate preparation for college-level work.

Shor (1996) contends that he is continuously surprised by the fact that “critical inquiry and power-sharing have virtually no profile in student experience” (p. 19). Students arrive in a critical classroom with little practice in what Shor refers to as democratic rhetoric. He maintains that although they do know how to follow or frustrate authority, they have little experience with how to assume authority. A teacher’s attempt to encourage students to experiment with different written rhetorical forms may be limited by students’ prior experience in other courses (Simon, 1992).

Student Resistance

Other research suggests that even when students are prepared to engage in critical work, they are often resistant to it (Shor, 1980; Shor & Freire, 1987). After many long years of traditional forms of schooling, students may find it difficult to give voice to their different experiences and to participate fully in the exploration of other counter-hegemonic practices that are encouraged within a critical classroom praxis (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002). Students may be resistant to the practices as well as to what they may perceive as controversial course content.

Shor (1996) argues that students often resist in the following ways:

- They do not want to share authority (it is easier for them to be the recipients of knowledge than it is for them to take responsibility)
- They do not like the process of curriculum negotiation (they want the “teacher-expert” to tell them what things mean and what to do)
- They do not know how to use authority or to negotiate the curriculum (this returns to the earlier discussion about their general lack of preparation regarding student-directed learning)

- They do not understand the discourse that professors often use to introduce power-sharing and counter-hegemonic practices
- They do not trust the professor's sincerity or the authenticity of the process of curriculum negotiation
- They are reluctant to take public risks by speaking up in an unfamiliar process for a variety of reasons: they may be shy, they may lack confidence, they may feel at risk if they have typically felt marginalized or oppressed within the classroom environment, or they may prefer not to draw attention to themselves.

My own experience has confirmed that while my expectation is that students will be liberated by both the theory and the methodology of an experiential classroom, students are often not adequately prepared to engage in critical classroom praxis and those who are prepared may show little interest in engaging in this work because they possess an understanding of how unsettling and hard this work can be. King and Ahlquist (1990) confirm that it is not easy, or always successful, to combat the long-established patterns of boredom and emotional distance that students have learned. Students have learned these, in part, to protect themselves from the oppressive nature of most classrooms.

hooks (2003) confirms this observation by suggesting that attempts to engage in a counter-hegemonic liberatory practice that takes place within a dominator context is challenging. Students themselves often come face to face with conflicting desires within this context: "They may desire help from an 'enlightened witness' while simultaneously desiring to be recognized and rewarded by conventional conservative sources. In states of conflict, students will usually opt to go with the status quo" (p. 89). Nancy Davis (1992) suggests that some resistance is therefore healthy because it suggests that students are struggling with the issues and taking them seriously.

When I consider my own experiences as a PhD student, I would concede that while the topic for my dissertation and the main purpose of my research is to explore the potentials of critical praxis, when faced with “traditional” professors and courses within the PhD program itself, I quickly deferred to the majority of my own post-secondary classroom experiences, trying to fit into the system and trying to comply with the wishes of the instructors, in part, to serve my prescribed role as a “good” student and in part to attain high marks. Davis (1992) submits that most students soon realize that there is a politically correct line and either give lip service to it or withdraw into resentful silence.

Students “may deny the existence or importance of inequality or may argue that conditions are improving so rapidly that no intervention is needed” (Davis, 1992, p. 232). Some students may remain on an abstract or intellectual level when discussing stratification and the influence of the dominant culture (Davis, 1992). Students may want to avoid introspection and recognition of how power differences between groups are played out in the interactions of everyday life, especially one’s own life (Shor, 1996). Resistance may come from students who are disadvantaged, who may want to deny the existence of prejudice, discrimination, and other structural barriers to their success, or from the more advantaged students who wish to deny their role in these power differences (Shor, 1996).

Time Constraints

Trying to implement a critical pedagogical praxis by adopting a student-centred approach to teaching and learning that is reflected within both the curricular content and the methodological practices can be quite overwhelming and time-consuming. Lisa Jakubowski and Livy Visano (2002) argue that, “We necessarily need to spend more time regularly modifying our readings, syllabi, lecture materials and means of evaluation in response to student concerns” (p. 28). Sweet (1998) agrees that radical pedagogy is much more time consuming than traditional

pedagogy. For instance, because a critical praxis is student-directed, professors weigh student concerns, interests, and ideals alongside those of the professors. Sweet concedes that, in essence, “radical pedagogues require a fresh approach with each class each semester” (p. 105). Teachers who use the same syllabus year after year do not need to invest a great deal of time and energy into preparing for their classes. Lecturing is also a “safer, more reassuring way to teach because teachers can establish a position that keeps students at a distance” (Shor, 1992, p. 102).

Because a student-centred approach to pedagogy involves meeting the students on their own terms and developing some understanding of their lives, students may begin to develop relationship with teachers. Students and teachers often develop a “pedagogical friendship” (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002) within the critical classroom. This may also result in increased obligations to attend and support student activities, to meet with students, to advise students, and to provide students with letters of reference, since students will most often ask a professor who “knows them” to provide such services.

According to John Danvers (2003), overloaded teaching and assessment timetables, as well as a large increase in administrative duties are factors that may prohibit the development of a creative and innovative culture of learning and teaching on an institutional level. Additionally, because books and journal publications play a stronger role than teaching in decisions regarding promotion and tenure, Gregory Marchant and Isadore Newman (1994) counsel career-minded professors to minimize the time that they invest into the quality of their teaching and to devote more time to publishing.

Institutional Constraints

The obstacle that seems to be the greatest, or at least the most frequently cited example of an inhibiting factor to a meaningful, critical classroom praxis, is that there are far too many institutional constraints for teachers to be invested in engaging in this form of counter-hegemonic

praxis (Chawla & Rodriguez 2001; hooks, 2003; Mauksch, 1986; Shor, 1996). hooks (2003) argues that the very institutions in which we work are structured to reinforce the dominant culture. Shor (1996) agrees that producing critical thought in an institution that is non-democratic and hegemonic is challenging. In Devika Chawla and Amardo Rodriguez (2001), Chawla describes how as a teaching assistant he found himself entrenched in a university where his attempts at counter-hegemonic classroom practices were too risky and too challenging and he soon found himself merely perpetuating the hegemonic order. There may be risk in employing a critical praxis.

Risk of marginalization

Jakubowski and Visano (2002) suggest that professors often risk being characterized as incompetent if their teaching strategies are unsuccessful. Professors further risk being marginalized if students perceive their willingness to negotiate curriculum as a sign of incompetency or as a sign of weakness (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002). Students and colleagues may query, “can a student-centred class teach anything significant” (Shor, 1992, p. 102)? Students and professors who have only been exposed to hegemonic practices, including lecture, testing, and teacher authority, may seriously question how information can be taught in a participatory way that allows for negotiation and student voice.

Professors also risk being marginalized by a more traditional academic culture that views a critical pedagogical approach to teaching and learning as subversive (Brookfield, 1995). Professors that teach in “radical” or “critical” ways are often regarded as controversial and they risk repercussions from academic administrators who are less open to alternative ways of teaching and learning (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002). Hans Mauksch (1986) emphasizes the need for professors to build the necessary social capital to facilitate both career advancement and career movement between institutions. Being recognized as an excellent teacher results in lesser

amounts of capital than being recognized as an excellent researcher (Mauksch, 1986). This may limit the prospects of future employment, particularly in universities with “greater prestige.”

Schedules and timetables

There are a number of other bureaucratic practices within universities that may further undermine professors’ abilities to implement critical pedagogical praxis. Books must be selected and ordered long before the first class meets, this seriously challenges those professors who intend to negotiate the syllabus, including what texts get read, with the students. It is additionally difficult for critical pedagogical praxis to be implemented into fourteen-week semesters with classes that meet twice each week for 90 minutes. It is difficult to have students generate themes, identify solutions, and engage in praxis that works toward solutions in the amount of time allotted for a typical university course (Solorzano, 1986).

Student evaluations

If the measure for successful teaching is a standardized teaching evaluation and a critical praxis cultivates student resistance, then teachers may receive lower scores on the student evaluations and those professors in probationary positions may find themselves in tenuous positions with school administrators (Bohmer & Briggs, 1991). Standardized teaching evaluations tend to lack indicators designed to assess the effectiveness of radical teaching (Sweet, 1998).

Pedagogical desires vs. institutional constraints

The struggle for balance between pedagogical desires and institutional constraints can create considerable stress for students as well. hooks (2003) tells the story of a black female undergraduate student whom she mentored. During her years at graduate school, this student came into contact with a number of professors who were very critical of hooks’ work,

particularly the controversial nature of her critical praxis. The student in hooks' story wanted to become a "major player in the existing dominator culture of academe" (p. 90) and because this placed the student at odds with hooks' epistemology and praxis, this student opted to distance herself from hooks. As Shor and Freire (1987) have pointed out, radical faculty members may become labeled as "flakes" or "troublemakers" if most other faculty members practice in ways that are more aligned with the dominant paradigm within the university. Critical pedagogues may be criticized by their colleagues for practicing in ways that end up disrupting the more traditionally taught classes because once students have been proffered a vision of what the classroom can be, they may desire to have their other classes reflect that vision.

For example, I once had a student come up to me after class and ask: "What can I do to make my other classes more like this one?" I was concerned about counseling this particular student to talk to his other professors about "adjusting" their teaching styles and classroom practices. I was hesitant in my response because I myself know how it feels when students "question" my praxis and I realize how easy it is to become defensive. Because the student's main concern was that he had a learning disability which made it very challenging for him to learn through the traditional lecture-style courses that tested what he had learned using multiple choice exams, I encouraged him to consider talking with his professors about his disability and asking them what suggestions they might have for him regarding how he could better perform in class and on tests.

He came back to me a week later and said that he had approached two of his professors; he had actually asked them if they would consider allowing him to contract a mark for their courses (a practice that we were using in our class at the time). He said that neither one of them was particularly interested in contract marking or even particularly interested in the fact that he had a learning disability that prohibited him from doing well on multiple choice exams. He felt discouraged and decided not to speak with his other professors. He expressed his gratitude that

he at least had one class that provided him with what he referred to as more “equal” opportunities for success.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, the review of related literature provides adequate examples of challenges to critical praxis while providing far fewer examples of critical classroom practices. It would also appear that although many critical pedagogues are able to anecdotally express the ways in which they engage in critical praxis, there is little evidence to suggest whether or not their engagement with this praxis results in learning outcomes that attend to the justice-oriented nature of a critical pedagogical curriculum. In other words, the review of related literature seems to point to a gap as it relates to empirical research regarding success with critical praxis and the outcomes of engaging in critical praxis. Chapter 3 will provide a description of my research study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the design of the research study. I begin with my attempt to “situate” myself as the researcher. The chapter then discusses an overview of the study, the research participants, the research instruments, and the procedures that were used for the collection and analysis of the data.

Locating Myself

In this section, my goal is to consider the “poststructural call” that invites researchers to acknowledge their role within the research process (Haraway, 1991; Lather, 1991; Russell, 2003). Haraway, in fact, argues that the process of locating oneself, or identifying one’s position, is the key practice to grounding knowledge. Because knowledge is always partial, situated, and contextual (Haraway, 1991) and its production is neither objective nor absolute (Heshusius, 1994), I will follow Russell’s (2003) advice that researchers think about the congruency (or lack thereof) between their methodological desires and practices before embarking on their research projects.

Although Haraway (1991) contends that researchers can only offer one partial perspective situated in time and place, there is a part of me that wants to, and needs to, believe that “good” research can offer something more. I wish to declare that although my literature review clearly revealed my ideological leanings, emphasizing my own location within a poststructural epistemology, there exists a part of me that yearns to quantify, objectify, and produce “trustworthy” research results that are regarded as generalizable, useful, and valid. I believe that this part of me exists, to some extent, as a result of my previous research experiences. One of these is worth sharing here.

As an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I wrote an honour's thesis that was a multiple case study of the effect of a music therapy program on two individuals with different disabilities. I received an award for the research and I invited my parents to attend the award's ceremony with me. At the end of the ceremony, my dad, who grew up on a dairy farm in Southern Wisconsin, pulled me aside and asked me about the value of the knowledge that had been presented. He could not fully grasp why the eating habits of one particular species of monkey in Borneo or the results of a music therapy program on the lives of only two people could have any measurable significance or academic impact. In essence, he wanted to know what the practical application of the research was and if anyone would actually benefit from the research or even read it.

That query has stuck in my head to this day, not simply because these questions were posited by my father, but because I do believe that an "anything goes" approach to research and to communicating and generalizing research findings is unacceptable. In reference to my current research, my original research question was, "to what extent and in what ways do critical pedagogues who espouse the theory of critical pedagogy attempt to practice it in a meaningful way within the post-secondary classroom?" This question had a number of weaknesses, one being the way in which the tone of the question already pointed to my own assumption that there was a lack of congruence between the theory that is espoused and the ways in which critical pedagogues practice. Furthermore, the word "meaningful" raised a question about how "meaningful" could be measured.

This original question raised a number of other concerns and responses from my PhD committee members and particularly my supervisor. In the margins of my initial proposed question, my PhD Supervisor, Connie Russell, wrote, "I'm getting the sense that your desired methods are driving your question rather than the question driving your selected methods; is your pragmatic bent overdetermining this?" There were additional queries from peers and colleagues

regarding why I had chosen a mixed methods approach. Many believed that the quantitative nature of the question would not provide me with any sapient information. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, the librarian in the education library wondered why there were no surveys or questionnaires related to critical pedagogy and why there were so few previous studies on the topic.

I have been grappling with these questions, pondering my educational background that was predominantly positivistic and a social and cultural upbringing that was fairly “traditional,” and my newfound experiential and “book” knowledge that affirm a more poststructural perspective, that knowledge and truth are partial, situated, and contextual (Haraway, 1991). I am struggling now with how to balance and find resonance between these two conflicting epistemologies and between the two parts of my divided self – my pragmatic self and my poststructural self (Breunig, 2006).

I have decided that “good” research can be rigorous while still acknowledging the implications of the ideological position of the researcher and the research context. I have recognized that denying a multiplicity of perspectives, alongside an understanding of context merely suppresses the possibility of multiple interpretations; it does not explain them away. The instability of partial perspectives and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991) is not the problem; it is the denial of this and the pretense that it does not exist that is problematic (Britzman, 2003).

I listened to the queries and suggestions of my peers and my committee members, developed some understanding about why there are so few studies and virtually no surveys or questionnaires related to this field, recognized the lack of congruence within my own beliefs and values as they relate to research, and have reconceptualized the nature of my research question and my research study. I additionally recognized that the purpose of qualitative research is to “probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them” (Gay &

Airasian, 2003, p. 13), not necessarily to quantify, generalize and verify. I therefore opted to do a purely qualitative research study, since the above definition addresses the very essence of what I hope to do. I therefore reframed my research question and reframed the nature of my study.

Methods

As previously outlined in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to examine the successes and the challenges that critical pedagogues encounter as they endeavour to turn the theories of critical pedagogy into practice within the post-secondary classroom. The following objectives guided the research:

1. To determine the ways in which professors who espouse critical pedagogy practice it within the classroom;
2. To identify and better understand some of the successes that critical pedagogues experience as they engage in forms of critical classroom praxis; and
3. To identify and better understand some of the challenges to engaging in the praxis of critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom.

In Chapters 1 and 2, a review of related literature explored the historical roots of critical theory and critical pedagogy, the theory/practice bifurcation, critical pedagogical praxis and challenges to praxis. The review revealed that the majority of writing has been theoretical in nature, with little qualitative research involving participants. The review of related literature and past studies in these first two chapters revealed that there are numerous gaps that exist with respect to the related literature on critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom and an acknowledgement that qualitative research on this topic is needed.

Appreciative Inquiry

Because of the nature of the study, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) seemed to be an obvious choice of methodological framework. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen either a system's or a person's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003). It seeks to build upon achievements, unexplored potential, innovations, strengths, competencies, stories, lived values, traditions, and visions. Taking all of these together, AI seeks to link these positive insights directly to a change agenda (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2003).

Taking inspiration from poststructuralism and the AI framework, I believe that research must be concerned with praxis. The impetus for this research reflects my commitment to praxis in its focus on the ways in which teachers can and do employ the theories of critical pedagogy to inform and enhance their classroom praxis. AI provided a means to ground the research within a framework that focuses on a change agenda, that is, bringing the theory of critical pedagogy and a critical pedagogical praxis into better congruence may help attain an ideal of social transformation. The research process itself was intimately conjoined with the potential practical implications of the research findings.

In practice, this methodological framework (AI, in particular) was used less in the spirit that John Cresswell (2003) and L. R. Gay and Peter Airisian (2003) had intended – that a clear and explicit methodological framework should be identified and should guide the research process and more in the spirit of Robert Bogdan and Sari Biklen (2003) and Taylor and Bogdan (1998) who describe the “evolving nature” of qualitative research. Steven Taylor and Bogdan (1998) assert that, although there is a methodology to follow and perhaps some general research interests, the specifics of a researcher's approach when doing qualitative research is to allow the research to evolve. My study indeed reflected an approach to research that was an emerging one.

Laurel Richardson (2005) identifies a unique aspect of research which I found illuminating as it relates to my own experiential processes in this dissertation. She asserts that the very process of researching and writing represents a method of inquiry. Distinguishing between the different processes involved with doing qualitative and quantitative research, she describes much qualitative research as involving a process of crystallization which represents a dynamic and creative method to doing research as opposed to the more quantitative process of triangulation, which she regards as rigid and fixed. She advocates a methodological process that involves researchers “writing to know” – asserting that the act of writing itself provides researchers with an opportunity to reflect upon and think about their findings. Writing thus becomes a method of discovery and analysis. I came to strongly identify with this perspective throughout the writing of this dissertation. I have come to know about the process of conducting qualitative research and come to better understand critical praxis as a result of a research process that has been emerging and experiential in nature.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the intent of this study was to open up an area of inquiry and dialogue for self-identified critical pedagogues to explore their classroom practices and the implications of engaging in a critical pedagogical praxis. It was further hoped that the findings from this study would serve as a guide to inform educators about various ways to employ critical classroom practices within the post-secondary classroom and to highlight the implications of engaging in this form of praxis. The overarching purpose of this study, then, was to further strengthen professors’ work (both theory and practice) within the field of critical pedagogy.

Data Sources

There were three data sources for this study: interviews; course syllabi; and one focus group session. Data collection consisted of conducting 17 interviews and conducting one focus group session which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. I also gathered course

syllabi and assignment descriptions to use as “additional talking points” during the interview. Participants provided me with 20 course syllabi in total. These data also provided additional insight into the various ways post-secondary classroom professors practice critical pedagogy. I used the written data to identify various aspects of classroom practices through descriptions of the course content, descriptions of activities and field experiences, remarks about the learning environment, descriptions of assessment and evaluation methods, and descriptions about overall expectations.

Participants

In total, there were 17 self-identified critical pedagogues from the Critical Educators for Social Justice Special Interest Group (CESJ-SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) who participated in this study. Of those 17 people, ten were female and seven were male. One participant was between the ages of 30-40. Three participants were between the ages of 40-50. Most participants (nine total) were between the ages of 50-60. Two participants were between the ages of 60-70 and one participant was over 70 years old. One participant never responded to my follow-up emails requesting her age range. Ten participants were non-tenured professors and one of these was a full-time lecturer and PhD student. Seven participants were tenured professors. Thirteen participants self-identified themselves as Caucasian; one as Latina; one as Native-American; one as Chicana; and one as Asian American. Two research participants were Canadians, teaching in Canadian universities and the rest (15) were from the United States, teaching in universities in the United States. Surprisingly, two sets of research participants came from the same universities. This was surprising because the CESJ-SIG is comprised of over 400 members and there are over 29,000 universities in North America. Twelve out of 17 participants had taught in the K-12 school system before coming to the post-secondary system.

Four people participated in a focus group session at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in San Francisco, California on April 10, 2006. They all self-identified as Caucasian, and three were females. Each of the women was in a different age bracket - one between 40-50, one between 50-60, and one between 60-70. There was one male who participated in the study and he was between 70-80 years old. Three of the participants were from American universities and one was from a Canadian university. Two were from the same university and were quite surprised to see each other at the focus group session because neither of them had known that the other was a participant in the study. Three of them taught mostly graduate students and one taught predominantly undergraduate students. All focus group participants had previously taught in the K-12 school system.

I had initially hoped to conduct two focus groups at the AERA conference but as it turned out, there were a number of interview participants who were unable to attend as a result of other commitments, or because they did not have their papers accepted, or were unable to secure funding to attend the conference.

Ethical Considerations

This research underwent an ethical review by the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University prior to the collection of data. I was granted ethics approval on July 27th, 2005.

Informed consent

Participants were made aware of the nature of this study, their role in it, provisions for confidentiality, and their option to withdraw from the study at any point. Signed informed consent was obtained prior to the collection of data (See Appendices A & B). Because participation in the study was voluntary, I tried to communicate timelines in advance so that participants were inconvenienced as little as possible.

Participants were made aware of the fact that the study was primarily based on data collected from interviews and a focus group. There was no direct observation or requirement to share course syllabi, student evaluations, or other forms of qualitative or quantitative data. However, participants were made aware that they could choose to voluntarily share additional data as a means to further inform me about aspects of their classroom practices. These data, like all data, were kept strictly confidential.

Access to data

I alone have access to all raw data. This includes raw data from the interviews and focus groups, as well as written data, including course syllabi and assignment descriptions, provided by participants. The transcriber had access to interview and focus group data but, as part of our professional agreement, agreed to return all tapes and transcriptions to me and to respect the confidentiality of participants. After the completion of the dissertation, data will be stored in a locked file in my supervisor's office at Lakehead University where it will remain for seven years. My dissertation and any subsequent publications will not betray the confidentiality of the participants without their knowledge. Pseudonyms will be used in any public documents. Participants had an opportunity to review their individual transcripts for accuracy. Participants who indicated on their signed consent form that they would like to be kept informed of the results of this research will be sent a final report.

Procedures

Interviews

I sent out the initial "call for research participants" to the listserv of the Critical Educators for Social Justice Special Interest Group (CESJ-SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in September, 2005 to recruit self-identified critical pedagogues who were interested in participating in this study. There are approximately 400 SIG members and most

have access to the CESJ-SIG listserv. The first call for research participants that I made to this listserv resulted in over twenty-five responses. I decided to limit the criteria somewhat and sent out a follow-up email to those twenty-five respondents saying that research participants needed to: 1) be teaching full-time or be defined as a full-time employee or have taught full-time at some point during their post-secondary careers and 2) be a member of the CESJ-SIG of AERA. This resulted in a significant drop in participant numbers and I learned that many of those initial respondents were teaching in a K-12 school system or were not members of the CESJ-SIG but had been referred to me by another colleague who was a member and who had read my posting.

I sent out a second call for research participants that included the revised criteria and received a number of additional respondents to that call. Although my initial intent for this research study was to interview 12 participants, I was advised by a committee member, during the proposal defense, to consider interviewing more than 12 participants. I decided to heed this advice and to target my interview sample size at between 15-20 people (Berg, 2004; Gay & Airasian, 2003). I therefore needed to send out two additional calls for research participants to meet this goal. The four listserv postings resulted in a total of 17 final interview participants for the study.

This participant pool represented a convenience sample (Gay and Airasian, 2003) of self-identified critical pedagogues from the CESJ-SIG. I deliberately chose to employ a convenience sample because I thought that it would provide me with a particularly enthusiastic group of participants which, in fact, it did. Because the convenience sample was not a representative one (Berg, 2004), I was initially concerned that there may have been some disadvantages to this approach, including the potential for a less diverse sample, as previously mentioned in the limitations section of Chapter 1. Fortunately, I believe that the sample represents a fairly diverse population in regard to age, gender, ethnicity, and teaching experience.

In the research proposal, I predicted a number of potential benefits to employing a convenience sample and these predictions turned out to be accurate. Because the “call for research participants” was directed toward those people who self-identified as critical pedagogues, I believed that those people who responded would represent a particularly keen group of participants who were particularly enthusiastic about teaching and about sharing their praxis. As it turned out, this was the case. In my view, this has resulted in participant responses that are not only particularly salient and central to the research question and objectives but “rich” with additional description and information related to pedagogical praxis in general.

The 17 final interviews were conducted by phone between October, 2005 and February, 2006. The length of each interview varied only slightly, each one lasting approximately one hour.

The guiding questions for the interview were designed to address Norman Denzin’s (2001b) ideal that interviews should be more than mere information-gathering devices. They need to be reflexive and resonate with the performative aspect of life in schools and life outside of schools. The guiding questions themselves were designed as part of a creative interviewing process that involved a set of techniques to move past the mere words contained in the interview questions (Douglas, 1985). The intent was that the interview questions, the tenor of the interviewer, and the interviewing climate would create an information exchange that encouraged dialogue and mutual disclosure.

Conducting phone interviews prevented me from having an opportunity to “read” participants’ body language and facial expressions. That being said, I did find that following the advice of Denzin (2001b) and Jack Douglas (1985) helped me to be attentive to peoples’ tone and their receptivity and reactions to certain interview questions. In this way, the overall tenor of the interview and research participants’ reactions provided me with additional information upon which to draw conclusions.

The interviews were semistandardized (Berg, 2004) and included a number of predetermined, guiding questions (see below), as well as questions that arose as a result of the responses. These guiding questions provided some structure to the interview. The value of this form of “less structured” interviews was that they allowed for opportunities for exploration of areas that I had not previously considered (Reinharz, 1992). My hope was that the interview process itself would be congruent with the underlying assumptions regarding the research study and that the interviews themselves would approach the world from the participant’s perspective. I intended to conduct the interview based on their lived experiences in the classroom, not from some prescribed set of interview questions. I believe that I accomplished this goal.

I conducted phone interviews because the sample population came from geographically diverse locations (Berg, 2004) and it would have been prohibitively time consuming and costly to attempt to conduct interviews in person. Bruce Berg (2004) suggests that qualitative telephone interviews are likely to work well if the researcher is conducting either formal or semistructured interviews; in this case, it seemed to work well.

I began each interview with a restatement of my research goals (see Appendix C). Participants were already somewhat familiar with the research since they had signed a participant waiver that included a brief synopsis of the research study and they were members of the AERA Critical Educators for Social Justice Interest Group and thus self-identified critical pedagogues who were already familiar with the field. I reminded them that their responses would remain confidential and reiterated to them that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. I then began the interview, starting with the first question below. Each question was designed to be relatively open-ended. Some questions and the ordering of the questions were refined slightly after the first interview as a result of participant response and as a result of my own learning from that first interview. For example, I realized that I needed to add an explicit set of demographic questions if this information was not directly communicated during the interview. I

have included the initial list of guiding questions, followed by the final list of guiding questions below.

The initial list of guiding questions for the interview was as follows:

- How do you define critical pedagogy?
- If you were to identify one or two aims of critical pedagogy, what would they be?
- In what ways do you self-identify as a critical pedagogue?
- In what ways do you teach about the theory of critical pedagogy?
- What role(s) do students play in your classroom?
- What role(s) do you play in your classroom?
- In a nutshell, what is your teaching philosophy?
- Do you believe that your classroom practices are congruent with your teaching philosophy? Please explain.
- Do you believe that you engage in forms of classroom praxis that reflect the theory of critical pedagogy? In other words, are your classroom practices congruent with the theory of critical pedagogy?
- Do you think that employing critical classroom practices alongside instruction about the theory of critical pedagogy will better attain the goals of that theory? Please explain.
- What are some examples of your classroom practices that reflect the ways in which you employ critical pedagogy?
- What has guided your pedagogical decisions within the classroom? Are your decisions research-based, theory-based, or are they more experiential and intuitive? Please explain.

- What are some of your success stories with engaging in employing critical pedagogical practices?
- What has the result(s) been for your students?
- How do you know?
- What are some of the challenges that you face when engaging in critical classroom praxis?
- If you were to name your biggest challenge related to engaging in critical classroom praxis, what would it be?
- What would help you better understand the ways in which you can engage in this form of praxis?
- What would be needed either on an individual level or on an institutional level for you to be more able and willing to engage in this form of praxis?

The final list of guiding questions for the interview was as follows:

- How do you define critical pedagogy?
- If you were to identify one or two aims of critical pedagogy, what would they be?
- In what ways do you self-identify as a critical pedagogue?
- In what ways do you teach about the theory of critical pedagogy?
 - Who are some of the theorists who influence your teaching?
- Do you believe that you engage in classroom practices that reflect the theory of critical pedagogy?
- What are some examples of your classroom practices that reflect the ways in which you employ critical pedagogy?

- Do you do anything specific in this regard related to assessment and evaluation?
- What has guided your pedagogical decisions within the classroom? Are your decisions research-based, theory-based, or are they more experiential and intuitive? Please explain.
 - What has shaped your teaching?
- Do you think that employing critical classroom practices alongside instruction about the theory of critical pedagogy will attain the goals of that theory? Please explain.
- How do you know?
 - What are some of your success stories with engaging in employing critical pedagogical practices?
 - Any anecdotal or empirical evidence to support your conclusions?
- What are some of the challenges that you face when engaging in critical classroom praxis?
- What would help you better understand the ways in which you can engage in this form of praxis?
 - Or what advice or recommendations would you provide for your students regarding this?
- What would be needed either on an individual level or on an institutional level for you to be more able and willing to engage in this form of praxis?
- Demographics
 - age, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, administrative responsibilities, more grad. than undergrad. courses, tenured or not, ESL

- The following three questions were asked only if they had not yet come up during the interview
 - What role(s) do students play in your classroom?
 - What role(s) do you play in your classroom?
 - In a nutshell, what is your teaching philosophy?

After each interview was completed, I thanked each participant and asked them about their interest in participating in a focus group session at the upcoming American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in April 2006 in San Francisco.

All 17 interviews were transcribed by a transcriber. I sent a copy of the transcripts back to each interview participant for his or her review. One participant sent me his transcript back in the mail, having copy-edited misspelled names and grammatical errors and the other participants responded to errors in the transcripts via email. I only received feedback on transcripts from five participants in total.

There were three participants who said that some of the critical theorists who they cited were not spelled accurately and I reassured them that I would make those changes within the written text and their quotes. One participant said that he was concerned that there was some inaccuracy between what he intended to say and what the transcriber had actually reported and these differences were worked out over the course of two email conversations.

Focus group

Because meanings and answers arising from focus group interviews are socially constructed rather than individually constructed (Berg, 2004), I believed that conducting a focus group session, in addition to conducting individual interviews, would provide further insights into the main objectives of the research study as a result of the interactive nature of the focus

group. I therefore decided to conduct a focus group session with those participants initially interviewed, resulting in data that was both individually constructed (interviews) and socially constructed (focus group session). Because interview participants are from the CESJ-SIG of the AERA, the annual meeting of AERA provided an obvious and convenient venue in which to conduct a focus group session.

I contacted participants in March, 2006 regarding my intent to conduct one or two focus group sessions at the AERA conference in San Francisco in April, 2006. I had previously asked participants to indicate on the interview consent form their level of interest in participating in a follow-up focus group and their preferences for focus group dates and times and had briefly discussed this with them at the end of the interview as well.

The focus group session took place on April 10, 2006 from 4:05-5:55 p.m. in a roundtable meeting room in the Renaissance Park Hotel in San Francisco, California. This focus group session was scheduled to precede the CESJ-SIG meeting that was scheduled as part of the AERA conference.

Of the 17 people who participated in phone interviews, eight participants expressed an interest in participating in the focus group session and those participants had indicated that the April 10 session was their first preference since the focus group session could convene and then we could travel together to the CESJ-SIG meeting immediately thereafter. I sent out three email reminders to those eight participants, indicating the location, date, and time of the focus group session. I additionally provided them with contact information for me during the conference, in the event of an emergency.

The focus group session was conducted in a conference room in the Renaissance Park Hotel which was one of the hotels used for the AERA conference. The room itself was set up as a roundtable and I arrived early and set the seats up in a semi-circle so that the participants could be in close physical proximity to each other and to the tape recording device. Cookies, coffee,

and tea were served and the overall atmosphere of the focus group session was relaxed and convivial. As people arrived, they introduced themselves to one another and expressed how enthusiastic they were about the session.

I had anticipated eight participants and the focus group session was originally scheduled to commence at 3:45 p.m. By 3:55 p.m., four people had arrived and so I announced to them that we were expecting two or three more people and that I thought we should wait for them. I had already received a regret from one participant while in San Francisco who had accidentally “double-booked” herself with another meeting and thus could not attend the focus group session. I was therefore anticipating that the other three were still en route. When I announced this to the others, Bailey said that she thought that the CESJ-SIG annual meeting had been cancelled and that SIG members were being encouraged to participate in a march about U.S.A. immigration law. Bailey said that she had heard that the CESJ-SIG members were meeting at the corner of Mission and 16th Streets at 5 p.m., and she phoned a colleague to confirm this. The other focus group participants and I then began to discuss if the other three participants had decided to join the march and to engage in “praxis” rather than to meet and talk about “praxis.” We decided as a group to start the session, with the four participants present, at 4:05.

What I later found out was that one person participated in the march; one person had just presented a session and completely forgot about the focus group; and one person’s daughter had surprised her and met her in San Francisco and she too forgot about the focus group session. I was initially disappointed that there were only four participants in the focus group session. I now believe that because there were only five of us, there may have been a greater opportunity for participants to have ample time to respond and develop their ideas together, resulting in a “richer” dialogue and a more relaxed “feel” to the focus group session.

The focus group session was semistandardized (Berg, 2004) and included a number of predetermined guiding questions (see below), as well as questions that arose in response to

discussion. These guiding questions provided some structure to the focus group session. The value of this less structured session was that it allowed for opportunities for exploration of areas not previously considered (Reinharz, 1992). My hope was that the discussion-oriented and interactional nature of the focus group session would not only contribute additional insights related to the research question and the three main objectives of this study but would additionally enhance participants' knowledge of the field (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

I began the focus group session with a restatement of the research question. Participants were already quite familiar with the study since they had signed a focus group waiver that included a brief synopsis of the research study (see Appendix B) and had previously participated in an interview. I simply reminded them of the following during the introduction: the intent of the research study, the confidentiality of their responses, the need for this confidentiality to be extended to include all participants in the focus group (and a signed statement to this effect), and a reminder that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I asked them if they had any questions for me and one of them wanted to know a bit more about how I had initially chosen this topic and had an interest in the relationship between this topic and teaching in a school of Outdoor Recreation, Parks, and Tourism. I responded that the central purposes of outdoor and experiential education are social and environmental justice. I told the participant that as I was studying and teaching about outdoor and experiential education, I began to come across the critical pedagogy literature and saw many connections and overlap between the fields of outdoor education and critical pedagogy. She then responded that she thought that was interesting.

I then began the session, starting with the first question below. I posed this first question as a result of my own experience in a roundtable discussion that related to the topic of social action pedagogy that I had attended the day before. The other focus group questions relate to the three main objectives of the research study.

The list of guiding questions for the focus group session was as follows:

- I was in a workshop yesterday and there was a group presenting a paper on “Social Action Pedagogy.” I asked the presenters why they were calling it social action pedagogy as opposed to critical praxis or critical pedagogy. They responded that, for them, praxis represented internal action and social action pedagogy represented the externalization of an educative process – both theory and reflection. And I would be curious to find out from all of you what you think the main purpose of critical pedagogical praxis is? And do you see a difference between social action pedagogy and critical praxis?
- What are some examples of your classroom practices that reflect the ways in which you employ critical pedagogy?
- Do you think that employing critical classroom practices alongside instruction about the theory of critical pedagogy will attain the goals of that theory? Please explain.
 - How do you know?
 - What are some of your success stories with engaging in employing critical pedagogical practices?
 - Any anecdotal or empirical evidence to support your conclusions?
- What are some of the challenges that you face when engaging in critical classroom praxis?

After the focus group session, I thanked each participant for taking time away from the conference to participate. I informed them that the focus group session would be transcribed and that they would have an opportunity to review that transcript and provide feedback on it. I also

asked them if they would consider participating in a panel related to this study at the AERA conference in Chicago in April, 2007 because it had come up during one or two of the interviews and was casually mentioned at the end of the focus group session as well. All the focus group participants said that it sounded like a good idea and expressed an interest in being a part of it.

The 1 hour and 50 minute focus group session was fully transcribed by a transcriber. Participants were sent a copy of the transcript and no one requested any changes or edits.

Data Analysis

Data from the interviews and focus group were fully transcribed. The process of data analysis was both inductive and deductive. The inductive process was guided by the three main objectives of the study and by the review of related literature (Chapter 2). I therefore began data analysis by establishing some initial categories and themes related to the objectives and the literature. I actually printed out the interview questions (see above) and research query, alongside the three objectives and this helped me to establish some main categories and themes. The first main category was critical pedagogy definitions. Included within this category were the themes of critical pedagogy purpose(s), theory(ies), influential theorists, and related pedagogies. This primary category and its related themes are associated with the first series of interview questions. I next established categories related to the objectives of the research study and those included: examples of critical classroom practices (with many themes within that); success with praxis (theory/practice congruence); and challenges to praxis (theory/practice lack of congruence). The next series of categories and themes related to the final research questions which focused on critical pedagogy and change within the post-secondary classroom.

I next read through all of the transcriptions in the spirit that Berg (2004) suggests – “as a passport to listening to the words of the text and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words” (p. 269). I read through the transcriptions with a view to deductively

identify other categories and themes that emerged out of participants' responses to the interview questions.

These two processes resulted in the establishment of over 250 categories and themes, which are referred to as codes within the Atlas.ti qualitative research software program. I used Atlas.ti to code the data by selecting certain passages from participant interviews and coding them in accord with the categories and themes that resulted from the above processes. These selected passages are called "quotations" within the Atlas.ti program. As I coded and as I continued to repeatedly read through interview transcripts, certain categories and themes were added.

For example, I would capitalize a main category which then became a code such as "CP [critical pedagogy] DEFINITION." I would then establish a theme (or a sub-category) within that code by capitalizing only the first word of that theme, such as "CP Purpose." If a participant responded that social justice was one purpose of critical pedagogy, I would code that as a sub-theme of the theme "CP Purpose," by coding it "social justice" in lower case.

Knowing that I had too many codes, both intuitively and as a result of my conversations with my Atlas.ti tutor, I next spent considerable time merging related codes using the "merge codes" function. This resulted in approximately 100 final codes. My Atlas.ti tutor advised me that this number was still above average, but because I wanted to maintain some of the categories and themes as discrete codes, despite the low level of quotation frequency attached to some of them, I decided to resist merging them. In the end, I was happy to have them as discrete codes because it allowed me a great deal of flexibility when it came to data analysis.

The process of data analysis involved merging codes and also involved establishing code and document families. Code families allowed me to combine different codes and to then view all of the quotations within those codes. Document families consisted of all of the demographic information related to participants.

The use of the Atlas.ti function called the “Query Tool” was helpful in examining the relationships between codes and document families, between code families and document families, and between various code families, resulting in an in depth analysis of the interview data. For example, I could use the “Query Tool” to analyze the frequency of occurrences and differences between male participants’ identification of influential female theorists and female participants’ identification of influential female theorists. This result gave me insights into how many male participants identified female theorists as central to critical pedagogy and how many female participants identified female theorists as central to critical pedagogy, as well as differences between these two groups.

Finally, I designed some visual representations of the codes and some of the relationships between codes. Atlas.ti refers to these illustrations as “network views.” I designed these so that those codes with the lowest level of frequency were at the far left end of the network view and those codes with the highest level of frequency were at the far right end of the network view (see Figure 1 for a sample illustration). The first number in brackets, listed after each code, represents the frequency of citations regarding a particular code. The second number in brackets represents the density. In other words, it accounts for how often that code has been used in relationship to other codes. For the purposes of this study, the first number in brackets (the frequency) is the only one that will be referred to within the results and discussion that follows. At the top of each illustration, each network view has the main code category listed, followed by the code family preceded by an F. This accounts for the repetition of the main category at the top of each illustration.

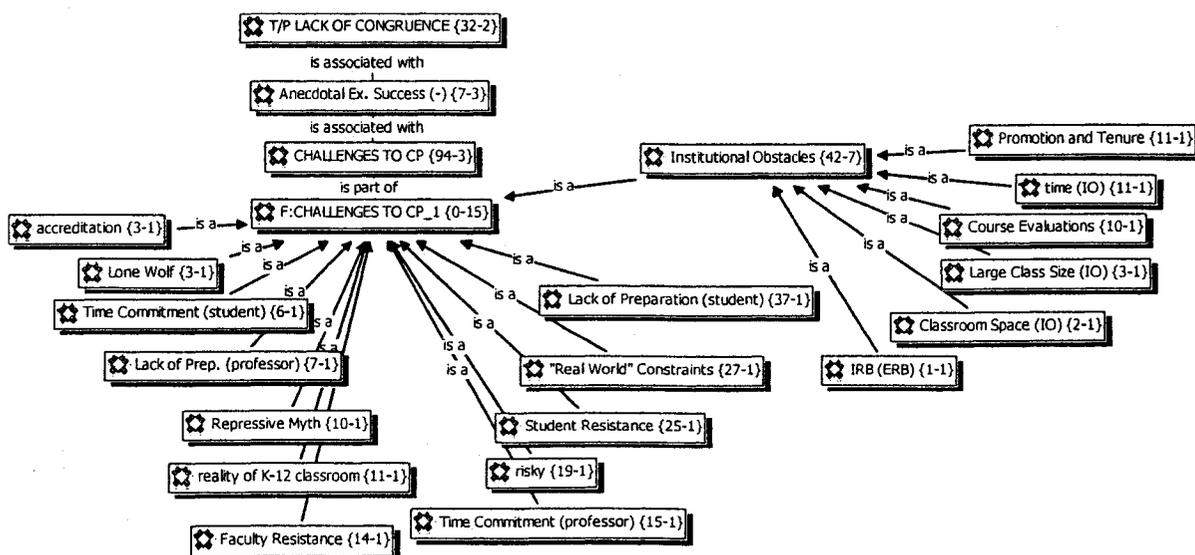


Figure 1. Sample illustration of network view.

I initially found it challenging to use the Atlas.ti software. Because I am not particularly proficient with computer technology and because the use of Atlas.ti software was new to me, I found it to be time-consuming. I actually considered abandoning it on one or two occasions in favour of the “tried and true” method of “cutting and pasting,” but persevered and in the end, was pleased that I had. When it came time to analyze the relationships listed above, I found that the “query tool” provided in Atlas.ti, in particular, was invaluable for its ability to quickly and correctly examine a multitude of relationships. I also found the illustrations that could be attained by using the “network view” tool to be incredibly useful. A network view provided me with a visual representation of the codes while additionally providing me with the frequency of occurrences (number of quotations) within each code. In the end, I believe that Atlas.ti saved me some time and ensured a higher level of accuracy with the analysis than I would have achieved by the “cut and paste” method I had earlier considered.

CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEW RESULTS

Introduction

The results of this study could be presented in multiple ways. I considered a number of different ideas regarding the organization of this chapter. I had thought that Chapter 4 might include the results and discussion from the interviews and that Chapter 5 would be a document analysis of the course syllabi and assignment descriptions that interview participants provided to me as additional data. Chapter 6 would then present the results and discussion from the focus group. Chapter 7 could summarize Chapters 5-6 and provide concluding remarks and recommendations. Because the focus group was comprised of those people who had previously participated in an interview, I believe that this option would have resulted in an unnatural bifurcation of the research results and discussion. I also considered organizing the chapters around the three main objectives of the research study and considered presenting the results and discussion related to each of these objectives as three distinct chapters. I decided against this option because the main objectives and themes of the study are interconnected and overlapping. In the end, I decided to present the results from the interviews and an analysis of the course syllabi in Chapter 4 and the results of the focus group session in Chapter 5. I decided to present the discussion of these results as a whole in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 concludes with implications of this study on the field of critical pedagogy and suggests recommendations for future studies.

This fourth chapter therefore includes the results of a data analysis of the 17 interview transcripts and a document analysis of the course syllabi and assignment descriptions. The presentation of these results focuses on the interview questions and on the three main objectives of the study: 1) To determine the ways in which professors who espouse critical pedagogy practice it within the classroom; 2) To identify and better understand some of the successes that

critical pedagogues experience as they engage in forms of critical classroom praxis; and 3) To identify and better understand some of the challenges to engaging in the praxis of critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom. The chapter begins with a recap of the participants and will highlight both the differences and the overlap between participants' definitions of critical pedagogy, its central aims, and the various theorists who inform their pedagogical praxis.

Recap of Interview Participants

Interview Participants

The first component of data collection involved interviews with 17 self-identified critical pedagogues from the Critical Educators for Social Justice Special Interest Group (CESJ-SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) (see Table 2 below for overview of demographic information for interview participants). In summary, I interviewed ten females and seven males. One participant was between the ages of 30-40. Three participants were between the ages of 40-50. Most participants (nine total) were between the ages of 50-60. Two participants were between the ages of 60-70 and one participant was over 70 years old. One participant's age remains unidentified. Ten participants were non-tenured professors, one of whom was a full-time lecturer and PhD student. Seven participants were tenured professors. Thirteen participants self-identified as Caucasian; one as Latina; one as Native-American; one as Chicana; and one as Asian American.

Two research participants were Canadians, teaching in Canadian universities and the rest (fifteen) were from the United States, teaching in universities in the United States. Two sets of research participants came from the same university. Twelve out of 17 participants had taught in the K-12 school system before working in the post-secondary system. I have changed the names of all participants throughout the dissertation to ensure their anonymity.

Table 2

Overview of Demographic Information for Interview Participants

Name and Gender (F/M)	Age	Citizenship	Tenured/Non-Tenured	Race
Linda (F)	30-40	United States	Non-Tenured	Asian American
Anne (F)	40-50	United States	Non-Tenured	Caucasian
Catherine (F)	40-50	Canadian	Non-Tenured (lecturer)	Caucasian
Donna (F)	40-50	United States	Not-Tenured	Native American
Graham (M)	50-60	United States	Non-Tenured	Caucasian
Jeff (M)	50-60	United States	Tenured	Caucasian
Jack (M)	50-60	United States	Tenured	Caucasian
Larry (M)	50-60	Canadian (ESL)	Tenured	Caucasian
Meg (F)	50-60	United States	Tenured	Caucasian
Bailey (F)	50-60	United States	Tenured	Caucasian
Bob (M)	50-60	United States	Non-Tenured	Caucasian
Sam (M)	50-60	United States	Non-Tenured	Caucasian
Laurie (F)	50-60	United States	Non-Tenured	Chicana
Nancy (F)	60-70	United States	Tenured	Caucasian
Sarah (F)	60-70	United States	Tenured	Caucasian
Mark (M)	70-80	United States	Non-Tenured	Caucasian
Taylor (F)	?	United States	Non-Tenured	Latina

All research participants taught in a school or faculty of education. Bob taught math education; Jeff, Donna, and Jack taught predominantly graduate courses; Anne taught courses that focused on the training of school administrators; and the others taught a variety of education-based courses, including courses that focused specifically on critical pedagogy and democracy and education. Other courses taught included Children's Literature, Assessment for Teachers, Action Research Seminar, and Administration of Special Programs.

Course Syllabi and Assignment Descriptions

The second component of data collection consisted of gathering course syllabi and assignment descriptions to use as "additional talking points" during the interview. Participants provided me with 20 course syllabi in total. These data also provided additional insight into the various ways post-secondary classroom professors practice critical pedagogy. These written data served to identify various aspects of classroom practices through descriptions of the course content, descriptions of activities and field experiences, remarks about the learning environment, descriptions of assessment and evaluation methods, and descriptions about overall expectations.

For the most part, these results will not include many specific references to the course syllabi and assignment descriptions. In the end, the information from these written data sources became integrated with the interview data because I often referred back to specific information from the course syllabi and assignment descriptions during the interviews themselves.

Critical Pedagogy – Self-Identification, Definitions, Purpose, Influential Theorists and Related Pedagogies

Although the main focus of this chapter is to present the research results as they relate to the three main objectives of the study, it would be an oversight not to begin with the interview questions and participants' responses related to the ways in which they self-identify as critical pedagogues, their definitions of critical pedagogy, the central aims of critical pedagogy, and the

critical theorists who have influenced participants' critical pedagogical "work" within the post-secondary classroom. I asked questions related to these topics during the interview but decided to focus on questions related to the study's three main objectives during the focus group. The results that are reported throughout this section will include participants' responses from the interview and an analysis of the aspects of participants' course syllabi that addressed those topics listed above.

Self-Identification

While research participants all self-identified as critical pedagogues, there was some disparity in their definitions. When queried about the ways in which they self-identified as critical pedagogues, many research participants responded that they teach *about* the theory of critical pedagogy.

Others talked about the ways in which they "practiced" critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom, citing examples of their use of dialogue, the importance of building a classroom-community, their focus on taking a constructivist approach when determining the course content, and the field activities that were offered within their courses. Some research participants talked about the ways in which they strive for congruency between their teaching and research and the theory that they teach about.

Anne provided one specific example of how she tries to "practice" the theory that she teaches about in her research course. She said that students do "observation in my research methods class; they go out and collect data and then analyze the data." She said that they engage in a real research project rather than just learning about research. Laurie talked about the importance of linking teaching and research with critical pedagogy theory:

Every year when we're doing a particular theme whatever it is, I don't ask them to do anything that I'm not doing. So this year we are doing action research with high school

students at a local high school. And my research will look at the work that they're doing and begin to negotiate with the classroom teachers to think about some of the issues that the high school students may choose that may not be so critical, and to kind of raise those issues so that they have to attach a theory.

Laurie said that she teaches about activism and social change and models this by being an activist herself. She said that she self identifies as a critical pedagogue through her teaching, research, and community activism.

When queried about the way that she self-identifies as a critical pedagogue, Meg concluded:

I mean I wouldn't go around and you know put it on my name plate or something. But particularly in regard to the way in which I approach doing research, I do identify myself as an action researcher and critical pedagogue.

A content analysis of course syllabi and assignment descriptions also highlighted the ways in which participants self-identify as critical pedagogues. For example, Catherine's syllabus stated that the course would begin with an "overview of my philosophy/approaches/biases – and yours!" Catherine self-identifies as a critical pedagogue and names her related biases through the following written description within the first paragraph of her course syllabus that reads:

To be really clear – I LOVE WORDS AND STORIES, POEMS AND EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS AND I LOVE SHARING EACH AND ALL OF THEM IN ANY FORM. I hope you do too. If not, please drop and add yourself into something numerical and calm.

Table 3 below is intended to help provide an overview of the general ways in which participants self-identified as critical pedagogues, participants' definitions of critical pedagogy, and their identification of the influential theorists.

Table 3

Overview of Self-Identification, Critical Pedagogy Definitions, and Influential Theorists

Name and Gender (F/M)	Self-Identification	Definitions Central Purposes	Principal Influential Theorists
Bob (M)	Difficult to self-identify and define	Classroom as an arena of struggle	Marx
Catherine (F)	Constructivist	Student engagement/ Critical thinking	Kozol
Meg (F)	Constructivist	Lifelong learning and ownership of learning	Shor Horton
Nancy (F)	Constructivist	Social change	Kohn Paley
Graham (M)	Constructivist/ Experiential education	Activity/field-oriented classroom practices to attain democratic and just citizens	Kincheloe Kanpol Steinberg
Linda (F)	Critical pedagogue "in progress"	Working with and through crisis toward social consciousness	Kumashiro Wink
Donna (F)	Critical pedagogue	Social consciousness and activism	Brophy
Larry (M)	Critical pedagogue	Examining hidden assumptions as means to work toward social justice	Freire
Anne (F)	Critical pedagogue	Critical responders through praxis and research	Ellsworth Giroux McLaren
Bailey (F)	Critical pedagogue	Multicultural education/ Sociocultural examination of education	Tatum Spring Wink
Sarah (F)	Critical pedagogue	Social change Democracy	Dewey
Jack (M)	Critical pedagogue/ Curriculum theorist	Emancipation	Marx
Sam (M)	Critical pedagogue/ Social reconstructionist	Promotion of critical thinking	Kuntz McLaren

Laurie (F)	Critical pedagogue/ Problem-posing pedagogue	Social justice and change through critical praxis and research	Freire
Jeff (M)	Critical pedagogue/ Freirean pedagogue	“Conscientization”	Freire Giroux
Mark (M)	Freirean pedagogue	“Reading the world by reading the word”	Freire Dewey
Taylor (F)	Freirean pedagogue/ Constructivist	“Reading the world by reading the word”/ Empowerment	Freire Vygotsky

Definitions of Critical Pedagogy

There was some overlap between participants’ responses when they were asked to define critical pedagogy. There were a number of participants who immediately stated that they had concerns with trying to identify the one “true” definition of critical pedagogy. Bob said, “Well, I don’t think I can give anything that is clear and brief enough to be a definition.” Larry stated, “There are a lot of different [definitions of critical pedagogy].”

A number of participants, however, did define critical pedagogy quite clearly and succinctly. Bailey stated, “I would define it as looking at schools through a sociocultural lens and looking at social structures, like race, class, gender ability, sexuality and how they play out in the larger society and in the schools.” Mark stated, “Well, my notion of critical pedagogy is focused on actually providing [students with] the mechanisms by which students can evaluate their social, political, economic standing.” Donna said that critical pedagogy allows students to question societal norms and how those norms either diminish or perpetuate injustices for all people.

Anne said that:

For me, I think [critical pedagogy] is about power relations, understanding, uncovering, and speaking about relations of power that are often and most often not part of our everyday discourse. So critical pedagogy in my estimation has to, and should, work to

uncover power relations and bring those relations to the forefront. So that people can not only understand and name them but then be able to discuss them as well.

Many participants regarded critical pedagogy as political. These participants believed that critical pedagogy provided them with a framework for teaching and learning that focused on power, hegemony, and social justice. Taylor concluded that all “teaching is political.”

Other participants focused their definitions on the importance of praxis. Linda stated, “The very, very basic thing is to name, to reflect critically and then to act.” Taylor said, “Oh. I guess following Freire, it [critical pedagogy] would be learning to read the world as well as the word. It is kind of an awareness, almost a consciousness raising, a mutual consciousness raising.” Sarah concluded that critical pedagogy goes beyond practice, focusing on praxis, which involves the outside world and transformation. Catherine initially focused on constructivism and student-centred practices when defining critical pedagogy and Sam concluded, “I see critical pedagogy as kind of growing out of the field of social reconstructionism.”

Role of professor

Many research participants talked about the role of the professor and the role of the student within their responses to the initial query about their definitions of critical pedagogy. A number of participants talked about the ways in which they regard themselves as “guides” or facilitators of an educative process, rather than as “transmitters” of knowledge.

Bailey sees her role in that as an attempt “to be quiet but to raise critical questions and to get them talking.” Catherine concluded that within this process:

Students and teachers work together to figure out what’s really going on. And I don’t mean that in a simple way, there’s never just one thing really going on, but I think critical pedagogy is about relationship building and relationship illumination. It constitutes a

series of events and connections. It keeps taking people further and further or deeper and deeper into whatever it is they're trying to do.

Catherine sees her role as being a facilitator of this process. She said that:

I tell them I want us to step out of our traditional role of teacher and student. I tell them that I see us as co-teachers, co-teachers and co-students learning together. I stress that I do think of myself as the person who is finally in charge, that I am the one who has decided to work like this. I tell them that I'm going to bring them into this kind of work through a series of activities and experiences.

Linda too sees herself as a facilitator. She said that her role is to serve as "the instructor listening to what the students are saying and when students say 'ah ha!' and they pose questions, to really be able to have the space in the syllabus" to address their "ah ha" moments. She goes on to talk about how complex [the process of facilitation] is:

I say to them from the very beginning that, 'I am not going to pretend that I am your equal because I am not. There is an inherent power dynamic here and I am not going to pretend that I do not have more say in this than you do. But my hope is [that it can be as student-centred as possible].' So I know that I have a role to play, but really the difficult part then, besides wanting it to be student-centred, is [coming to terms with] figuring out 'what the hell does that mean?,' especially when the students are not centring themselves. I need to ask myself, 'What role am I supposed to play?' and 'How do I do it to try to still guide them in doing and encouraging them in doing it, but then not having the class just being like people talking about whatever they want to talk about that may not really be productive?' So that was very challenging. I think, for me as an instructor, it was also very difficult to figure out what I needed to be doing.

Mark addressed the need for some structure when engaging in student-centred teaching and learning:

I usually give options, but they're always open to select another option. I don't start from nothing. If we start from nothing then we will never get to chapter ten of Dewey because we will be arguing about chapter one still, which may not be a bad thing actually. But I think it is very important that there are some options that they can see and they also come up with something else they can do.

Mark said that some minimum necessary structure, alongside some choice is ideal and that his role is to help provide some of that initial structure.

Larry described his role in the following manner:

I think there are two major roles, one is to introduce students to things which they may be interested in and/or would need to be introduced to and the second is to challenge what they are saying and doing, but to do so in a supportive way and to move forward. And to open up the spaces for them to be able to uncover things that challenge their own thinking or, and this may be a bigger move, things that challenge me as the teacher.

He went on to discuss the ways in which he perceives students within this framework:

Given that, I do not construe [students and their previous experiences] from a deficit mentality. I construe students coming into the class with genuine interests and with a concern about the topic that has been advertised as the focus of the course. Therefore, what they bring with them has to be taken seriously. It doesn't mean it has to be accepted, but it has to be taken seriously.

Sam talked about the ways in which he empowers students early on by treating them as colleagues and by having high expectations for them to serve as change agents in the schools.

Role of students

The role of the students was a central aspect in participants' discussion of critical pedagogy as well. Laurie said that she sees the students as "activist researcher(s)." Bailey similarly concluded that, "The students play a pretty active role." Anne said:

When students start in a class with me they have rarely had previous experiences with critical inquiry, they haven't really thought about some of the [critical] issues. I say to them that part of getting an education is to think about how things might be. I try to teach them about how multiple and varied things are, and how as a class, we need to broaden [our understanding of the world]. I tell them that they do not necessarily have to agree with what I say or what I read but I do want them to understand there are other perspectives besides the one that they have and that is part of becoming an educated intellectual. Their role, I think, is to contribute. I particularly love when students talk about their own identities and how they understand the world and see the world because I think when they hear that then everyone understands and grows from that perspective. So their role is, to some extent, to disclose if they feel comfortable with it and to struggle with personal identities in the realm of their political and public responsibilities as teachers and global administrators.

Sarah pointed out how difficult it can be to reshape students' "traditional" conceptions of their role within the educative process, concluding:

[Student are] amazed. There is always an unlearning process that occurs because very rarely have students ever been asked to think [critically] before. It takes some getting used to and many times they keep looking to the teacher to do it for them or to lead them.

This notion of unlearning that Sarah talks about seemed to represent a central theme within participants' responses regarding the role of the student within the critical post-secondary classroom and will be addressed in more depth later in this chapter.

Central Aims and Purposes of Critical Pedagogy

When participants were asked about the overarching aims of critical pedagogy and to identify its main purpose, there were a variety of answers including: democracy; emancipation and/or transformation; critical thinking; social justice; profound learning experiences; empowerment; critical responders; social consciousness and activism; social change; and student-centredness. Student-centredness, which some participants perhaps oversimplified as constructivism, was mentioned most often as a central aim of critical pedagogy, receiving 42 responses. Social justice was mentioned 33 times and social change and social consciousness and activism were mentioned 24 times. Democracy was also frequently mentioned, receiving 27 responses (see Figure 2 below – first number in parentheses reflects frequency).

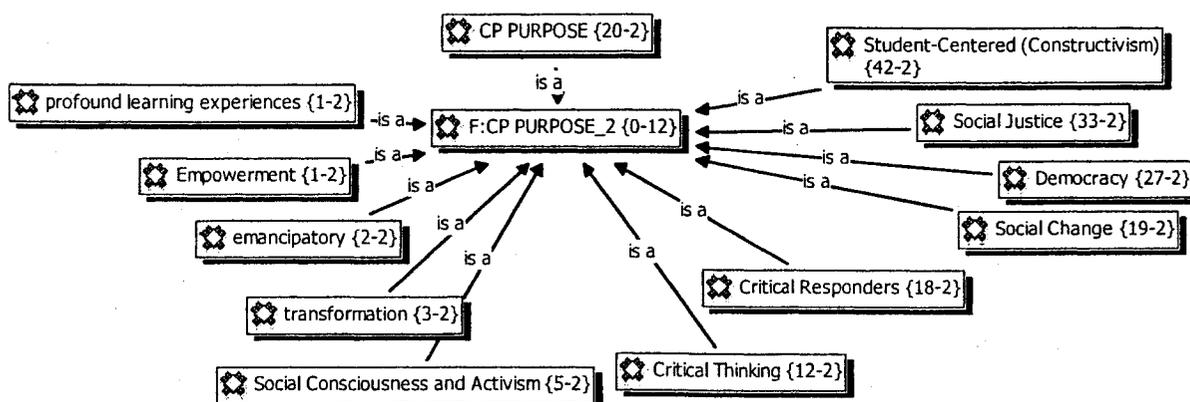


Figure 2. Purpose of critical pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy Theory and Influential Theorists

As one would imagine, the theory of critical pedagogy and the theorists who influenced participants were interrelated to the ways in which participants defined critical pedagogy and the central aims that they identified. If a participant identified democracy as the central aim of critical pedagogy, then quite often Dewey was mentioned as the most influential theorist in that

person's practice. Likewise, if a participant identified social justice as the main purpose of critical pedagogy and within its definition, then often that participant would cite Freire or McLaren as central to her practice. Those participants who focused on the writings of Beverly Tatum and hooks often cited social consciousness and activism as the central aim of critical pedagogy.

In other words, individual participants' definitions of critical pedagogy, their identification of the central aims of critical pedagogy, the theory that they taught about and the influential theorists who informed their practices overlapped significantly within their individual responses. For example, often a participant would cite an influential theorist at the outset of the interview as a response to my query about the definition of critical pedagogy, and this theorist would come up repeatedly throughout the interview. For example, Freire was mentioned 55 times throughout the course of the 17 interviews. Clearly, Freire's influence on the field of critical pedagogy was significant from the viewpoint of these participants. McLaren received the second highest number of citations (18). Many theorists were cited less frequently but clearly influenced participants' perceptions of critical pedagogy theory and practice. For example, Dewey was cited eight times throughout the course of the 17 interviews but clearly had a significant influence on Larry, Mark, and Jeff, all of whom purported that the main purpose of critical pedagogy is to prepare citizens for democracy and teach courses that "speak to" that purpose. More will be said about this in the next section.

Some research participants cited many influential theorists when discussing their definition of critical pedagogy. For example, Graham mentioned McLaren, Freire, Shirley Steinberg, Kincheloe, and Barry Kanpol in his response to the initial question. Other participants cited only one influential theorist in their response to this initial query. For example, a number of people only mentioned Freire initially.

Within their responses to my query regarding the definition of critical pedagogy, there were a total of nine out of 17 participants who mentioned Freire within their definitions. This occurred even before I posed the question about teaching about the theory of critical pedagogy. Jack and Bob mentioned Marx within their definitions. Other research participants mentioned McLaren and Giroux. When asked about their definitions of critical pedagogy, both Mark and Sarah talked about the influence of Dewey on the field. Occasionally, a theorist was only mentioned by one participant but that theorist's influence over that one participant's work was extraordinary. For example, Linda mentioned the ways in which Kevin Kumashiro influenced her teaching and learning: "I think when you read Kumashiro you'll kind of get why I really believe in that." She mentioned the influence that his writing has had on her interpretation of critical pedagogy and her classroom practices repeatedly throughout the interview. In this particular case, Kumashiro was not only a mentor to Linda but was also a close colleague and friend of hers.

This was the case for others as well. Graham worked with McLaren and concluded that, "Really my understanding of critical pedagogy was developed through my work with McLaren when I was working on my doctorate." Mark said that he was a close friend of Apple; and Jack, Mark, and Meg all worked directly with Freire in some capacity. Thus, not only the frequency of citations regarding influential theorists, but the quality of those references, may be an important consideration. In other words, despite the fact that some theorists were only cited once, the significance and influence of those theorists appeared to be particularly strong.

There were 37 different theorists mentioned in response to questions about the definition of critical pedagogy, the purpose and aims of critical pedagogy, and teaching about the theory of critical pedagogy. A complete list and network view of these influential theorists, including the frequency of citations (first number in brackets) can be found in Figure 3 below. Out of those 37 influential theorists, seven were female theorists. Both female participants and male participants

cited that their work was influenced by a mix of male theorists and female theorists. In other words, males did not cite female theorists more or less frequently than female participants did. Both male and female participants cited the influence of female theorists exactly seven times each. Male participants did however cite male theorists (69 times) more often than female participants did (53 times).

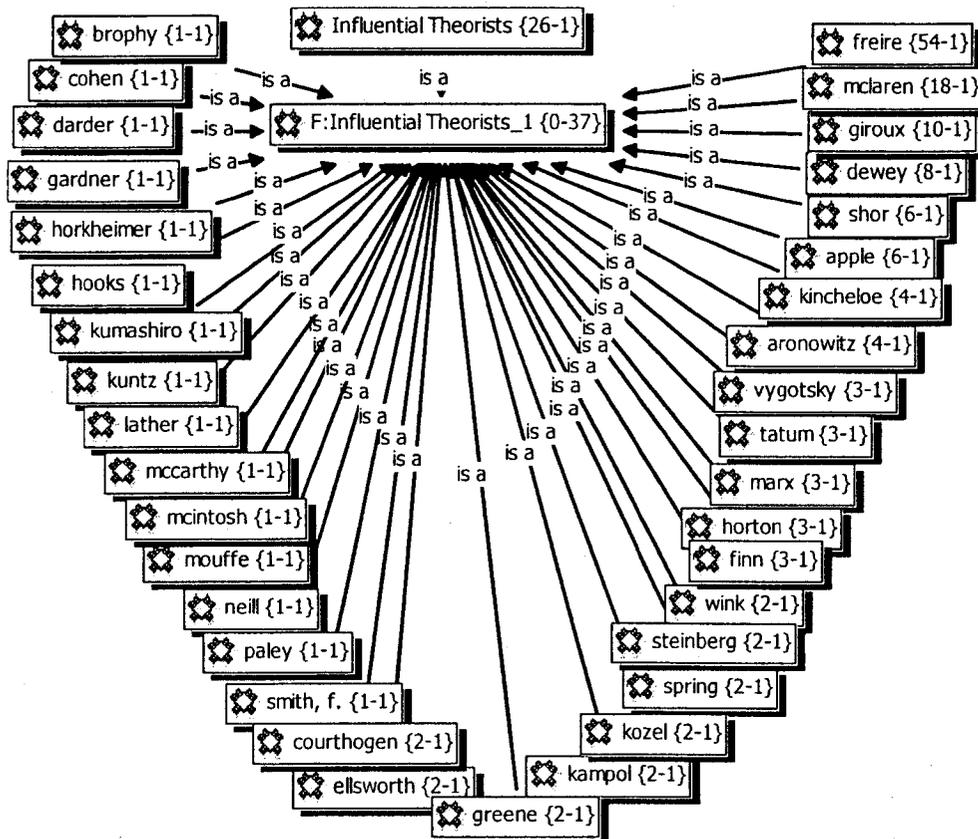


Figure 3. Influential theorists

Related Pedagogies

Participants also related a number of alternative pedagogies to critical pedagogy within their definitions. Jack mentioned the importance of the feminist and civil rights movements. He

also mentioned the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism on the field of critical pedagogy. Bailey, Jeff, and Laurie all mentioned critical pedagogy's relationship to other anti-oppressive pedagogies, including those that addressed issues of race, gender, sexuality, and colonialism. Sam saw "critical pedagogy as kind of growing out of social reconstructionism."

It was interesting to note the overlap and interaction between participants' responses to the questions about definitions of critical pedagogy and its central aims and purpose and the influential theorists. This overlap was closely interrelated to the courses that participants taught as well. As I mentioned earlier, Larry, Jeff, and Mark, in particular, included numerous references to Dewey throughout their interviews. They additionally made reference to him within their definitions of critical pedagogy and identified democracy as one of the central aims and overarching purpose of critical pedagogy.

An analysis of the course syllabi provided by research participants revealed evidence that these three people teach courses that directly relate to these interests. Larry's courses, entitled "Democratic Values, Student Engagement and Democratic Leadership" and "Democratic Values, Student Engagement and Critical Thinking" provide evidence of this. Both courses focus on "the purposes of education in a democracy" with course readings that address that focus. Mark asserted in his course outline that, "This course, [entitled "Democracy, Education and Social Change"] to be consistent and internally valid, will be as democratic as we can make it." Mark later said that consistency and internal validity come about through trying to keep the oversight and administration of the course in sync with the ideals of democracy. Students read Dewey's (1916/1944) *Democracy and Education* and other readings pertaining to democracy and social change in Mark's course.

Jeff reported that he teaches a course entitled, "Schooling for a Democratic Society" that focuses on responding to such queries as, "What does schooling for a democratic society mean?" He said that he essentially starts with these queries to assess students' previous knowledge and to

engage them in a democratic process of examining curriculum. A beginning bibliography of readings for this course, included *Pedagogy, Democracy, and Feminism* (Hernandez, 1997), alongside Dewey's (1916/1944) *Democracy and Education*.

Those participants who focused on the writings of Beverly Tatum (1999) and bell hooks (1994) often cited social consciousness, social justice, and activism as the central aims of critical pedagogy. The research participants who taught these courses emphasized the interaction between critical pedagogy and other related pedagogies.

For example, Bailey, who provided me with the syllabus for a course entitled "Culturally Relevant Teaching," focused her course content on a variety of topics, including: gender and culture; class consciousness; ethnicity and culture; and anti-racist teaching. Readings were varied and aligned with each particular subject area. Linda's course syllabus on "Race, Representation, and Resistance in U.S. Schools" focused on the multiple discourses surrounding issues of race, ethnicity, and gender. Graham's course syllabus for the course he teaches entitled "Multicultural Education" focused on the topics of urban education, limited English proficiency (LEP), gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) issues, ability grouping, and gender equity. Jack informed me that the bulk of his teaching focuses on preparing people to become school administrators. He identified the importance of helping to develop his students' critical consciousness as one component of their preparation toward becoming school leaders and as one of the central aims of critical pedagogy. Participants' references to related pedagogies were reflected throughout the course syllabi.

Post-Secondary Classroom Praxis

This next section will examine the ways in which professors who espouse critical pedagogy practice it within the post-secondary classroom. This section will report the results of the research as it relates to the 17 participant interviews and an analysis of the 20 course syllabi.

Examples of Post-Secondary Classroom Praxis

I asked two specific questions to get at the ways in which pedagogues practice critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom. I queried, 1) “Do you believe that you engage in forms of classroom praxis that reflect the theory of critical pedagogy?” and 2) “What are some examples of your classroom practices that reflect the ways in which you employ critical pedagogy?” I additionally asked about classroom practices related to assessment and evaluation if it did not come up over the course of their responses to the two previous questions. The network view in Figure 4 below highlights the examples of classroom practices that participants discussed alongside the frequency of responses (first number in brackets).

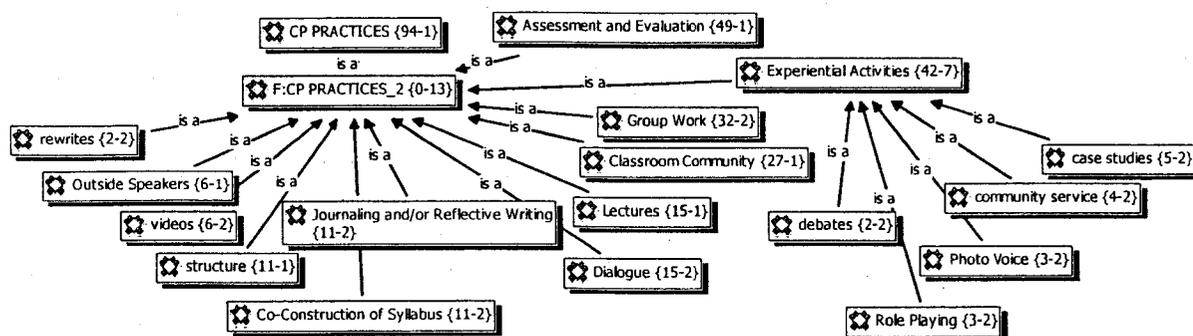


Figure 4. Classroom practices

Classroom community

Many interview participants responded that building a classroom community was one of the central features of their critical praxis within the post-secondary classroom. There were 27 quotations related to this. Nineteen of the 27 total quotations related to classroom community came from female research participants and only eight quotations on this topic came from male participants.

Bailey commented on how she tries to “create a really safe and comfortable space for students to talk and to process their own stuff. I also do a ton of sharing of my own stories.” Catherine talked about how, with her younger students in particular, she strived to “create a classroom where they were very comfortable to be who they were. My kids are always allowed to move and talk and eat and drink and have a real life in the classroom.” She talked about one particular practice that she uses at the beginning of class:

The first thing that I tend to do, not always, but usually, is I have a lot of different provocative quotes. Some of the quotes are directly about teaching and learning. Often a lot of the quotes are just related to being a decent human being. I will often start a class by giving all my students this package [of quotes] and I ask them to read through all the quotes, respond to any quote or combination of quotes, to then write a private response to me and to then be prepared to share something about the quote in class.

She said that students are thus allowed an opportunity for some privacy with their reflections as well as an opportunity to share with her first before bringing their thoughts and ideas publically into the class as a whole. She said that she believes that sharing with her prior to sharing with the class as a whole helps students feel “safe” and helps them develop as a community. Catherine went on to say:

I often do private, one-to-one activities like that and then I’ll throw out a question for the whole class. It will be a pedagogical kind of question. I’ll say, ‘Make notes to yourself.’ I’ll tell them a story or give them a question and say, ‘Just take one minute and write down to yourself a few things that come to mind when I ask a question or tell you a certain story.’ So then I’ll say, ‘Pair up with one person in the class that you don’t know and discuss what your response is.’ Then I’ll have them gradually build up to a larger and larger group where they discuss their responses and then I’ll have them act out a playful version of what they agreed on in their responses.

Catherine said that, in her experience, this interpersonal sharing and these group-oriented activities help students feel more comfortable.

Taylor said that,

[I] try to create a safe space where students will feel comfortable, expressing where they're at and moving from there. I just ask that they be open to other ways as well and we spend a lot of time every semester engaged in basically community building.

Nancy talked about the importance of building community and student voice:

I try to make it a point to have everybody have a voice in the class. And I do it in various ways. I vary where I stand and position myself in the classroom so I can access people who do not normally talk and encourage them to contribute. Oftentimes [I build community] by mixing people up in different groups and requiring different people to share.

In reflecting back on one of her classes, she added:

In my master's research class, there was one African American woman who was much older, maybe in her late 50s, and she was from Jamaica. She wrote me a note and said that she was pleasantly surprised that she felt welcomed into the group and things like that. So hopefully, some of it is working.

Donna also talked about the importance of building a classroom community, concluding that she thinks the safety of the classroom and people are central to practicing critical pedagogy. She concluded that, "No one should be invisible in the classroom as much as that's possible." Laurie talks about building a classroom community in her class by reminding students that:

'This is about your community.' So of course, I try to create community but don't always succeed. I ask them to work in small groups and to work in small teams. I may present the information initially but they negotiate it.

She said that, in her view, this too contributes to students' sense of community.

Dialogue

Dialogue was mentioned by male research participants on only three occasions as an example of a critical classroom practice while female participants mentioned it 12 times. Bob talked about the importance of group work and group discussion within the classroom, but he also highlighted the value of what he referred to as a dialogue journal. For Bob, the use of a dialogue journal provided students with an opportunity to reflect on their learning throughout the semester. Bailey uses a method called the rotating chair to encourage dialogue. According to Bailey, students act as dialogue facilitators. She said:

In the rotating chair, the dialogue is passed off by the student facilitators to the student who has spoken the least in the class. So they scan around the room and pick someone who hasn't participated and that student facilitates the next round of discussion. So it is very clear what the norms are and those norms are that everybody participates and that equal participation is encouraged.

Bailey said that this form of group dialogue provides a means for students to engage with each other and to reflect on their learning. Meg talked about the ways in which she combines computer technology with dialogue. She said:

I use the blackboard system a lot. I'll post a discussion question and then, what I did this year was, I made all the students in the class teaching assistants in the class which allowed them to post their own questions and generate forums for discussion themselves. So I'm not always guiding that.

Group work

Participants additionally referred to the importance and value of group work and this classroom practice was often closely linked with the practice of dialogue. There are 13 examples of female participants' use of group work within the critical classroom and 19 examples of male

participants' use of this. Graham asks students to complete an assigned reading and then asks them to break out into groups and prepare questions. He said that students then, "Discuss the readings in small groups during class time. They then come back into a large group and see what the consensus was around the reading and the topic." Nancy said that she uses group work as a means for students to reflect on the readings. She concluded, "[Students are] put into groups to talk about, develop ideas, and then apply what we've already read."

Bailey said that she uses "think-pair-share" as a group work technique, whereby a student first individually works on a particular question or problem and then pairs up with another person to problem solve and explore the question; that pair then finds another pair or two and continues to brainstorm, synthesizing the various responses that have resulted from this "think-pair-share" experience to formulate a response. Sam talked about the way that he uses group work to "try to draw out the function and the talents of the students in the classroom in different ways all the time so that they are leaders of small groups and cooperative learning groups and they rotate their leadership roles." He went on to provide this example:

One of the activities that I do in the "Foundations of Educational Administration" course is what I call an administrative mind walk where the students get into small groups and for one week they observe the day-to-day practices on campus and look into specific aspects of campus life, such as 'a day in the life' of a typical administrator. They then come back into their small groups and they talk about what they've observed and how that fits into what they've been learning about the theory of critical pedagogy, particularly its emphasis on issues like democracy, diversity, respect for diversity, respect for decision making of all stakeholders, and things of that nature.

Sam said that this activity employs a combination of classroom practices as a means to further develop students' understanding of critical pedagogy, including: experiential activities [team-

building exercises to build community and field work, among others]; observations; and small group work.

Journaling and/or reflective writing

Six male participants and five female participants talked about their use of journaling and/or reflective writing as a classroom practice. Jack said:

[Students] have to keep a journal in which they reflect every week upon a question like, 'What am I learning and is it making any difference?' So it is an effort anyway to have them confront themselves and ask themselves whether they're lending themselves to the real effort of [critical pedagogical "work"] or whether they're going through the motions.

Bailey said that she uses "free writes" as a form of reflection:

I do a lot of free writing in class whenever a conversation gets to a point where I do not exactly know where to go with it or what to do or sometimes it is getting out of hand.

Sometimes I just need some thinking time, or I sense that students do. I will ask them to stop the action and do a free write about what is going on in their minds and then I ask them to share with a partner and then share with the class as a whole.

She asserted that she uses this technique as a pedagogical practice to nurture not only students' reflective and critical capacities but her own.

Mark said he employs reflective writing as a means to impel students to find direct applications between the theory that he is teaching about and its utility to students' lives:

They take [some aspect of the theory] and I ask them to go home and write a reflection on it and the reflection should respond to the questions, 'What does this mean personally to me? and How am I connected to this material?' This represents my attempt to help them personalize it. In other words, I make sure that their learning is not just 'abstract blah,' but that it relates to their own existential situations.

He said that students often will return to class having learned more about that theory from this process of reflection and from relating to it on a personal level in his view.

Experiential activities

Participants referred to their use of a variety of experiential activities throughout the course of the interviews, including: role playing; photo voice; mock debates; field activities; and community service; among others. Male participants used mock debates (2 to 0), case studies (4 to 1), and role-playing (3 to 2) more often than female participants who used community-service (3 to 1) more often than men. Meg was the only interview participant who cited using a classroom practice called “photovoice” which consists of an action research project whereby people take pictures of their communities (people, buildings, businesses, library, etc.) as a means to examine issues of hegemony. Both male and female research participants talked about the field activities that they conducted as components of their critical pedagogy curriculum. These will be explained in more detail below.

Larry said that he uses case studies as “a snapshot of an educational life, or of a person’s life, which illustrate the tensions, struggles, and dilemmas of people’s lived experiences.” Larry said that he asks students to examine different types of individuals and their experiences within K-12 and post-secondary institutions and to prepare responses to these cases as if the student were in the role of the K-12 teacher.

Jack responded that he tries to “get people through a case study experience and asks them to role play some of the cases.” He said he asks students to role play people in various positions of privilege within schools and those people in positions of less privilege. He described this below:

Through some role-playing where students have had to assume positions of people within the case and then enact those roles within the classroom and then have other folks in the

classroom do, you know, a critical analysis of how people played their roles, [the students] have learned a lot.

He concluded that, "I've always found [this] to be a very good exercise for them" because his students are impelled to consider others' perspectives. Jack said that he believes that the role-playing activity provides students with an opportunity to step outside of themselves and to better understand these varying perspectives.

Jack said he also uses mock debates as a way for students to better understand the course readings. He divides students into groups and has them argue one side or the other of a particular issue as it relates to a topic from the course readings or to education in general. For example, he said that students may need to argue either for or against the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States.

Other research participants talked about additional experiential activities that they employ within the curriculum. Community service was one such example. Anne talked about the ways in which she uses this classroom practice to teach about critical pedagogy and issues of justice:

In the past I had a teacher education class. It was a curriculum development course and I had my students create enrichment curricula for three homeless shelters. So they created this curriculum, using a Freirean approach. They had to interview the shelter residents and get to know them and find out what their whole day looked like and what interests they had. They then had to create evening enrichment activities for the shelter guests.

She said that another group of students conducted:

First person interviews with Vietnam veterans and listened to various speakers who served in Vietnam and then did some research and had to create curriculum related to the Vietnam War for the War Memorial in New Jersey for 3rd grade students and 5th grade students based on their knowledge from these first person sources.

Anne said that both these experiences seemed to deeply enhance her students' understanding of issues of social justice, privilege, and oppression.

Sam talked about how his students do community service as one component of their critical pedagogical work within their post-secondary experiences, but many also maintain that commitment after graduation. He concluded that, "They may not be activists when they were in college, but they begin to use some kind of activist work within the classroom [as a result of these community experiences]," and when Sam later meets former students at conferences he "begins to see them using that methodology [activism and service-based] in their own teaching."

Graham talked about the importance of other kinds of field activities, stating, "Well, I think taking the students out in the field is really it. Having them see that what I'm talking about isn't just theoretical and abstract, that poverty isn't an abstract issue or philosophic issue," for example, is really important. Sarah spoke about her experiences with trying to make the social-justice oriented curriculum less abstract, by claiming:

I've had students do social action projects with pre-K students and I've had them doing the same within an alternative high school. This one young man was very reticent about doing this kind of project with alternative students who were in a 'last chance' kind of secondary school environment. What that particular school wanted was a breakfast program. It came out that many of the students came to school without a good breakfast. So [the student from my class] was able to help them organize aid, and he had to do some major negotiating to get it. But he got them a breakfast program and a field trip. Nobody trusted these kids to go on a field trip and so they had never been allowed to go one one, and he took them down to a marine institute. I choke up when I think about [his relating his experience about this back to the class].

She said that the student had taken pictures and was very emotional in his presentation back to the class. In Sarah's estimation, it was clear that he had been very affected by the experience.

Sam talked about an experience that he facilitates with his students. He said that he asks students to do community-based field observations related to pedagogy across various school campuses and institutions. He said that some students observe elementary classrooms if they are training to work with elementary school kids and other students observe businesses. He requires students to conduct field observations during two evenings or during a six-hour block depending upon the school or institution that the student chooses to observe. He said that this field experience generates a number of student responses and queries that relate to critical pedagogy theory. According to Sam, students respond by asking each other and him:

Here's what we've seen in practice, how does that match with theory? How would we apply what we've learned to our future role as school administrators? What would be some of the barriers and challenges? How do we build bridges over those barriers?

Sam said that students are able to meaningfully connect with some of the justice-oriented issues that they are learning about in class through these observations. Graham said that he encourages students to attend community events and gives them credit toward some aspect of the course requirements if they submit a write-up of their reflections on that experience.

Other critical pedagogical practices

Participants reported using the following additional classroom practices to address issues of social justice, including: bringing in outside speakers (8) and watching videos (7) such as the The "Color of Fear" (1994) (2), "Crash" (Haggis, 2004) (2), and documentaries (1). There were a number of other experiential activities that participants cited. For example, Bailey talked about using an activity that she calls "take a stand." She described the practice:

When I teach about social class, there's an activity that I learned about from a conference and I'm blanking on who presented it. She adapted it from someone and I adapted it from her, but basically, the students line up in a row and then they take two steps forward if

they have a library in their home and one step backwards if they were bussed out of their neighbourhood to school and they respond to various questions like that and it inevitably stratifies the people in the room pretty much by class, race and gender.

Bailey said that has facilitated this activity in a number of different settings, including within the classroom and at conferences and she said that this activity always provokes conversation.

She said that she will also ask “students to take a survey, such as Peggy McIntosh’s White Privilege Checklist (1989), and I’ll have them do the checklist and then write a reflection and then talk to a partner and share their reflections on their experience with having to list their privilege.” She said that this helps students better understand some of the unearned privileges that many of them experience.

Sam said that he asks students to draw an anatomy of an effective school leader as one example of an art-oriented experiential activity. He said that, “Students do drawings in small groups and I know when they’ve understood some of what I have been teaching when they come back with a head drawn with big ears and a small mouth.” He said that in his view this demonstrates that students are able to comprehend some of the theory that he is teaching them.

Sam said that he tries to incorporate a practical component into every class that he teaches. He said an assignment for one course requires students to choose either a “pip” (professional improvement project) or a “sip” (school improvement project). Each student has to take on a project, either with a team or as an individual that in Sam’s words, “tackles” one of these questions or a related question: “How do you improve democracy in the school?” “How do you address issues of social justice?” Sam said that if teaching within the post-secondary classroom does not have relevance to the students’ lives or the world at large, then the institution and the professors are “failing” the student. He concluded that he and his colleagues “[t]ry to integrate [theory and practice] in all their courses and that so far, we’ve had great success. We are the fastest growing program in the school of education.”

Co-construction of the syllabus

Eleven research participants (six female and five male) addressed the ways in which students co-construct the course syllabus and negotiate the curriculum within the critical pedagogical classroom. Bob maintained:

So what I do is I put together a rather extensive syllabi, but some of the things on the syllabus I leave out deliberately and/or make unclear and I make it clear what I think is deliberately unclear and I invite them to not just ask about it but to challenge it and to try to reshape those things.

Bob referred to the fact that he predetermines some of the assignments and includes those on the initial course syllabi but leaves some opportunity for assignments to be co-determined by the class as a whole once the course is underway.

Linda suggested that if I looked at her “Pedagogies of Difference” course syllabus that I would see an example of how she co-constructs the syllabus. On “the first day of class I showed up and all that was there was the first page. Those were the texts that I actually assigned.” She then directed me to the second page which contained a list of the added texts – examples of those reading materials that were included as a result of negotiated student input.

Jeff starts the process of co-constructing the syllabus by having:

Students begin to identify areas where they want to go. I share the books I have. I’ve gotten to a point where I don’t buy texts anymore. I just have a lot of texts on reserve for the students to utilize.

He said that, in this way, the course starts with some minimal structure and content in place. Jeff uses the readings on reserve as required readings. These are agreed upon consensually by the students. He then provides students with an opportunity to pick other readings, either from the readings on reserve or others that they identify and to incorporate those that best suit their interests and needs and professional practices.

Assessment and evaluation

Participants said they also regarded their use of alternative methods of assessment and evaluation as critical in many respects. Female participants provided twice as many examples of alternative methods of assessment and evaluation. Examples of these alternative methods for both female and male participants included co-designing assignments and rubrics, self and peer assessment, contract grading, and the use of portfolios.

For example, Jack talked about how in his “Ethics and Equity in Education” course, students have to prepare their final assignment:

They have to prepare a paper as though they are going to give a presentation to the school board. They have to articulate an ethical position around, what I would call, the intrinsic morality of learning that is being ignored under the current school reform efforts.

In reference to the interview question regarding assessment and evaluation, Bob said that, “One of the things that I’ve done that is kind of counterhegemonic is I haven’t given tests or quizzes in 13 or so years.” As a math teacher, Bob said that he has replaced these forms of “traditional” assessment with in-class assignments that still address the math content that he is teaching but provide students with an opportunity to work together and to take more time than they could if they were being tested more formally.

Some participants said they use assignment rubrics. For example, Bailey uses rubrics but students “do self assessments on the rubrics. And that was really interesting because they were actually harder on themselves than I was.” Nancy reflected back on an undergraduate course she taught where she asked the students to design their own assignment rubric, “but that might have been not a good place to do it” because they lacked adequate preparation. She conceded that, “But I do know a good friend of mine who is down the hall and I think she does that in her literacy and technology class. They develop rubrics for projects together” and so Nancy said she was going to try again. Mark described his use of a rubric as follows:

I give them a rubric to do a 10-15 page final paper, but they don't have to use my rubric, they can do it any way they want to. I usually give them a couple of previous good examples and then they always have to give themselves a grade and justify the grade at the end of that learning analysis.

He said that those students who need the structure of a rubric can benefit from having one initially and those students who want more freedom can choose to reject it.

Bailey, Sarah, Mark, Linda, Catherine, Anne, Donna, and Linda all talked about using some form of peer or self-assessment in their teaching. Donna said that students do a lot of group work in her courses and they self and peer assess their participation marks accordingly. Sarah said that she may ask students to self-assess and then she combines that mark with her assessment. She said that students often self-assess much lower than she expects. Catherine's syllabus stated:

Your self-evaluation of the quality of your contribution to our course will be matched with my and your colleagues' assessment of your work, and we will come to a mutual agreement on what your final "mark" should be.

Jack, Linda, Laurie, Sam, and Mark all said that they use portfolios as assessment and evaluation tools. Linda incorporates self-assessment of a portfolio as a means to determining a student's mark. She stated,

Eventually I gave them these alternative forms of assessment such as the portfolio and that was eventually what we did. They submitted a portfolio and I also asked them for each assignment what grade they thought they deserved. What was very helpful for me is that I used the Vassar catalogue guide for what each letter grade means.

She said that having those criteria helped students better understand assessment and they could self-assess more effectively. Linda said that she also includes a reflective/evaluative component

to the overall course, allowing students to consider other aspects of the course and the student's role within the course as well as the professor's role. She added:

So I asked them to also tell me what grade they should get for each of the assignments and why, and then, what grade they should get for the course based upon the Vassar catalogue's descriptions and why, and to include not only their assignments but also anything else they want to include that I don't get to see in the assignments. For example, their notes, or their drafts or other things, or maybe some additional thoughts that they wanted to add in reference to what they got out of [the course], including what they liked or didn't like about the assignments. In other words, the portfolio and self assessment was meant to provide students with an opportunity to be able to present more of the course as a whole, reflecting on my role in it and their role in it.

Laurie's department as a whole is adopting portfolios as one form of assessment across all its courses.

Other participants talked about alternative forms of assessment and evaluation, including: avoiding a red pen (Catherine); providing feedback on some assignments without grading them (Linda); rewrites (Jack and Larry); and trying to develop assessment tools that foster knowledge acquisition and critical thinking more than competition (Graham, Catherine, and Sarah). Meg talked about her use of contract grading:

What I decided to do this year was to have students do individual learning contracts, rather than come up with a specific set of assignments or something that I would just impose on everybody. And so I came up with a set of course objectives that I thought were important given the subject matter that we're covering and the requirements for the course, you know, in the curriculum. And then I asked students to contribute their own objectives and then to come up with ways in which they felt that they could meet that combined set of course objectives and how they wanted to be evaluated.

In reference to marks, Mark said:

I tell students that giving them a grade is my legal obligation and I will do that. But they're going to be involved in the process as much as possible and in contract grading if you want a C, which nobody wants, then you do this and this, and if you want a B, then you have to do this and this, and there is some choice in there. If you want an A then you have to do something outstanding that is creative. It can't be pedestrian. Then we try to develop criteria for doing that. It sounds so neat, doesn't it, but it gets very chaotic sometimes.

Mark's "Democracy, Education, and Social Change" course syllabus enumerated the initial criteria for the grading contract and included: attendance and participation; completion of all reading and logs; development of a democratic cultural analysis and action plan; and learning group presentation. Mark explained that, "An A range [grade] is achieved by completing all B assignments and the completion of either one of the following:" 1) a 10-12 page research paper or 2) strong participation in one of the "Paulo Freire Democratic Project" activities.

Donna finds that contract grading is "easier with doctoral students because I think they've been exposed to a critical lens in their master's program." Sarah and Catherine also both said that they use alternative forms of expression to assess and evaluate students' learning. Sarah said:

On the last night of class, I encourage them to share who they are as a democratic educator and to do so in an artistic way. They may write music or they may write poetry. I've had somebody dance. They can create an artistic piece and sometimes students will take some literary piece and rewrite it and adapt it to who they are and want to become as a democratic educator.

Sarah said that it is always a wonderful evening with lots of performance. She said that students have done drama. Some students did a play while others have cooked.

Traditional classroom practices

A number of research participants said that engaging in critical classroom practices is not about fully rejecting some of the hegemonic and more traditional forms of practice. Bob maintained that he uses very few lectures in his class, while Graham revealed that lectures and powerpoint continue to be a part of his teaching and complement the more experiential components of his practice. Jeff said that it is important for critical pedagogues not to reject “lecture” as a teaching tool. In reflecting back upon the ways in which he uses group work and discussion, he also added:

You know, the class may be discussing certain democratic ideals without knowing that the topic is related to democracy, and I’ll come in and sort of do a 10-15 minute talk about what democracy is and what some of the different theoretical perspectives represent and I’ll fill in the blanks if I have to.

He said that students often need some short lectures to ground their experiential knowledge and responses to the reading with some of the related literature and research.

Jeff also said that some of the more hegemonic forms of teaching and learning should not be wholly rejected when “practicing.” Mark stated: “I’ll often jump up and do what I call a ‘lecturette’ on something that comes up” to further students’ understanding about a particular theory. Anne also explicitly stated the importance of not rejecting the traditional. She said that, “I will say that it is really important for the traditional pedagogy to be recognized and to be taught as well. [Critical pedagogues] should not move to a totally critical approach because I don’t think it grounds people enough.” She said that pedagogues need to be attentive to combining various forms of pedagogy within the critical classroom.

Meg, Sarah, and Catherine all said that their students in the past have asked them to lecture more. Catherine related that those students wanted to hear what the professor has to say. Nancy expressed how she has overheard students talk about the fact that professors who

encourage student presentations are seen as lazy. Nancy conceded, “Sometimes I feel guilty and I think that I ought to be doing more direct lecture. It is funny, but when I do direct lecture, I’m not sure they get it half the time.” She talks about the need to combine lectures with activities that are meaningful to students.

Structure and rigour are two other “more traditional” themes that came up when participants were asked about their classroom practices. Catherine said that she has “[p]eople who transfer into my class and think it is going to be an easy ‘A.’ And they quickly find out that it isn’t easy ‘A.’” She said when students do not receive the foundational knowledge and structure that she provides early on in the semester, they come in and initially only see the freedom and think that it is going to be an easy class. Catherine said that freedom actually requires more structure rather than less. She asserted that she plans meticulously and her lessons are highly structured. She said that she needs to do more preparation for each and every class if she is going to shape the lesson to students’ needs on any given day.

Mark said that students have some difficulty with the less-structured nature of his classes: They either love it or don’t like it. All the students want one structure; they keep saying, ‘What’s the structure of this class?’ I say, ‘You’re developing the structure. I’m not here to fill you up, that’s not the point.’

Within his critical classroom, Larry said he uses a discussion of structure to help students negotiate the syllabus and to help identify those aspects of the course that are negotiable. He relates this discussion to the structure of the institution and said that within the context of university teaching there are inherent limitations as a result of this structure. He said that he uses an example from his own past teaching experiences to introduce students to the importance of structure, saying:

There was a time some ten years ago when I was naïve, when I went to the class with no outline or what I thought was no structure at the time. We have to be careful that when

we think we are going in with no structure, we may actually just be reproducing the current base structure with a different kind of structure.

Larry said that he uses this story as a starting point regarding the need for both structure and some flexibility within that structure in his classes.

Anne too discussed how she uses some structure to design a curriculum that is both accessible and rigorous:

I do use some hard readings but I try to juxtapose some accessible readings with those. Those hard readings are the ones I may take apart for students and say, ok, this is what they're saying. I try to help them to see that they can use these books to deepen their understanding of an idea. When I read my first Paolo Freire book in 1995, I didn't understand it. I understand it now, but because I read that kind of stuff all the time.

Examples of Post-Secondary Classroom Practices from Course Syllabi and Assignment Descriptions

A content analysis of course syllabi and assignment descriptions provided examples of research participants' use of "alternative" forms of classroom praxis. In his syllabus, Mark described his pedagogical approach to teaching and learning as a "pedagogy constituted by Reading (R), Reflection (R), and Action (A)" (2RA). He discussed the ways in which it was used. He said that, for example, a student may read an article about education and democracy; they may reflect upon that reading and submit a reflective summary, and they may then go out and do interviews with K-12 administrators about the purpose of K-12 education and the ways in which education and democracy are interconnected.

Jeff's syllabus highlighted that, "We are individuals with varied lived experiences and we need to respect that." He encourages people to "speak from our own experience and for ourselves." He introduces the first day of class by asking students to respond to the query, "What

does ‘schooling for a democratic society’ mean to you?’ as a way for students to situate and locate themselves within the course content.

Most course syllabi (14 out of 20) provided additional examples of critical classroom practices. In his course syllabus, Larry wrote, “One of the major aims of class participation is to develop the class into a community of inquiry – one in which the participants care about the issues discussed and the persons in the group,” relating this back to the importance of developing classroom community.

Many course syllabi confirmed participants’ responses as they related to the importance of alternative assessment and evaluation. Sam and Graham talked about the ways in which they would address learners’ multiple intelligences and different learning styles through forms of instruction and assessment and evaluation that directly addressed these differences within their course syllabi. Graham listed the various modes of instruction that he would use in his classroom, including: “lecture on topics; discussion of topics; computer assisted experiences; small group discussion; reports from groups; demonstration; individual student presentation; and use of film and other culturally relevant materials.”

Many participants noted their use of student presentations as an instructional method within their courses. Sam explicitly wrote that, “A variety of methods will be used to determine formal grades, including: attendance and participation; three written assignments related to the readings; and many choices related to additional assignments, including field experiences and research-related work.” Other examples of providing “choice” in relation to course assignments came up frequently. Anne’s syllabus explicated the many choices that students have regarding essay topics and final projects, student participation in action research and community activities, and choices regarding related research. Meg provided further evidence of the ways in which she uses individualized learning contracts (as discussed in her interview) in the written syllabus that she provided. The syllabus read:

Working with the instructor, each student will develop an individualized learning contract that specifies the ways in which s/he will meet the course objectives described above.

Additional student-generated objectives will be included in the contract. The contract should specify how each of the objectives will be met and the criteria by which they will be evaluated.

Bailey wrote about the various assignments required in her course. These emphasized the alternative forms of classroom practices that she addressed during the interview and included examples of reflective journal writing, a cultural autobiography paper, and an activity-based multicultural encounter which required students to “participate in a hands-on multicultural experience that takes you out of your own culture to learning about another culture.” Linda’s comprehensive and co-constructed portfolio description confirmed her explanation of her use of the portfolio as she described it during her interview. Further evidence of participants’ earlier examples of syllabi co-construction were exemplified by their use of a two-part syllabus. Bob’s initial (Part I) syllabus consisted of a brief description of the course, including a partial list of “course activities and assignments” and “course materials.” And Part II of the same syllabus consisted of student quotes and responses to the initial process of curriculum negotiation, presenting a much more expanded version of the initial Part I of the syllabus (five pages in Part I versus 25 pages in Part II).

Examples of the ways in which research participants used peer and self assessment were also found throughout the written course syllabi and assignment descriptions, providing complementary evidence to related interview responses. For example Catherine wrote, “Your self-evaluation of the quality of your contribution to our course will be matched with my and your colleagues’ assessment of your work, and we will come to a mutual agreement on what your final ‘mark’ should be.”

Concluding Remarks – Examples of Classroom Practices

Participants included examples of classroom community, group work, dialogue, experiential activities, and alternative methods of assessment and evaluation throughout their interview responses. Bailey and Catherine both referred to the fact that they do more and more metacognitive processing and sharing with their students as time goes on - as a way to explicitly “teach” about the critical nature of these classroom practices. Bailey, in particular, said that she made some assumptions early on in her teaching career, thinking that students would automatically discern the critical nature of her practice. She learned that this was not always the case and that she needed to be more explicit with students about the “political” nature of her counter-hegemonic teaching and needed to explicitly communicate her choice of certain classroom practices to students.

Sam stated that he needs to be attentive to ensuring that he practices what he preaches, reporting that:

I think that I constantly have to make sure that I make a conscious effort to be a practitioner of praxis and not fall back into that more comfortable position where I think, ‘Let me open up their heads and pour in the theory.’ And sometimes I find myself wanting to get on the soapbox and say, ‘These are the reasons you must man the barricades.’ So I’m constantly challenging myself as well. I just find myself as each new semester approaches trying to ensure that I’m using the kind of instructional strategies in the classroom [that I profess are important to critical praxis].

It is evident from this extensive list of classroom practices, from the stories told within many of the quotations here, and from an analysis of the course syllabi, that participants are able to provide examples of critical classroom practices. Some of this discussion directly relates to the two other main objectives of the research study: 1) identifying and better understanding success

with these forms of praxis and 2) identifying and better understanding challenges with these forms of praxis. The results that relate explicitly to these two objectives are presented next.

Pedagogical Decisions

Before launching into a discussion about the extent to which these forms of critical pedagogical praxis were successful, I first asked participants about what influences most shaped their teaching. The direct query that I posed was, “What has guided your pedagogical decisions within the classroom?” I would sometimes further clarify this query by posing, “Are your decisions research-based, theory-based, or are they more experiential and intuitive?” and would occasionally ask, “What has shaped your teaching?”

Many research participants said that there were a number of factors that guided their pedagogical decisions within the classroom. These included: experience (20); research and/or theory (16); student feedback (15); intuition and/or serendipity (9); and mentors (3). Most research participants concluded that their pedagogical decisions were guided by a number of these factors and that many of these factors occurred almost simultaneously within their thinking. Mark concluded that he does some of all the above:

It is like theory and practice are two sides of the same coin and you can't separate them. Everything that we do is theoretical, and if we just do practice without any theory then it becomes what Paolo [Freire] called activism. So we have to guard against that.

Jack concluded:

I think it is a mix of things. I think that I tend to be fairly philosophical in terms of the way I think about my work and trying not to just justify it but to illuminate it with some philosophical considerations. But I also work on intuition. A lot of times I will bring stuff to class that I just read last week. I read and think to myself, ‘Oh, gee, this is something they have to get exposed to’ and so I bring that in.

Experience

Many research participants talked about the experiential nature of their decision making regarding pedagogical decisions. Catherine, who dropped out of high school, addressed the ways in which her own disenchantment about schools has influenced her pedagogy:

I lived on my own for many years in Europe and I didn't come to university until I was in my late 20s. I did a lot of different jobs and lived in a lot of different places and without knowing it at all, I was quite a critically alert and sophisticated thinker without having been in school.

Catherine said that those travel experiences had a significant influence on her pedagogical decisions. She said that she is good at reading people as a result.

Larry, who was also a high school dropout, became involved in a number of community-based projects. He shared this experience:

So I remember very clearly being a 15-year-old doing social work of some kind with [the] wider community and although at the time it wasn't articulated as being critical pedagogy, it was. I think those kinds of experiences have stayed with me and were influential to me.

He said that he knows firsthand the value of community involvement and therefore incorporates that into his pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom.

Taylor also talked about how "my own experiences in terms of going through school as a minority [have affected my pedagogical decisions]." She said that she has firsthand knowledge of the ways that schools and tests oppress people of colour. Sarah said that her post-secondary teaching has been influenced by her previous teaching experiences, stating that, "When I was working at the John Dewey laboratory school, it felt right and comfortable and I really matured there as a pedagogue." Mark also talked about a K-12 school saying that, "This program I did in high school was 100 percent experiential. Students were just experiencing the community in

which they lived. And they had some really interesting experiences.” Mark said that experience really shaped his teaching within the post-secondary classroom.

Anne researches and writes about her own teaching and the impact this has had on her pedagogical decisions. She has published a number of papers on an examination of her own teaching practices. These autoethnographies have had an impact on her pedagogical practices because they have made her more aware of some of the gaps between what she professes and what she actually does.

Research and/or Theory-Based

Some research participants were influenced by the theorists who were previously mentioned and the related literature, while others were more influenced by empirical research that had been done on the topic of critical pedagogy.

Jack concluded that:

I would say [I] probably tend to not be influenced very much by empirical research because I’m much more influenced by theoretical stuff or people who will work with empirical stuff but go beyond it and say what the implications and applications are.

Bob said that the progressivist theorists have significantly influenced his teaching. He said he was probably doing progressive education before he read about it. He concluded, “So I guess what I’m saying is that there was more theory and philosophy behind it than I knew. And now I’m more conscious of it and I more consciously bring it to bear” [when making pedagogical decisions].

Sarah described the influence of theory on her pedagogical decisions by stating, “I hadn’t really thought about this before, but I think I came [into my pedagogical practice] through the ideas” [the theory]. Laurie concluded, “So I guess I was already an activist when I came into the

field, and so critical pedagogy provided me with, I guess, a theoretical framework about how to do my writing and my research.”

Student Feedback

Student feedback, including mid-semester evaluations, final teacher evaluations, and anecdotal comments were all factors in participants’ pedagogical decision-making processes.

Meg stated that:

Student feedback is really important. I have the luxury of working with students who are themselves educators and are older, more experienced students, so they bring a lot to the classroom, you know. I’ve got them, in at least this action research course, for a full year. We can work together over a quarter and then at the beginning of this quarter I can go back to them and say, ‘Well, what did you think? What would you like to have happen? Did this work? Did this not work?’ It happens over subsequent quarters based on what we do to begin with.

She said that the student feedback directs what happens in those subsequent quarters.

Anne concluded that a lot of her pedagogical decisions are based on students’ responses to a set of queries that she may pose regarding which direction to take a particular lesson and this is based on students’ needs. These questions are related to the readings and to the methodology. She will often ask for student feedback on one of her lectures.

Donna said that she uses a set of queries as a means to request student feedback and to determine the “shape” of the next lesson:

It is a continual assessment throughout the semester, as well as, two or three times during the semester. I hand students a little sheet that basically asks, ‘What did you like about class tonight? What did you not like? What do you wish that you would have heard?’ And they just fill that out and drop it by my office.

Graham asserted that he ensures that students have ample opportunity to reflect on the course and his teaching and provide him with feedback. For example, he stated:

I just did a mid-semester evaluation with my students where they anonymously evaluate the class. I have them write down on a piece of paper, without their name on it, three things that they liked about the class, three things they don't like about the class, and one thing they would change about the class. I also ask them that 'If they were teaching from now to the end of the semester, what they would do differently?'

Graham said that he uses this feedback to shape the second half of the semester. Laurie said that it is "not necessarily the evaluations, but the students' reaction to the content" that shapes her pedagogical decisions. She asserted that she uses her natural intuition as a gauge.

Intuition and/or Serendipity

The role of intuition and serendipity within the pedagogical decision-making process appeared in a number of participants' responses. Jack talked about how many of his decisions are based on intuition, as did Linda. Bob said, "I just rely on my own resources and my own instincts and what I was born with" [in making pedagogical decisions]. Catherine talked about her experience with using intuition to guide her pedagogical decisions:

I've been in drama school, I am an artist. I think that I have had a lot of experiences that have added up to my being comfortable using intuitive and seat-of-my-pants, ad hoc responses. I tend to be very accurate in how I respond with people and to them. I tend to read people quite well, especially in groups, the dynamic and the flow that goes on. I've also had times where I've been totally overwhelmed and not known what to do and faked it.

Catherine went on to say that she wishes that she had the opportunity to take a course in reading groups and how to use intuition within the classroom.

In reference to the interview question about pedagogical decisions, Donna said, “I would say that my [pedagogical decision making] is mostly intuition and experiential and that I wish it were more research and theory-based.” She went on to say how it may be good for her to look more closely at how she makes pedagogical decisions. Sam shared a story about someone who approached him regarding his pedagogy and commented on how this person characterized [Sam’s pedagogical decision-making] as serendipitous. Sam said that this person also said that she observed students learning “things” in Sam’s class that were not necessarily the lessons that were intended to be taught (by Sam), but somehow serendipitously contributed to students’ learning nonetheless.

Mentors

The final factor that participants reported when responding to the query regarding their pedagogical decisions was the role of mentors and colleagues. Bailey, Catherine, and Linda all commented on the influence of mentors and colleagues. Linda remarked, “Having been taught by some amazing professors and seeing what they’ve done in class has led me to adopt certain assignments and also ideas from observing their teaching.” Catherine said, “The best teachers that I’ve ever had in my life were those who introduced me to people like Freire and many others and who introduced me to critical thinking and encouraged me to make use of my own creativity.” She went on to say that these people have shaped her teaching practices in ways that they may never know.

Overall, most interview participants said they were equally influenced by a number of factors when making pedagogical decisions, with an occasional participant (Donna – more intuition than theory) and Jeff (more research-based) “leaning” more toward one decision-making process over another.

Success with Praxis

I next posed the questions, “Do you think that employing critical classroom practices alongside instruction about the theory of critical pedagogy will attain the goals of that theory?” and “How do you know?” This question about success with praxis often led to this initial participant response: “Well, I don’t really know; I’m just assuming that it works better than the traditional.”

Upon further reflection, participants began to better formulate their responses. Most responses to this question about success with praxis can be categorized under the subheadings of real world connection, anecdotal examples of success, and empirical examples of success, with a few related sub-categories (see Figure 5). There were also 77 quotations related to participants’ discussion of the ways in which success with praxis was linked to a discussion about the congruence between theory and practice and the importance of that congruence within the field of critical pedagogy. I start this next section with an examination of this broader theme of the congruence between theory and practice.

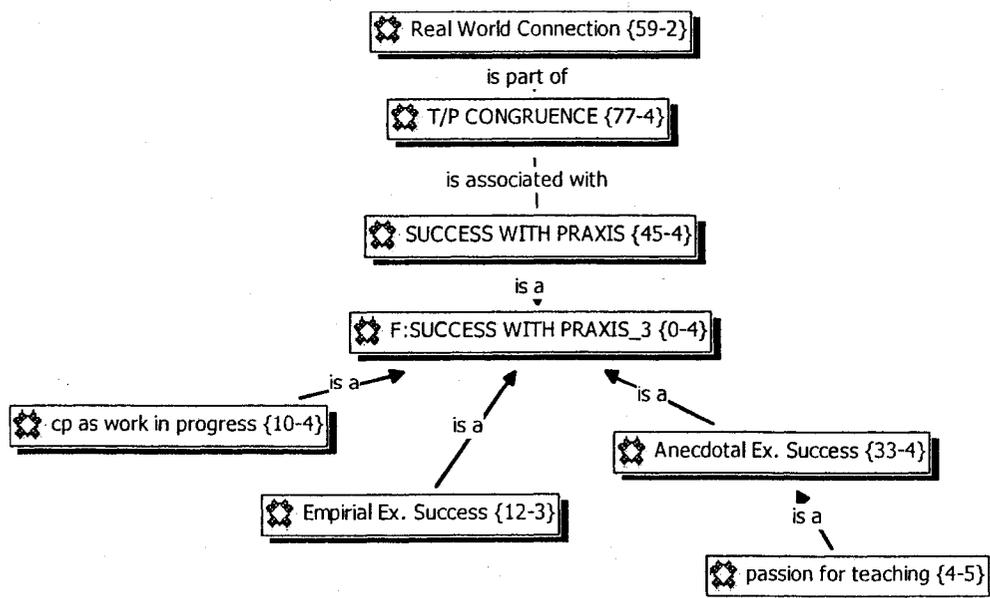


Figure 5. Theory/practice congruence and success with praxis

Congruence with Theory and Practice

This section presents the results related to the question, “Do you think that employing critical classroom practices alongside instruction about the theory of critical pedagogy will attain the goals of critical pedagogy theory?” In other words, this section will examine participants’ responses to the interview questions that asked them about their success with critical pedagogical praxis.

Laurie talked about this congruence as it relates to students’ involvement in action research projects as one component of her courses:

I always tell them that I want them to be participants in the research. And so whoever they’re working with, they have to put themselves into it. They have to spend some time looking into their own positionality, responding to questions like, ‘Who are you? And why are you interested in this topic?’

Laurie claimed that this models the ideals of action research. Laurie also stated,

I do try to create community [and relate it to the community-based, justice work within the field of critical pedagogy]. I ask students to work in groups and to work in small teams, explaining to them that that is the nature of community work.

Laurie said that, in this way, she explicitly links the concept of community and justice work within the broader society to similar work within the classroom.

Sam reported that he feels most successful when he is practicing what he preaches. He said that critical pedagogues need to challenge themselves to make sure that, “They are not just talking the talk, but that they are walking the walk.” Sam went on to say:

I think we [he and his colleagues] are always trying to see how we are applying the theory in real practice at any given moment in time. I think the weakness, if we had a weakness, would be that if you came here and you gave the students, say, matching tests on identifying these critical pedagogists with their most influential works or something,

our students would probably not do that. For one thing, they would probably come to you and say, these multiple choice tests are shit.

Sam claimed that congruence reveals itself in what the students learn as well.

Meg talked about the importance of congruence between theory and practice as it relates to both teaching and course materials:

I'm working on a book right now with my friend and it is designed to be a non-traditional textbook of action research. We got to thinking, well, if my classroom practice has to sort of adapt to be more consistent with the praxis of action research, why would I do banking education in my own classroom if I talk about using an action research model in my community work? Well, then you go look for textbooks and the textbooks tend to be much more sort of traditional in the way they communicate information. So why aren't we using those same things and processes of discovery in looking at our own experience in some way, from a more critical perspective, but bring that experience into the process in the textbook itself?

Meg said that this book project is, in part, a result of a self-critique of her own practices. She asked herself, "How do I make my practice consistent with what I believe? It caused me to really reflect on in what ways do I really do this." She learned:

I do identify myself as an action researcher and that is sort of the way I go about doing my research practice. So for me what I've been trying to do is to take what I know as a community-based participatory action researcher into my classrooms. You know, if I'm going to be teaching action research and if action research is about valuing people's knowledge and identifying problems, and working collaboratively to solve real problems in a community setting, then I need to bring that into my teaching and if I'm trying to teach my students, who are for the most part educators themselves, how to translate that practice into their own practice, then I need to think about ways I model that in my own

classrooms, if I'm expecting them to do the same thing. So, you know, thinking about what I know from my community experience and thinking about how to translate that into my classroom practice is sort of key to me.

She claimed that all of that reflection has translated itself into thinking about her action research book project and how to make that book knowledge accessible and congruent with the ideals of action research.

Donna talked about one assignment and how she tries to relate that project to what the students are reading:

When we read Dewey, it is very dense prose, so I try to have a whole variety of assignments and one of them is what we call the social action project. Students are asked to employ a democratic decision-making model in designing a recommendation to effect some change within their own school environment that they identify as limited or not fair.

Donna claimed that this has been a very powerful exercise for students because they are having to go beyond the theoretical and abstract to actually construct a plan of action related to social change.

Larry described the notion of congruence between theory and practice as follows:

If one is truthful, so to speak, to critical pedagogy, I think it needs to be manifested in our entire being and in all that we do. So I would consider [the theory of critical pedagogy] both as a way of life which would include teaching, administration, research, relationships with colleagues, relationship with students and relationship within the community.

Larry said that critical pedagogy is a wholistic way of being not simply a way to practice within the classroom.

In reference to congruence Mark reported:

In my classes I attempt to combine the content of what we're talking about with attempts to make the content relevant and turn the content of the course back on the course itself. For example, I may ask, 'If we're talking about democracy, etc., how do we continue to assess our own democratic processes?'

Real World Connection

A number of participants said they experienced a high level of congruence between theory and practice when their post-secondary praxis connected the curriculum to the "real world." Bailey talked about one assignment that, in her view, accomplishes this "real world" connection:

Students do a reflective analysis as one component of their final assignment. She said this assignment compels students to examine how the justice-oriented issues that they've been reading about and discussing in class actually play out in the world. Students then do a social justice action project where they actually have to teach for social justice.

Bailey said she tries to design assignments that move students from critical reflection to critical action.

Catherine talked about the importance of bringing in outside speakers as a means to help students bridge the gap between theory and the real world. She said:

[The experience of] having some fellow students from her university who are black coming into predominantly 99.9 percent white faculty and then speaking about what it is like to be a student of colour at her university in a very racist culture is eye-opening for her students. Having students come in who speak about what it is like to wear a burka on campus. Having Jewish and Islamic students come in and discuss issues really opens up a sometimes very precarious and sometimes scary set of issues. I tell my young teachers

they will have to start thinking about the world differently, and working through some of the difficulties of difference, and feeling comfortable discussing these because their students will bring their life experiences and this diversity into their own classrooms.

Catherine believes that “all the stuff of the world is played out in the classroom.” She said that outside speakers make the discussion more relevant for her students than would occur by simply talking about issues of difference.

As a visible minority herself, Linda talked about the “real world” connection:

Oftentimes what we’re studying is actually happening to them in their daily lives. And so it plays out in the classroom and so for me, when I first started teaching five years ago, I felt like I was just teaching about issues of justice, but it became quite clear when students were crying and yelling at each other and at me that it wasn’t something that I could just say we we’re learning about. It was obviously something that was somewhat affecting our own lives.

She went on to discuss the challenges and the risks in teaching that not only connects the curriculum with students’ lived experiences but also is concerned with the value and the importance of this connection.

Graham talked about what might happen if professors in faculties of education fail to connect their pedagogy to the “real world” by concluding:

They don’t get it that five years from now, 50 percent of the kids in American schools are going to be immigrants or second language learners or kids of colour, or lower, formerly called minority, under-represented kids. In California where I was working, 25 percent of the kids were Caucasian and 75 percent were other; 48 percent were Hispanic. It is a different world in California. When I talk to the counsellors and teachers in California, all their heads are going up and down. They say, ‘Yes, this is reality.’ When I talk to them

here [a small college in the Midwest], they look at me going, 'Well, it hasn't been like that for me. That's not what I know.' It is different.

Graham said he tries to get through to his students but it is harder at the Midwestern college where he teaches because students' lived experiences do not resonate with what he is trying to tell them about diversity and minority groups. Graham said that he tries to help students better understand this disparity by "taking the students out of the classroom and having them see that what I'm talking about isn't just theoretical and abstract. That poverty isn't an abstract issue."

Nancy talked about the diversity in students' experiences and the importance of creating a "space" for them to share their stories and experiences as a means to connect their learning to the "real world" and their lived experiences. Sarah said that she encourages her students to "move out into the world and do something about what they believe in" and provides students with "credit" for doing this work. Sam suggests that professors within the post-secondary system should always be "modelling what you want [the students] to do as teachers in the real world" as a means to bring a "real world" connection into the classroom as it relates to teacher preparation.

Other participants talked about how important it was for them as professors to maintain a connection to the "real world" themselves and to K-12 praxis because of their role as "teacher trainers" within the university. Bailey was explicit about ensuring that she spends time in schools:

I mean I spend one day a week always in schools. I worked in one elementary school for the last 18 years in upstate New York. I have also gone into city schools for the last eight years in New York City a few times a semester and spend time with teachers who work on the professional development project that I direct.

She said that this association is a very central aspect of her practice, saying that some post-secondary professors become too far removed from the realities of the K-12 classroom.

Anecdotal Examples of Success

Interview participants provided many anecdotal examples of success. Many of these examples come from student feedback on teacher evaluation forms. Jack had a student write, “I wish I had this course when I was an undergraduate.” He added that often students will say something to this effect to him toward the end of their programs. Graham talked about student feedback concluding that: “[The] feedback I get from many students is that it is the best class they have had; they say they appreciate my passion for it and my openness.” Passion for teaching was mentioned by others as well. Graham’s students have shared with him that they appreciate not only his passion for teaching but his passion for and commitment to justice.

Nancy also talked about the connection between passion and success with praxis, highlighting some of the success that she has had:

Our district required that we do a lot on inclusion and I was passionate for that. So I really worked hard to find ways to help all children succeed in the classroom. Then I would work with them alone too, providing them with extra help.

She said that in seeing what students were capable of, particularly as a result of some of the one-to-one interaction made her become very passionate about trying to have an inclusive classroom and inclusive practices.

Catherine said that she has experienced success with praxis by observing the “[e]vents [that] occur in the classroom that reveal to me that they’re learning the stuff that I hope they will learn and that I intend them to learn and they then learn so much more.” She also shares how, “[students] have demonstrated that they’ve learned in their written work, and from what they tell me about what they’ve learned from my approaches.” For example, she said that she sees their

critical thinking skills mature over the course of the semester as reflected in their assignment submissions and the quality of their writing. Linda shared how “[s]tudents are still dropping into my class and talking about how they look at things differently now; they look at their courses differently now and want more ‘say’ in their classes now and all of that.”

Mark shared a narrative from one of his student evaluation forms. He said that the student wrote:

Mark, as you may already know that I will be graduating from graduate school on Saturday, August 6th. As this portion of my educational journey comes to a bittersweet end, I have begun to receive the customary praise and congratulations for this accomplishment for which I have had some difficulty accepting. While I’m truly flattered by these kind words, it is necessary for me to acknowledge the impression that you have made upon my life. You have stretched my comfort level to a point where I am now unafraid to consider ideas once believed to be foreign. Opening your heart and home, you have provided a sanctuary where I could develop into a full person. For this and much more I extend a heartfelt thank you. Sincerely, Ralph.

Mark had previously mentioned, during the interview, that it was common practice for him to host the last class at his house.

In reference to success with praxis, Taylor shared the following:

One student switched majors after my course because she said her eyes were opened and she just couldn’t go into the area that she was going to go into which was business related. She actually switched to sociology and communication because she thought that she could do more to make a difference in the world.

Taylor said that [examples of success] sometimes came in the “form of a student saying, ‘You’ve changed my mind or I had this conversation over Thanksgiving with my racist family when I went home.’ You know things like that.

Jeff recounted:

Well, I've had [some success with this], some of the students that I have are also graduate assistants who are teaching undergraduate courses and it has been interesting to see how they have used some of these ideas in their own teaching. They come into their classroom and say, 'Let's talk about what we want to do. What are the directions that we want to have from this point to the end of the semester?' [The graduate students] shared those kinds of incidents with me and this shows that the students are in some ways going about trying to engage with the praxis of critical theory.

In reference to the interview query about success with praxis, Nancy responded:

I work closely with one of my former students in our charter school where I do most of my research and the [charter school students] are children of poverty and [my former student] is fantastic and I could never take total credit for her although she claims that she learned a lot of it in my class. She just has this wonderful talent for being a wonderful teacher. So I don't know. I'm hoping [the success of critical praxis] does influence my students, but that's a good long-term study that needs to be done.

Sarah and Anne talked about the ways in which students shared stories with them about how life-changing their courses were. One student in Anne's class expressed this by saying, "I'm really changed and life has really changed and I can't believe I understand these things. I see the world in a whole different way." Laurie talked about the fact that her students continue to be activists within the community. Their activism is one measure of success.

The notion of rigour seemed to play a role in success as well. Mark talked about students' reactions to the role of rigour within his classroom, concluding that, "Reading is not like a mosquito walking across the water; reading expresses some depth of what you're trying to do." Mark talked about the importance of helping students to understand that they can read some "difficult stuff" and make sense of it. He stated:

When students start reading Dewey, and literature related to democratic education, most of my masters students say, 'how did I get in this class and how do I get out of it.?' But at the end, almost all of them say, 'this guy [Dewey] had something to say here.'

For Mark, this feedback indicates some measure of success.

Empirical Examples of Success

There were far fewer empirical examples of success (12) than there were anecdotal examples of success (33). Jack noted:

Every three or four years, we send a questionnaire out to our alumni and I would say that the results of that are very positive, but it is hard in that kind of a survey to get any fine grain appreciation of their responses. They can say on a questionnaire, 'Oh this social justice orientation that I picked up at [university] is really working for me. I'm still committed to all that stuff.'

But Jack conceded that he does not really know if they are just paying lipservice to the institution or if they really act on the justice-oriented curriculum in the ways that they say they do.

Catherine was actually the subject of a doctoral student's study related to pedagogy. She stated:

A few years ago, I was the subject of a doctoral study. A doctoral student looked at my teaching for a term and interviewed me and attended all my classes and then interviewed my students and interviewed me and a few people who knew me and then wrote his thesis on this. He was trying to show that I was a creative teacher.

She said that this student did demonstrate in his study that she was a creative teacher. Catherine saw this study as one example of empirical evidence related to success with praxis.

Taylor and Mark both pointed to their teacher evaluations as one form of empirical evidence but they were hesitant to equate these evaluations with success with praxis because

their evaluations were not always very high. Taylor concluded, “Well, one of the things is that they have the student teacher evaluations at the end of the courses and I always have a few students who give me very low marks. Most of them are very high.” Mark said that, “I get my student evaluations and I probably have one of the highest standard deviations of anybody in this school. They either love it or they don’t like it.”

Meg concluded that she does not think that empirical studies are important, asking me: ‘[How would you empirically measure success?] Are you basing [success] on increased test scores? ‘Well, then, to tell you the truth, I would say that I don’t believe much in test scores. I don’t believe in testing. So if students seem to be engaged in learning and expressing a nuanced understanding of social phenomena based on the things that we do, it is more qualitative than it is quantitative in terms of how I judge that. But their own assessment of what they have learned seems to be very positive. I know that they continue to engage in those practices.

Meg believed that empirical evidence would not necessarily demonstrate anything substantive related to success with praxis. She said that measuring success empirically may be antithetical to the field of critical pedagogy itself because the counter-hegemonic nature of the field is not particularly focused on measurable outcomes.

In response to queries about success with praxis, many research participants noted that they regard their praxis as a work in progress, rather than as something fixed and measurable. Jack said that, for him, [critical pedagogy] is a work in progress and Bailey said that her praxis is constantly evolving. Sarah described her praxis as an emergent one, saying that most recently she has been considering how to improve her own practice as it relates to building the classroom community and a “safe” space for the students.

Challenges to Praxis

Participants' discussion about challenges to critical pedagogical praxis began well before I explicitly posed this query in the interview. Many participants began to discuss these challenges within their responses to the very first interview question regarding the definition of critical pedagogy. As can be seen from the number and frequency of examples found in Figure 6 below, responses were varied and included: lack of congruence between theory and practice (32) and real world constraints (38); institutional obstacles (42); lack of preparation (37); and student resistance (25). The next section discusses interview participants' responses to the research question that asked, "What are some of the challenges that you face when engaging in critical classroom praxis?"

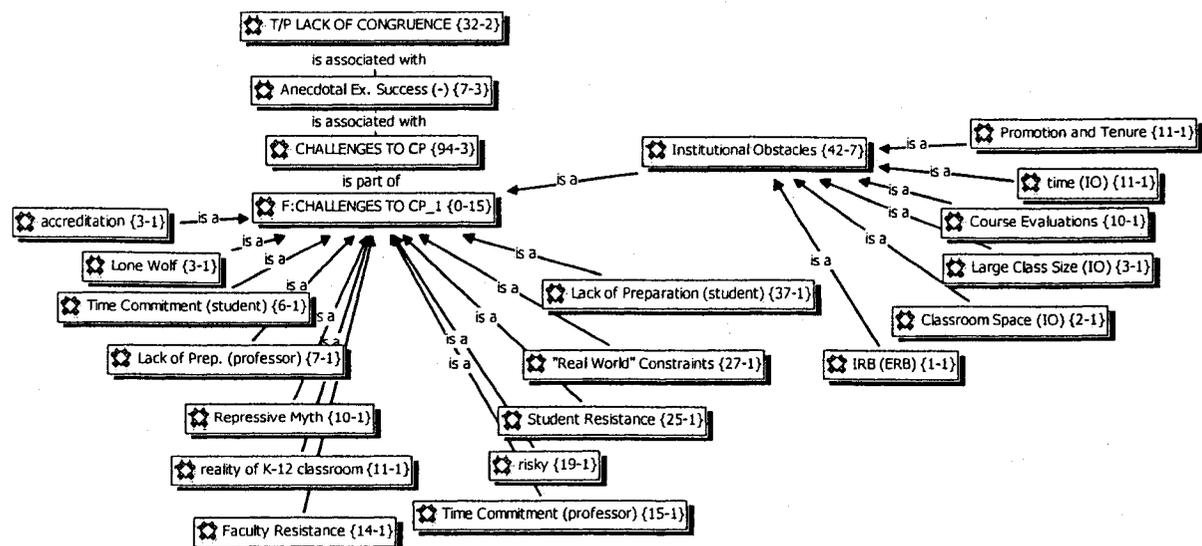


Figure 6. Challenges to praxis

Lack of Congruence Between Theory and Practice and “Real World” Constraints

A number of participants said that it is challenging to bring the theory of critical pedagogy into the practical realm of teaching within the post-secondary classroom. Sam concluded that there is a lack of congruence between what he and his colleagues are trying to teach about and the current climate within education in general.

Similarly, Nancy has observed a lack of congruence in her colleagues:

I'd have to say that I have one colleague who's been mainly teaching the doctoral courses and he builds himself up as a critical theorist and he really isn't. However, what bothers me is that he doesn't want to do anything about it. I have found that I just feel like I [have to work on congruence between theory and practice within my own classes]. I have to try to make myself deal with some of these imbalances in power. And [Nancy's colleague] feels that just studying it is enough and that bothers me, I have to say. That's not good. I know everybody has their own situation. So I just need to relax.

In response to the interview question about challenges to praxis, Graham said that although he strives to engage in critical praxis, he faces a challenging reality:

I'm brand new here and I'm trying to figure out my own survival and the easiest path is to teach them in the classroom and to do whatever everybody else is doing in the building and to follow along with the traditional approach to what we're doing.

Graham reported that he hopes that reality changes but he is concerned that he himself may develop the habit of just going with the flow.

Laurie said that one aspect of practicing critical pedagogy that is challenging to her is that “I am aware of some of the critiques about critical pedagogy. Many people believe that it is a nice way to think, but that there's no methodology.” She said she is concerned that too many pedagogues will choose to teach more traditionally if the message they receive is that there is no way to practically implement critical pedagogy.

In reference to the lack of congruence between theory and praxis, Linda claimed that, There are folks who really believe that they are very progressive; [they talk about] activities and all of that and yet when they have the opportunity to do these [activities] in the class, they don't take [advantage of the opportunity].

Sarah said that many of her students realize that there is a lack of congruence between theory and practice as it relates to their own teaching after they complete their degree and start teaching in the K-12 classroom. She said:

[While] most of them see themselves as constructivist and critical, they get into the classroom and they realize that what they're doing in [the classroom] is very behaviourist-oriented rather than justice-oriented and that the system itself is oriented in that way and they take a look at the contradictions in their own practice and the ways that they've adopted very behaviouristic practices as a result of being part of that system.

Sarah said that students articulate their beliefs in one way, but from what she has witnessed and from what they come back and recount to her, their actual practices may contradict those beliefs.

Sam said that after taking the state examination for teacher certification, his students will come back and say:

'Isn't this test just really hypocritical and contradicting everything that we've learned in terms of critical pedagogy? Meanwhile the state is promoting us to master these competencies and they come back and give us a multiple choice test to see if we've mastered them,' and I'll say, 'Ya, you're absolutely right. In order to be a practising principal in the state of Texas you do have to have this licence. And the licence is to pass the state exam.'

Sam said that his students are pretty savvy about what goes on and they themselves experience this lack of congruence between what they are being taught and how they get licensed and tested.

Donna concluded:

We have things that we have to do to balance [critical praxis] with meeting the college's framework as well as New Mexico's framework for what needs to be taught in a K-12 school administrator preparation program.

In reference to challenges with praxis, Bailey said that, "Everything is mitigating against [critical pedagogical praxis] now with the focus on testing and accountability and standardization and all of those things. It is really challenging."

On an institutional level, Sarah said that,

They're [the State of California] talking about reorganizing the oversight process. From my interpretation and others' interpretation, [this reorganization] looks a lot like "No Child Left Behind." It would mean a continuous stream of feeding [the state] data and analyzing data. Responding to state standards and doing the documentation to have our programs accredited has become increasingly prescriptive. The last set of standards that I did for 2000 had certain elements that were listed under each standard as guidelines, and you could formulate your program; [the elements] were suggestions. The latest set, which I procrastinated about for as long as I could because I just find it really oppressive, contained elements that were very prescriptive; every element was prescriptive.

Sarah said that it is getting harder to maintain freedom within the post-secondary classroom as a result of K-12 prescriptions.

Sam said that the emphasis on accreditation and testing in Texas makes it hard to convince students of the value of critical praxis, stating that students know that "In order to be a practising principal in the state of Texas you have to have a licence and to get the licence, you have to pass the state exam." He said that reality makes it hard for him to adopt a critical praxis within the post-secondary classroom. He said that it particularly makes it hard for him to employ

portfolios as a valid means of assessment and to convince people of the value of other alternative forms of assessment and evaluation. Sam went on to say:

I think it should cause us to pause and re-examine what we're doing in the state of Texas. Students can't just major in education. They have to major in a content area and then get their teacher's certification to go along with that. It causes me to think that, 'Whatever we are doing in our certification programs, we need to make sure that these students see a connection to what they are going to be doing in the classroom.'

Institutional Obstacles

Institutional obstacles were mentioned frequently as challenges to critical pedagogical praxis. This category represented a sub-category within challenges to praxis and included the following examples: institutional (ethics) review board (1); physical space of the classroom (2); large class size (3); course evaluations (10); time constraints (11); and issues related to promotion and tenure (11).

Meg discussed her challenges with the institutional (ethics) review board (IRB/ERB) stating:

You know just the way in which [the IRB] operates and their need to operate as such given the sort of federal restrictions on research, and the fact that we are within a research one institution, conflicts with the nature of action research. They're just not very consistent with one another.

She said that scientific and outcomes-based research is more familiar to most educators and to most members of the IRB. Action research is considered suspect by many.

Catherine said that the physical space of the classroom is problematic for doing critical pedagogy:

What makes my job harder and, in essence, makes my students' jobs harder is that we are in an education facility filled with classrooms, none of which model what a classroom actually should look like in an elementary or high school. I've asked administrators many times if a few faculty could join together and decide for one term to share a classroom and have students work to make it look like a real classroom with couches and chairs and cushions.

Catherine said that couches, chairs, and cushions were what she had in her classroom when she was teaching in a K-12 school and what she would choose to have in her post-secondary classroom if she didn't have to change rooms all the time.

Graham said that the physical space of the classroom is problematic, stating that:

The seats have fixed desk tops and the chairs are in rows and then [students and professors] can't walk [around the classroom]. [Students] are really uncomfortable in there.

He claimed that even simply moving students physically around the room, from direct instruction to group and cooperative learning, is a challenge and is time consuming. He also asserted that having 44 students in his multicultural education course impedes his ability to effectively practice critical pedagogy within the classroom because a class of that size is simply too large, in his opinion. Donna said that, for her, classes of 15-20 students are even too big to employ some of the practices that she would like, such as curriculum negotiation and self-assessment.

The issue of time came up as another institutional obstacle. Bob said that the short class periods represent an institutional obstacle and challenge to praxis for him:

How I am supposed to cover a certain amount of material in a short period of time, especially when there are some mathematics problems that we could spend literally days on? It is challenging.

He said that it is additionally challenging to stop when there is a critical, teachable moment.

Linda stated, "My course syllabi are so packed that when a crisis happens, there needs to be time to just put the lecture notes away or the syllabus away and say, 'Wow! Let's deal with this right now.'" But she said there often isn't that time. Donna said:

[I] have two hours and 35 minutes in which to cover a topic and if the topic needs more time, I have to choose to either carry it over to the next class session or to start something new. I don't think this is ideal because then neither topic will receive adequate coverage. I realize the need for having a certain amount of time, but if it were an ideal situation, we would congregate at a certain time and when we exhausted the topic of the day, we would leave. Yes, sometimes I think, 'Gosh, we could spend weeks on this one topic.'

Some participants talked about the teacher evaluations that are given at the end of a course as being an example of an institutional obstacle. Donna mentioned that they were not particularly valuable to helping her better understand her teaching practice. She stated:

I don't learn very much from the [end of semester evaluations] that the university requires. I mean I was a student and I've been in classes where we all filled them out and it is not easy to quantify someone's teaching effectiveness by circling a set of numbers (1-10). Students just unthinkingly circle, circle, circle. Unless people feel really strongly one way or the other, they usually make very few, if any, comments.

Donna said that the comments are most helpful, not the circles.

Mark said that, "I find those [course evaluations] to be a great hindrance because they promulgate a very conservative, traditional notion of pedagogy and postsecondary education." Mark actually is concerned that they may impede professors' willingness to engage in critical praxis. He said that faculty may teach toward the evaluation rather than teach toward a set of ideals or beliefs. Nancy mentioned that while she doesn't "really feel much reliance on student evaluations," she does believe that other "professors are watering down what they require [in their courses] because they want to receive high marks on student evaluations." She thinks

there is too much of an emphasis on student evaluations as they relate to issues of promotion and tenure and that this emphasis is actually having an effect on peoples' pedagogical decisions.

On the same topic, Taylor said:

I always have a few students who give me very low marks. Most of them are very high but the focus of the committee's [tenure and promotion] seems to be on the few negatives and they claim that I should have no negatives. For me to teach in a way that I have no negatives, I think I'd be teaching all middle-of-the-road stuff. To me, it is better to get through to the majority of students than to teach something that's so palatable that it doesn't really stretch anyone's thinking.

Taylor also said that, "Students now seem to think that they are customers and that professors have to keep them happy and comfortable." Further, she said there is a conflict between critical praxis and students' perception and that conflict is amplified by the promotion and tenure system. She shared this experience about the university's response to some of the lower marks on her course evaluations:

I am going through some of the hoops that [the institution is] throwing my way. They want me to observe how other teachers teach. They're giving me a lot of "homework" to do. You know, I have to observe teachers who have been recognized by the institution as outstanding teachers. They're making me do things like that. I do it, and quite frankly, I don't think some of these people are very good teachers.

Taylor said that, in her view, these observations are making her realize that those professors who avoid resistance are often those most valued by students and by the institution.

There were other examples of the ways in which issues of promotion and tenure served as an institutional obstacle for engaging in critical classroom praxis. Jack said that the promotion and tenure system is challenging. There is a "very strong individualism that is encouraged in some ways by the university tenure and promotion system; namely, you have to watch out for

number 1 first and foremost.” Mark mentioned that, “You [may] want to effect change in the classroom and institutionally, but you’ve got the fear of not getting tenure and so on.” Meg, on the other hand, said that she has “never felt constrained by the institution pre- or post-tenure.”

Relating to qualitative research, Jeff talked about the fact that there is resistance within post-secondary institutions:

There are some battles that we have won in terms of having the statisticians accept the qualitative research. I mean I was in meetings [in the past] where basically people stood up and said, in reference to this dissertation that I chaired, ‘This is bullshit and walked out.’ As you know, that is devastating to the student and you also begin to question your own credibility and so you have to fight those kinds of battles. It got to a point where we finally said, ‘Look, the world’s not flat anymore. Multiculturalism is here; qualitative research is another one.’ It finally filtered up to the ‘higher powers that be.’ It is like, ‘Hey, you know, academic freedom is here.’

Jeff said that he and his colleagues have to do a lot of work to “teach” others that conducting interviews and doing qualitative research is a valid method of understanding and interpreting the world.

Lack of Preparation

Fifteen out of the 17 research participants discussed the lack of preparation that students have when entering into the critical pedagogical classroom to engage in this form of praxis. Meg said that students are accustomed to being provided with the answers and one student in her class reacted the following way:

I have had students in the past who kept coming back to me saying, ‘I want you to tell me the answer. You know a lot about this, why aren’t you telling us about this?’ And they

seem frustrated with me. One student in particular last year ended up taking it out on me because I think he got kind of fed up with me because I wouldn't give him the answer.

Meg said, "That student dropped my class after the first quarter."

In reference to the question about challenges to praxis, Sarah reported:

For [her students], there's an unlearning process because very rarely have students ever been asked [to critically question assumptions] before. So it takes some getting used to. And many times [the students] keep looking to the teacher to do it for them and to lead them. I talk about that with them.

She said that she talks about the value of experiential education and the value of creating enough space for students to explore issues on their own. Sarah says that she takes students and their ideas seriously and hopefully this kind of respect helps students feel more comfortable to take some risks. Sarah said that she needs to be attentive to students' needs and she has to sometimes balance the more "traditional" with the critical at times, stating that, "Occasionally students will say, 'We want more of what you know,' and so I think there are some times when I could do that."

Donna said that many of her students learn to "tow the party line." She said that "No Child Left Behind and other acts like that" are "unfriendly" to critical educators because their focus is on testing and memorization rather than on critical inquiry. She assumes that students learn a certain set of skills early on in their education as a result of those educational initiatives. Linda mentioned that she is less surprised as time goes on that students are challenged by critical praxis:

Given what students have gone through for so many years, with the emphasis on grades, GPA, and standardized testing, it should not be surprising that they react with some discomfort. Students are used to getting a syllabus and being told what to do and they're just trying to get the best grade that they can.

Linda says that you cannot really blame students for being unprepared or for resisting when their previous preparation has directed them toward [testing and being told what to do].

Jack asserted that there are a number of factors that contribute to students' passivity within the classroom, stating that, "They've been programmed by an X number of years of school, programmed by society, programmed by their parents and their peer group to basically go with the flow."

Nancy said:

I was trying to change [my pedagogy] to be more 'in sync' with my philosophy which was focused on student engagement. However, [the students] were used to more direct instruction. And they really attacked me. They said I never told them anything and that they had to do all the work. Whereas I felt they were learning more when they had to do some digging. That was very painful and it made me be much more ["traditional" for awhile]. When I got my job, I started out much more directive because of that.

Catherine said that she addresses student passivity and students' previous preparation directly with her students. She tells her students, "You're sitting quietly listening while I sit in this circle with you, and that shows me that you've learned how to be a very good student." She then tells them that, "I don't want you to be so goody goody, I want you to be a bit baddy, baddy with me." She said that she encourages them to question her teaching and question their own assumptions and that it is all part of an "unlearning" process to help them understand some of the "hidden curriculum" and assumptions that they have been taught previously in their schooling.

On the same topic, Sarah concluded that:

Everybody's been socialized so strongly to agree with the instructor or the teacher. So I encourage those very traditional voices [to question assumptions] and they're reluctant at first. I'm kind of looking for them to recognize that there isn't one way to think about things but they're not used to an adversarial stance, so one of the challenges is how do

you keep inquiry and dialogue open and still be passionate about a point of view. I think it is totally false that someone has a neutral stance. I don't think there is any such thing. Sarah said that the teacher-student relationship and some of the socialized norms related to this make this dialogical process (and disagreement) very complex. Students don't always trust that their voices will be heard or valued if what is expressed is contrary to the teacher's opinions. She said that a lot of her students are also very worried that their mark will be affected if they express a contrary opinion.

Mark was the only research participant who said that he does not worry about this [lack of student preparation], concluding that, "I don't worry about preparation because I get them where they are at and it is my job as a professional to do what I can" to take them to the next place.

Linda asserted that the problem within her classroom was not only that the students lacked preparation, but that:

[I] did not necessarily know what I was going to be like going [into the post-secondary classroom] because I've never done [critical pedagogical praxis] to this extent, but I was open to go with the flow and follow my intuition and try to respond to what needed to happen and that would depend on what the students are like and how much they're putting into it. But I think that for me as an instructor, it was also very difficult to figure out what I needed to be doing.

Linda said that in her case, not only were the students unprepared for critical praxis, but so was she, as the professor.

In reference to faculty reactions to critical praxis, Sam said:

I think that, particularly with younger faculty, there's this idea that the students don't have the knowledge base to engage in the kind of trusting conversations and a collegial atmosphere that you may have in your graduate classes.

He went on to say that this assumption may inhibit younger professors from engaging in critical classroom praxis. In Sam's view, many professors have been prepared for something different in their experiences and don't trust students or the system enough to engage in some of the risks and discomfort of doing critical work.

Student Resistance

Student resistance represented another common theme when participants considered some of the challenges to critical pedagogical praxis. Resistance was most often described as students' resistance to engaging with critical praxis. Linda described her experience with student resistance saying:

What ended up happening is that first of all a couple of students really freaked out when I showed up on the first day of class with a very blank syllabus and told them that [the syllabus was partially dependent] on the role that they played. I would say that one or two students really took this as an opportunity to participate and in having a say in the curriculum, the assignments and also how they would be assessed, but more of the students just didn't say or do anything.

Linda believed that this experience pointed to two problems: lack of preparation and resistance to engaging in an alternative praxis.

In reference to student resistance, Larry reported that he conceives of resistance as follows:

I want to argue there is a very positive sense of resistance. I try not to look at so-called resistant students from a deficit mentality. I've had students who become very angry at something [that I said in class] but I don't always know exactly what it was. For example, the minute I mention globalization and the minute I mention marketization and things like that, which raise big political issues, some of them will say, 'Why do I have to deal with

this?' That becomes a big test for me. I can immediately start lecturing them, so to speak, and putting them down right. But I need to be very patient and at the same time, impatient inside.

He claimed that he can have two opposing feelings. Internally, he can experience a sense of urgency but he tries to keep this urgency and some of this passion in check so that he does not too quickly marginalize the resistant students.

Larry went on to provide this example:

I had one student, for example, who was very angry with these kinds of things. And then later I learned why. There were good reasons why, I think. And she wanted all the answers and quick-fix answers to big problems of democracy. I had forgotten this incident at one time, but she actually spoke about it in class and then in one of her essays, interestingly enough. And in one of the breaks, it was the third week, she approached me again with all of these questions and I saw a different tone in her questions. It wasn't the tone of trying to push me in the negative sense, but she was more passionate about what she was asking. I said, 'Yes, you need to let these things grow, the questions to grow, and the issues to grow.' I said, 'I think you need to be a bit patient as well.' I had completely forgotten that I had said this, but she came almost towards the end of the class and she said, 'You know I thought very seriously about what you told me there and I saw you being patient in the class with me.' And she said, 'I'm now starting to look at the world in a different way.'

Larry said that he grows and matures from moments like that as well.

In reference to resistance, Bailey stated:

There's plenty of resistance. It takes the form of, 'Oh, we've already done this; we did this in 301.' Or 'This is all we hear about; we need to hear about other things.' Or 'I

already know this or I've got this.' And so it takes a lot of work to get students to stay open.

On the same topic, Jack said that some students end up resenting him because they do not want to be "pushed" to think critically and to confront the assumptions that are central to critical pedagogical praxis. Taylor said that the process of, "getting students to even accept different points of view" can be challenging and met with resistance.

Students' experiences of the reality of the K-12 classroom also played a central role to participants' discussion about student resistance. Catherine said that students think they know about "[t]he pragmatic reality of working in classrooms in public schools with kids" and want their teacher preparation to address how to deal with "real world" disciplinary issues, not questioning assumptions. Sarah said that students in her courses react similarly:

The students will say somewhere during the course, 'Okay, I do really believe this in my heart, but this is not what the school looks like where I am at all. We're pushed [to focus on] test scores; test scores are the single unitary measure, and how do we do this?'

Sarah said that when students talk about the reality of the K-12 classroom and their lived experiences, they are essentially engaging in critical praxis, even if what they are critically questioning may demonstrate their resistance to critical pedagogy.

Anne said: "I have seen resistance from students at times. That's upsetting and sometimes that will show up in a student evaluation, but I wouldn't say that's my biggest struggle here."

Anne felt the institutional obstacles were greater than the resistance from students at her university. Jeff described the resistance that he has experienced as healthy, stating that, "I don't mind resistance from students; I think that it is healthy."

Mark said that faculty resistance may be more of a problem than student resistance, stating that, "Teachers sometimes are really thin-skinned, and [many faculty think] 'Oh my God, they're not going to like me.' 'Well, so what? In fact, if you're not getting resistance, you're not

doing the job.” He understands why faculty are resistant, because the institution does not always support this form of praxis, but he says that professors use that excuse too liberally.

In reference to faculty resistance, Larry reported that he has had faculty tell him:

‘You’re lowering the standards by doing [critical praxis].’ And my reply is that, ‘I don’t think that I am lowering standards. I see my critical praxis as introducing a different set of standards - one that may be marginalized by traditional institutions.’

Larry said that the introduction and evaluation of that new set of standards itself represents critical praxis.

Nancy claimed that one of her colleagues left the university because he was tired of so many wealthy kids complaining about requirements on their dissertations and so many parents complaining on behalf of their kids, saying they weren’t going to contribute money to the university. This resulted in pressure being placed on the faculty to allow poorer quality dissertations, in her colleague’s view, and frustrated Nancy’s colleague to such an extent that he left the university altogether. Nancy said that overall many of her colleagues are concerned that student resistance will lead to a less rigorous curricula.

Other Challenges to Praxis

Interview participants not only shared anecdotal examples of success, they also shared anecdotal challenges to praxis. Most research participants agreed that critical pedagogy was “risky” and this posed some challenges to praxis. Mark shared a story about one student who “wanted to sue me because he didn’t learn anything in class and actually went to the Provost of the university.” Anne shared the following:

I’m in a department that is rather conservative. I do have students who don’t like me at all and that’s fine. Frankly, I don’t think [some of them] have the disposition to be open to other people’s experiences. I’ve had some experience with that. I had one student who

stood up and really gave me some awful feedback on the last day in front of the whole class. And I didn't know how to stop him. I've never had that experience where someone just kept coming at me, and I think he said things like, 'You don't live your politics' and all these things that were really, really hurtful, and he really didn't have a right to say because he didn't know me.

Anne said that she pretty much just stood there because she was so shocked and did not know what to say. She said that she would now confront a student if that were to happen again.

In reference to challenges with praxis, Jack talked about his experiences:

In my classes, students always lay out a great deal of their self-identities to others, and you know, it is not always equally easy for everyone to do that. But by taking these risks, they can begin to develop a deeper appreciation of some of the political and institutional obstacles to achieving a more just and equitable vision of education through understanding this relevance in relation to their own lives.

He said that students generally are willing to take that risk with him.

Linda said that critical pedagogy involves real emotions and there's risk in that. She talked about how she tries to be explicit about such risk and to prepare students for that:

I start the class so that folks will know and expect that this will be difficult and that I'm encouraging them to take the risk to express the emotions and to also really look at how it is affecting their daily lives so that we can get as much out of this [the critical classroom experience] as possible.

She said she does so through community-building activities.

Jeff said that the critical classroom is just "not pretty at times" because of the conflict and discomfort that can arise. Larry wants students "to become aware of the risks and possibilities" of critical pedagogical praxis.

Participants additionally emphasized the increased time commitment required of both themselves, as professors, and of the students, as challenges to praxis. Jack said that he “easily” works 60 hours each week. He would like to be doing more writing and should probably consider putting less into his teaching, but he “doesn’t resent it because I think that’s part of my vocation - to work intensely with people who are here to learn.” Taylor reported that:

Other than the demands of being an academic these days and having to be on all the committees and advisement and everything else, I don’t know anybody in my department or at the university who puts in less than 60 hours a week.

Bailey said there is definitely an increased time investment for her when teaching critically, stating that:

If you teach traditionally you kind of get your powerpoints together beforehand with the same format, but I’m constantly rejujgling and reorganizing and using or not using something or making revisions to something based on the group.

She said that she feels like she has to be “on” all the time: “I have to be attentive; I have to know my resources; and I have to be confident.” Bailey said she thinks critical praxis is a more intense way to teach but also a more rewarding one.

Larry said that it is hard to engage with some of the critical classroom practices as a result of the increased time commitment. Ideally, he would like to provide students with opportunities for rewrites and have adequate time to provide them with meaningful feedback, but this ideal is challenging with all the other demands of university teaching.

Linda, Meg, Graham, Larry, and Laurie said they all had students say to them that the expectations are higher in their classes than in other professors’ classes, requiring an increased time commitment. Laurie commented on how some students “cannot [keep up with the coursework] because they were so overwhelmed with what’s being requested of them.” She is

concerned about this challenge but is uncertain about how to achieve a better balance between engaging in critical praxis and being sensitive to the increased demand on students' time.

A number of research participants noted that the idea of critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom is itself a bit of a repressive myth. Anne said, "I don't want to be a preacher and be on some kind of a pedestal. I don't want to feel like it is a religion. But sometimes it comes across that way." Larry said, "[Critical pedagogists] have to be careful that when we think we are going in with no structure that what we actually might be doing is [going in with a different structure] that is simply reproducing the current base structure." He advises professors to stay open to the multiple possibilities that may present themselves as a means to avoid turning counter-hegemonic praxis into a different form of hegemonic-praxis.

The final challenge to critical pedagogical praxis that was raised during the participant interviews was addressed by Catherine who stated that, "Being alone with that kind of way of working" is very challenging within the post-secondary university classroom. Anne agrees that it has been very difficult for her to effect change while working in a very conservative institution.

Critical Pedagogy and Change within Post-Secondary Classrooms and Universities

I posed three final questions during the interviews: "What would help you better understand the ways in which you engage in this form of praxis?" and/or "What recommendations would you provide for your students regarding this?" and "What would be needed either on an individual level or on an institutional level for you to be more able and willing to engage in this form of praxis?"

Participants' responses to these questions focused on the following themes and occurred with varying levels of frequency, including: importance of like-minded community (42) and association affiliations (15); importance of staying current with theory and practice (12); importance of contributing to theory and practice (6); and passion for teaching (4).

Importance of like-minded community and participation in associated affiliations

The importance of being part of a like-minded group of colleagues or part of a like-minded community was emphasized within participants' responses to the queries regarding what makes critical pedagogy work and what would be needed to effect more widespread incorporation of critical pedagogy within classrooms and universities.

Jack, Laurie, Sarah, Mark, Anne, Sam, and Taylor all talked about how significant it was for them to be part of a group of like-minded colleagues within their schools and faculties. As previously mentioned, Jack said, "I'm not a voice crying in the wilderness; rather, I'm working within a community of folks that have great commitments [to critical pedagogy]." Laurie said that she advises her students not to give up, telling them to, "Find someone who thinks like you and create a support network for yourself."

Anne, Mark, Sarah, Laurie, and Bailey had previously mentioned the fact that they had many like-minded colleagues within their own faculty and across other faculties within the university. Nancy said that she does research with colleagues from other faculties within her university:

There are two different [colleagues] - one is in Library Sciences and we did some research together and the other is in Early Childhood. We share literature that we want to read and ideas about how can we apply that in our teaching.

She said that it is exciting to get together with these colleagues and she finds support for her praxis in the work that they do.

Jeff shared that, "In recent years we've gotten a couple more faculty that I would identify as allies in some of the other departments." Catherine said that she wishes that there was more team teaching not only within faculties but across campus. She mentioned that she believes that team teaching and other forms of collaboration with other professors would help support critical pedagogical praxis within classrooms and on an institutional level.

Sam reported about the work that his university is pursuing, stating:

Our new vice president decided it would be worthwhile for all of the faculty and staff at the university to go through institutional training [in cultural proficiency]. So we began this year. It is really a huge proposition because we may have a couple of days of intense all-day retreats on it but there really needs to be some constant engagement in conversations and follow-ups, [so that] we're practising what we're preaching in terms of overcoming cultural destructiveness, cultural incompetence, across all differences, be they related to issues of sexual orientation, gender, religion, or whatever else they might be.

Sam said although there is some recognition at the institutional level regarding the significance of developing cultural proficiency, He believes that "We still have a long way to go."

In reference to the interview question about finding support for critical praxis, Taylor reported that:

I think the one thing that helps is having colleagues and friends who are involved in the practice themselves at other institutions and developing that kind of a support network. I [think it would be good if] there was a way to maybe even get more support on an institutional level. I don't really know how to go about that. I've been fortunate in that I've had experiences with colleagues who teach from a critical perspective and I've also found that people who are involved in critical pedagogy are extremely helpful to each other. I had Peter McLaren do a live hook-up with one of my classes, via satellite, which was phenomenal.

She said that this kind of collegiality is helpful.

Meg and Sam both talked about the importance of support groups within faculties and within the institution, as well as outside of the institution. Nancy said that she has some affiliation groups, made up of individuals from many different universities, with whom she gets

together at conferences. Many participants talked about the importance of going to conferences and being part of affiliated associations. Jack is a member of the University Continuing Education Association and the American Educational Research Association. Bob talked about his affiliation with the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* Bergamo conference. Jeff talked about a conference that he attends called Critical Pedagogy and Labour. Nancy attends conferences on International Collaborative Action Research and Anne spoke very highly of the Congress on Qualitative Inquiry that she attended. Mark is associated with the Association for Moral Education. In addition, this group of interview participants are all members of the Critical Educators for Social Justice Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association and highlighted the value of being a member of that association. Anne said that she was not attending the AERA conference this year because “AERA sort of poops me out. It is hard to come home and then go to another conference. No, I’m going to save all my energy for the Congress on Qualitative Inquiry.”

Importance of staying current with theory and practice

A number of participants talked about the importance of staying current with the field. Mark provided the following advice regarding the above queries. His advice to his students [and to me as the researcher] was that:

You should have the ability to not be overly defensive and to consider and to seek data that not only support your own position, but that help you gain a sense of other peoples’ positions and you should [strive to] always be open.

He said that all professors should assume a spirit of inquiry in all that they do. Mark believes that it is easy for pedagogues to get caught up in thinking that their way is the only way.

He goes on to advise:

Always think about the greater good but let the question be, 'How do I get to the greater good?' Be broad and visionary but also related to the pragmatic question of, 'What do I do on Monday morning that relates to the greater good?' I would say, 'Don't worry too much about how to do something until you figure out exactly what you want to do in terms of the values you think are important.'

Mark went on to advise young critical pedagogues:

Get some [supportive] colleagues and inform yourself; you must read. You must know what you're talking about and know the arguments of others. Understand the things that you don't believe in. You don't have to believe it, but you have to understand it before you can really take a position.

Jeff said that he believes that critical pedagogues need to work through some of their own issues. He said that, in part, critical pedagogues need to work more toward recognizing that not everybody sees the world in the same way. He said that it is most important that "people come together and work together on critical issues." He regards this need as a long term process but a necessary commitment on the part of educators.

Linda talked about the importance of reading and the importance of identifying resources. She also stated, "I would like to hear more about the student's role in critical pedagogy. Like what you're doing right now, I would be very curious to have read the people who write about being critical pedagogues, how did that work for them?" Bob, Bailey, and Jack also talked about the importance of staying current with theory and practice.

Importance of contributing to theory and practice

Jack reported that it has been really important for him to contribute to the field. He stated: I think it has probably been just during the last 10 years that I have started to say, 'Hey, I know what's going in the field and I'm not happy with it.' So I'm stepping up much more in my own writing and saying, 'I'm going to start putting out stuff that's ahead of the field.'

Anne, Donna, Sarah, and Sam all said that contributing to the body of knowledge is a central aspect to what makes critical pedagogy work. They also point to the need for more contributions related to both critical theory and practice as a means to respond to my second query regarding institutional change. Anne stated:

I think pedagogues have to be in tune with the fact that when they go into a job they should make sure that they remember that their own teaching can be a resource for research. It is a great way for professors to get publications and strengthen their teaching. That was a lesson that I learned early on. I was fortunate to get publications from that and it has really been helpful.

Anne said that she is not experiencing any pre-tenure crunch, in part as a result of having published a fair bit on her own teaching practices. She said that studying and writing about her own practice has also improved her teaching.

Passion for teaching

Passion for teaching was central to the previous discussion about success with praxis and was also mentioned in a few participants' responses regarding what makes critical pedagogy work within their classrooms. Nancy said that without her passion for teaching and her strong ethic of care, she imagines that students would care less and be less passionate in return.

Concluding Remarks

The interviews concluded with my inquiring about participants' attendance at the American Educational Research Association conference and their interest in participating in a focus group session with other interview participants. A number of interview participants also expressed to me that they saw value in my study and provided me with some feedback about the interview process. Catherine said, "[Your] questions were really, really good, very to the point, without being leading and really the right questions." Bob said that participating in the interview helped reinvigorate his thinking about ways to engage in critical praxis.

Sarah thanked me saying, "I just wanted to say thank you, it was informative. It helps with speculative thinking. When someone asks you questions, it makes you think about your own practice. So, thank you."

A number of people said that they were looking forward to the focus group session and to meeting the other interview participants. Bailey suggested that, "You should think about pulling together a panel [of us] and doing it as a presentation for the SIG [Critical Educator's for Social Justice Special Interest Group] or something like that." Catherine said that, "I'm really hoping to be in San Francisco" and to have the opportunity to meet other study participants in person.

CHAPTER 5: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

As mentioned previously, I believed that there would be relevance in the interactional nature of the focus group session (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I additionally anticipated that there would be added meaning to the research study as a result of focus group responses that were socially constructed rather than individually constructed (Berg, 2004). I was not disappointed. The focus group session proved meaningful for the purposes of this study and was additionally meaningful to those interview participants who chose to participate who were able to share ideas and learn from each other through the focus group process.

This fifth chapter includes the results of data analysis of the focus group session. The presentation of these results centres on the focus group session queries which related to the three main objectives of the study: 1) To determine the ways in which professors who espouse critical pedagogy practice it within the classroom; 2) To identify and better understand some of the successes that critical pedagogues experience as they engage in forms of critical classroom praxis; and 3) To identify and better understand some of the challenges to engaging in the praxis of critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom. The chapter begins with a recap of the focus group participants and then turns to a presentation of the results of the focus group session.

Recap of Participants

The focus group session took place on April 10, 2006 from 4:05-5:55 p.m. in a roundtable meeting room in the Renaissance Park Hotel in San Francisco, California. Four people participated in the focus group session. All four self-identified as Caucasian. There were three females. Each woman was in a different age bracket - one between 40-50, one between 50-60, and one between 60-70. There was one male who participated in the study and he was between 70-80 years old. Three of the participants were from American universities and one was

from a Canadian university. Two were from the same university and were quite surprised to see each other at the focus group session because neither of them had known that the other was a participant in the study. Three of them taught mostly graduate students and one taught predominantly undergraduate students. All four focus group participants had taught previously in the K-12 school system.

Purpose of Critical Pedagogy and Praxis

The focus group session began with some brief introductions. People said their names and where they were from, mostly to test the tape recording device. Because the participants had already been in the room and talking with each other, there appeared to be no need to do anything further in the way of introductions.

I began the focus group session with a question that had arisen in a roundtable discussion, entitled "Building Solidarity with Others: Practices in Social Action Pedagogy," that I attended the previous day. I asked the following, "I was in a roundtable session yesterday and there was a doctoral student presenting a paper on 'social action pedagogy.' I asked the student why she was naming what she did 'social action pedagogy' as opposed to 'critical praxis' or critical pedagogy.' The doctoral student's supervisor responded that, for her, praxis represented internal action and social action pedagogy represented the externalization of an educative process, both theory and reflection. In response to this, I would be curious to find out from all of you, 'Do you see any difference between social action pedagogy and critical praxis?'"

Social Action Pedagogy vs. Critical Praxis

Participants generally responded that they did not see a distinction between social action pedagogy and critical pedagogy. Mark responded that, “It doesn’t make much sense to me to say social, individual versus social, action pedagogy. I don’t see a disconnect between that and what Paulo Freire talks about particularly.” He said that Freire’s notion of conscientization, or “critical consciousness, that is its English equivalent,” has action imbedded in it always. He said, “I would assume that action is the internal, like Freud, if you believe in Freud, or it could be external, like Marx.” Sarah responded:

Well, there always has to be the internal and the external. So it seems to me a pretty fine distinction. Are you saying that the external is played out in the classrooms socially or in the larger world socially? That seems like a pretty fine distinction. I have an assignment in the democracy class that is a social action project and students go through a decision-making and social action piece. The focus is on the students. And I [could] call it social action pedagogy or critical praxis; I don’t see a distinction.

The discussion then moved freely into the other two participants’ ideas about the purpose of critical pedagogy.

Purpose of Critical Pedagogy

Participants said that they believe that the purpose of critical pedagogy is to help students develop a critical consciousness, to recognize and identify the political nature of schooling, and to encourage students to be social activists. Catherine responded that:

I want [students] to wake up to who they are as people and [to understand] that what they do as teachers matters; their kids matter; the relationships matter; and to be resilient in the face of all the forces that consciously and unconsciously play against them; [and to be] decent human beings with their kids. It is really basic. I’m a classroom and high school

teacher and teaching university now, so my perspective is pragmatic. I want the work to be real for my students in university and the big complaint is that it isn't. And so I want them to be critically wide awake. That's what [the purpose of critical pedagogy] means for me.

Sarah claimed that:

I would say that I want them politically wide awake too. And I think for me, my use of critical pedagogy started early on when I was a progressive educator. I have since become a critical educator, and, for me, the evolution of that is having gone from a focus on human growth and development to looking at power from a societal perspective and to examine where things are inequitable and unfair. I want my students to be wide awake and to be very mindful [of issues related to power and inequities] and to then work toward being willing to commit to a reallocation of power.

Catherine responded to Sarah by saying:

I'm so glad you said that in terms of the political because I've only recently understood, with more sophistication, the critical aspects [of my] work as a teacher. When I was working in [K-12] schools, it was just too awful. I had my classroom, we did our work and I ignored a lot of things that now I wouldn't ignore. I try to alert my students to the political in teaching, which is a harder job.

Bailey agreed:

I think the same, using slightly different words. I want the teachers I work with to understand social structures related to race, class, gender, ability, sexuality and how those power relations play out in the classroom to marginalize or privilege people. I think teaching is inherently political. I think teachers are so focused on preparing kids for a future that we forget that they are living their lives now and there is a need to make education real now by understanding the world our students live in.

Mark remarked that trying to identify a singular purpose for social justice or critical pedagogy is hard. He said that trying to identify when one has reached a level of critical awareness is hard to measure. Mark continued, saying that, "One time I asked Paulo [Freire], 'Tell me, are you critically conscious?' He responded, 'I am working on it.'" Mark thought that it was very interesting that Freire himself responded this way. For Mark it meant that, "[Conscientization] is not something you ever get; it is not something that you arrive at. It is dialectic and it is a commitment but it is [also] a feeling that one has to do something about." Mark said that many people want an answer to the question; "How do I become critically conscious?" But Mark responded that in his view, "There's no cookbook that tells us how to do it." For him, conscientization is a work in progress and something that is continuously emerging and evolving.

Sarah said that she feels a sense of urgency because of where she is at in her career. She went on to elaborate on this point, saying:

I feel a sense of urgency now for the way the country is but also as a result of where I am and because of where I thought I would be [at this point in my life] when I think back to being a mother with a baby in a stroller, protesting the Vietnam war and the ideals that I held then.

She said that when she thinks back to that time, she would have thought that the world would look differently now. She talked about her surprise that the United States is still at war.

Mark responded that he thinks about Dewey's question about democracy, musing that the query is not "How close are we to democracy?" but rather "How far away are we from fascism?" He added, "And I *really* mean that. I don't know about the Canadians, but in this country, there are some very scary trends." Catherine responded that, "Well, we [Canadians] watch you. And we had a federal election which brought in a minority conservative government. Very strange

man, very strange, truly.” And Sarah responded, “[It] must be leaking northward.” Catherine said, “That is what we are afraid of, really.”

Mark said that, “In our ideal world [critical pedagogy as praxis], kids and adults would take action against their own oppressions. It could be internal oppression and external oppression.” He mentioned the immigration march that was happening right at that moment on the corner of Mission and 16th Streets, just a short drive from where we were meeting, as one example of this form of critical praxis playing itself out in the real world.

Post-Secondary Classroom Praxis

I next asked, “If I would walk into your classrooms how would I see your commitment to critical pedagogy in the classroom? Would I see your commitment to critical pedagogy in the classroom?” Mark’s immediate response was, “It is not a technique or a menu. It is a commitment,” and others agreed. I asked, “But how does that commitment play itself out?”

Dialogue, Curriculum Negotiation, and Classroom Community

Dialogue, curriculum negotiation, and classroom community were mentioned 10 times and came up in participants’ initial responses to the query about examples of classroom practices in the focus group session. Sarah said:

I think we negotiate. I think it would be the nature of the discourse in the classroom. You wouldn’t find frontal teaching very often. That is technique. That is one strategy and it might be the most effective for a short period of time for a particular subject, but in my classes, it looks like we are having one long conversation.

Sarah claimed that she uses a lot of dialogue. She went on to say:

In the beginning of the course, we have to talk about what it means to actively listen and what it means to be fully mindful and present in class. There’s a lot of conversation, but it is conversation as dialogue - dialogue where you suspend judgment and come in with an

open mind to really actively listen to what each participant has to say. We don't always do it well. I don't always do it well, but we work on that. So, I would say one focus is the nature of discourse - who talks and how we listen and the nature of authority. I have one authority, but not the only authority in the classroom.

Mark talked about the way that he addresses authority. He said:

I tell the students that this is not an authoritarian classroom, but that there is authority in this room. I have certain legal obligations. I have to give you a grade. So, there is not negotiation all the time but there is some negotiation.

There may be negotiation related to content and assignments, according to Mark. He said that his actual classroom practices change all the time. Mark said that one example of a classroom practice is his use of what he refers to as cultural circles. In his view, cultural circles provide a means for students to bring their own experiences into the reading and content of the course. Mark said that he asks students to first read (R) and try to understand and to then write and reflect (R) on the reading and to then ask themselves to identify how they are going to act (A) on what they've learned. He described this as his 2RA pedagogical approach to critical reading and action. Students then share their insights through dialogue with others within the cultural circle.

Mark said that, in essence, students are practicing Freire's ideal of "reading the world by reading the word." In Mark's view, students are interpreting the reading and hearing others' interpretations of the reading and applying it to their own lived experiences and individual context. He said that students develop a deeper understanding of the text and a critical consciousness as a result of this dialogue. He said that students are compelled to examine how they will integrate what they have read and what they have discussed into their practice.

Bailey said, "getting back to your question about what my classroom would look like if you were walking through the hallway," she contributed:

I have a routine that's very focused on dialogue and it is very focused on active engagement. You walk down the halls in our teacher ed[ucation] program and you're always going to see groups and projects and chart paper and people reporting and sharing throughout the program in the first semester. The foundations professors use this idea of a rotating chair from women's studies pedagogy where the students take turns preparing facilitation dialogue and the chair is turned over after each interchange to whoever they feel has spoken the least. So it is this very equalizing idea.

Bailey also claimed:

I use a lot of media and pop-culture, things like [the movie] "Colour of Fear" (Mun Wah, 1994) and those types of things within the course. As the students start to do curricular projects in their field placements and in the culturally relevant teaching course and start to engage in social justice projects, they bring their experiences back into the classroom and share these through dialogue.

Bailey said that students also engage in small group work. She said, "I walk around and will engage with them or listen to see if people seem to understand the concepts. I teach very responsively."

Catherine said that she also uses a lot of media in her post-secondary classroom. She added that she uses "lots of performance and lots of art and music. I show some films too," and she also talked about how she brings in outside speakers. Sarah said that developing a sense of community within the classroom is an important part of critical pedagogy. Sarah said that she does a "check-in" at the beginning of every class as a means to build the classroom community. She said:

Check in [focuses on questions such as] 'What do we need to know this week?' 'What do you need to share with us so that you get it out of your brain or out of your mind and out on the table so that you can then fully engage?'

She said that, “In the process, [the class] becomes a group; we bond.” She went on to say that through this process, “Each person becomes not just what you see on the surface, but a human being with all his or her complexities, levels, and layers.” For Sarah, this practice, that relates more to process than to content, is central to her teaching.

Sarah noted that it was interesting that almost everyone in the focus group mentioned the importance of building a community of learners and trying to create a “safe space” in the classroom. She said that if there were two central aspects to her classroom practices they would be safety and surprise. She said:

I teach a research class and I always say that if [critical] inquiry is really genuine and authentic, there will be some surprises. There will be some things that are unexpected.

The same thing happens in a wonderful, delightful way in the classroom if you create that space. So if the course content is always prescribed, ‘I give you this, you regurgitate it back to me,’ you are never going to be surprised because there isn’t a space created in the classroom for that. The best classroom moments for me are the times when I am surprised in a wonderful way because somebody shares something that I would not have imagined or does something with an assignment that does something that I would never have thought about.

Sarah said that surprise is integral to critical pedagogical praxis.

Mark said he liked the idea of surprise and described one classroom activity that he employs that involves an element of surprise. In teaching students about authority and authority in the classroom, Mark gives students “the same protocol that Stanley Milgram did in his original research in 1966” [on obedience to authority]. He shows them the film entitled “Obedience to Authority” (1974) about the experiment at Yale University designed to find a reason for the holocaust. The premise was to test how much pain a normal individual would inflict on another person if directed to do so by an authority figure. The main query that Milgram wanted to

explore was how far a person (research participant) will go to comply with authority (in this case, the experimenter's instructions) before refusing to carry out the actions required of him?

Mark said that before he shows the film he has his students predict how [the research participants] will respond. He said that his students predict that people will only go so far with their obedience to authority. Mark said that he then “show[s] them the film and everybody is shocked [at how far people will go with their obedience to authority].” He uses this example as his own mini-experiment in class to demonstrate to students how authority can grab hold of a person and he then links this result to the ways in which traditional education has influenced students to obey authority.

Sarah responded that Mark was structuring in surprise and everyone laughed in agreement. Mark said that he uses this activity to teach students about values and to be “uncomfortable with their own perceptions.” He asks students to consider what values are central to their teaching practice and to them as people. He then has them take a value survey and gives them the results of that survey. Mark said that students then discuss the congruence, or often lack thereof, between what they profess as valuable and what they actually assess as valuable. He added:

I give them some theory related to this when it is all over. I say to them, ‘Now that you have seen the film “Obedience to Authority” and examined your own values, here’s some stuff to read and to think about in relation to your own teaching practice.’

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation was mentioned less often in reference to the query about examples of classroom practices, but for Catherine, this was a central aspect of her teaching practice. Catherine said, “I don’t mark [the students’ assignments]. I don’t mark anything that they do. They self-evaluate everything. And I give them guidelines throughout the term. I’ve had

to do that because they told me that they needed some structure.” Catherine said that students are so attuned to the mark as being the most important part of their “learning” and she has had to work with students on that. She said:

I tend to get very visual with the idea of marking. I ask them how they would feel if someone went around and put red marks on their forehead, ‘F,’ ‘A,’ ‘B,’ in indelible ink and sometimes I even have an activity around that and I actually mark them up.

Catherine said that she tries to encourage students to see marks differently. She said that students’ first reaction when she presents the idea of self-assessment is that, “Students get the ‘free A’ look in their eyes.” Catherine claimed that she explicitly states that there will be rigour and structure within the self-assessment that students do.

Mark said that, “I think Eisner has a lot to say about assessment and evaluation” as it relates to learning styles and intelligences. Mark told the focus group that he applies some of Eisner’s research on assessment in reference to his own classroom practices. He also talked about the value of alternative assessments in the form of poster presentations, action papers and projects, and collages and artwork. He said, “I came across a great book that talked about the political nature of posters throughout history” and I have made that into an assignment where “students have to design posters that address some aspect of political life or schooling.”

In reference to assessment and evaluation, Sarah contributed that, “It is interesting that there can be a creative thread and space for [alternative forms of assessment] in the classroom.” She said that assessment does not have to be in the form of words. “There are other ways for people to express themselves and other ways to demonstrate competence,” but Sarah did not elaborate on any specific examples that she employs.

Success with Praxis

I next asked about whether or not participants all thought that they experienced some success with critical pedagogical praxis and how they knew if they were successful. I talked to them about my experience with writing the literature review for the dissertation. I mentioned that I had been able to identify some examples of critical praxis within the literature and that some of the literature also concluded that critical praxis was successful, but that those conclusions seemed to be predominantly anecdotal. I said that I found very little empirical research related to the field of critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom.

Mark immediately responded that trying to identify a specific set of outcomes and trying to conduct evidence-based research within the field of critical pedagogy is problematic because of the nature of the discipline. Research on critical pedagogy is not like scientific research that is trying to measure and quantify something, in Mark's view. He said that the field of critical pedagogy may have a different perception about what counts as evidence. Bailey said that, "I would like to respond to that because it is something that I'm looking at in my research." She talked about three sections of a course entitled "Culturally Relevant Teaching." Each section is being taught by a different person. She said:

The three of us [the professor for each section] decided last year to collect samples of student work and do a multicultural survey to really look at the cohort of students in culturally relevant teaching to see what they were getting out of it and how they were bringing it into the classroom. [The students] do a cultural autobiography in the course. We decided to take a look at that using a lens of racial identity awareness to see whether any shifts occurred [in their thinking]. Students do a preliminary cultural narrative at the beginning of the course and then they 'work it' and we 'talk it,' and it weaves through the course and then they turn in a final one. So we have some of their early writing and reflection and some later writing. And then we also did a pre-test and post-test

multicultural awareness and preparedness survey, a quantitative instrument that we found online.

Bailey said that they did not have the results from this project yet. She said that her students engage in empirical research related to critical pedagogy through one of their course assignments as well.

Bailey further said:

[The students] have a pop culture and social action project where they do an analysis; they survey the kids in their field placement to see what they are reading and viewing.

[They look into] the video games that students are playing, for example. They then pick a lens, either race, gender, or ability, and they analyze the kids' favourite things.

Bailey reported that the students will,

[take the television show] Lizzy Maguire, for example, and look at what messages are given about gender, about girls and boys or they will pick a video game that fifth grade students are playing. And when they do this, they quickly see the biased messages. And the students are like, 'Oh my God, I can't believe 3rd graders are watching Lizzy Maguire!' They sound like their grandparents all of a sudden. They are truly horrified.

She said that she next asks the students "to find the good stuff, good representations and plans, and to design some curriculum around that and to introduce it in the classroom, and then document kids' learning."

Bailey went on to say that:

Students actually presented this year and last year on [these curricular action projects] and now [the three professors] are looking at how to bring this discourse of teaching for social justice and culturally relevant teaching into the classrooms of the teachers who are working to support them in these learning projects.

Bailey mentioned that one result of this project is that, “The cooperating teachers are shifting in their understanding from a [focus on] character ed[ucation] to a [focus on] teaching for social justice.”

Sarah then asked if she could pose a question to the group as a whole and she queried:

We have some students who come to our university because they know that we stand for social justice. We have other students who come for a variety of reasons and we get resistance from them, whether it is in response to content related to inclusive schooling, whether it is in response to reading Paulo Freire, or whether it is resistance to engaging in the social action projects. We do have some very traditional people who come in with an ideology that’s very traditional. What I am wondering is, ‘Does everybody know when they come into your programs that [teaching for social justice] is the nature of the program? Do you have a continuum like we do that specifically focuses on justice?’

She then asked us:

‘What do you do?’ I mean I’ve heard some students say, ‘We go into every class and [social justice] gets shoved down our throats.’ The students say they have no choice. How do you communicate the justice-oriented nature of your curricula?

Catherine responded that the university that she teaches at is not known for having a social justice curriculum. She said that teaching for social justice is something that is done on an individual basis, by individual professors, in their individual classrooms. I responded that I have one like-minded colleague in the faculty where I teach but that I have many like-minded colleagues in Education and Women’s Studies and that support helps.

Bailey responded that, “Teaching for social justice is in the conceptual framework [at her university] - both authentic learning and teaching for social justice.” She said that, “Students have to write an essay on the topic in order to get into the program.” When Bailey said this, there were “oohs” and “aahs” from people in the room. Bailey went on to share that:

There are students who need to be introduced to it, and there is what we call an anchor course, in each semester of the program. [The first one] explicitly focuses on pedagogy and social justice. [During] the second semester, there's a special ed[ucation] course taught through an advocacy approach with inclusive learning. The third semester [includes] a culturally relevant teaching [course] and the fourth semester has professionalism and teaching for social justice [as the anchor course]. So they have that anchor course in every semester.

Bailey mentioned they have also had a study group at her university for two years which focused on social justice, examining two essential questions: "What does [social justice] mean?" and "What does it look like in our pedagogy?"

Bailey acknowledged that her students still show resistance and there are still challenges. She said that students demonstrate resistance by ignoring their own privilege and by asserting that, for example, gender oppression is no longer an issue. Bailey said:

Many students come into the university with norms of polite talk and middle-class niceness. They bring that with them and we talk about that. When I see resistance in my class, I'll label it and I'll describe it, and I'll characterize it as a pattern, as something that they may have learned as a middle-class white person, but there are other ways to interact and be in the world.

She said that students demonstrate resistance through their polite talk as well, by not wanting to confront difference or knowing how to confront it.

Challenges with Praxis

I used Bailey's comment about resistance to ask about some of the other challenges to engaging in this form of critical pedagogical praxis. A number of participants said that they felt most challenged by conservative educational initiatives, such as the U.S.-based "No Child Left

Behind” act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) and other “real world” constraints, including the realities of the K-12 classroom. Other participants said there were a number of institutional obstacles related to post-secondary education, including student evaluations. Participants also said that the increased time commitment to engaging in critical praxis was a challenge.

“No Child Left Behind” and “Real World” Constraints

Many of the initial responses focused on the reality of the K-12 classroom and the “No Child Left Behind” initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Sarah said:

Mark and I have a colleague who during her sabbatical has been surveying her teacher candidates five years out [of our university]. One of the outstanding themes that has resulted from this research is that students leave our university saying that they really believe in the justice-oriented curriculum and [yet the students say that the] K-12 public school curriculum is prescriptive and focused on testing. The students are told what page to be on [in the curriculum] and they say that there are weekly assessments. These students, who are teachers in the K-12 classroom, say that they have to cover the material and then they have to move on to the next bit of material. If a teacher decides that he or she needs to go back and work with the earlier material for longer, he or she knows that the students may be penalized because they may not do as well on the following week’s test.

Sarah said that for her it is very challenging to work with her post-secondary education students about how to incorporate some of the ideals of social justice into the curricula when so many of them end up practicing in a conservative educational environment. Sarah mentioned that, “I work with students who are studying to be school administrators as well.” She went on to say that:

The teachers believe that the administrators are imposing the [prescriptive curriculum and testing] on them. Administrators believe that the district is doing this to them. The district

believes that it is the state. The national thing [“No Child Left Behind” initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)] trickles down.

Catherine queried, “Does no one say no? This is a Canadian innocent asking, but are there states that say no?” Mark responded that, “No, the States can’t say no because they will lose their money.” Bailey said, “There are huge penalties. It is all tied into funding. There are punitive aspects to “No Child Left Behind” that punish families and the schools that are underfunded. She said that this law creates further inequities because:

The schools that do not measure up often have more diversity and less resources and they have to show improvement for a larger number of subgroups. I mean the odds are stacked against them. In New York City, all throughout the city, the schools are closing and teachers are being fired. Teachers are getting shuffled around and placed somewhere else. Many [people] are coming to see it as the privatization of education. It really is the willful destruction of public education in this country coupled with the charter school movement. In essence, Bailey said that “No Child Left Behind” is failing the public school system.

Catherine asked, “Are there pockets of resistance?” and Sarah responded that, “The state of Connecticut is the one state that has sued. “ When Catherine asked, “Sued what, the federal government?,” Sarah responded, “Yes, I’m trying to think of the grounds.” Sarah went on to say, “The state of Utah has said that anywhere that “No Child Left Behind” is in conflict with the laws in the state of Utah, that the state laws will come first. So, they’ve resisted in that way. There are individual districts that have resisted and it is growing.”

Sarah remarked:

You hear educators and administrators saying that ““No Child Left Behind” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) is a huge challenge.’ We were talking about “No Child Left Behind” in class the other day and a student said, ‘I have to steal time away and I will be scolded and reprimanded if an administrator walks in and I’m not on the

[prescribed] page [of the curriculum].’ The student said, ‘If I want to take a teachable moment, or I want to take time, I have to steal it.’

Sarah concluded, “Now that’s pretty sad.”

Mark talked about a recent article in the *Harvard Educational Review* about two young teachers:

They were not necessarily critical pedagogues, but just had a real sense of [student-centred pedagogy] and the one teacher lost her job and the thing was, [it was said that she was] not a good team player and was not playing the game even though her evaluations were [good] and the kids loved her. And the young man quit and went to another district as I remember. Two very promising teachers.

Sarah responded that she had heard something about that article and said:

One fear is that the creative teachers that are interested in critical pedagogy will get fired. The system is so oppressive that those are the teachers we will lose. Those are the ones that will leave the field, and we will be left with the public school system with teachers who flourish because they play the game and because they conform. So it is a real worry.

Catherine said that:

It is like [the educational system] keeps going back to the lowest possible level of engaging people. I wonder if it is because there are so many people who are actually in the system, the teachers and administrators, who don’t work together as a real team, who don’t really act together, who just let it happen. I mean it is people who do this. I don’t understand it.

Bailey remarked:

I think there’s more pressure now than there was in the 50s and 60s because of public accountability. It is the same old scripted stuff, but now it is on fast forward and it is reported in the paper. You can number crunch so much more easily with computers. You

can spit out these report cards that pit one school against another school. It feels like this gigantic race to some illusive finish line to save the country. It is all market economy and consumer-based. I kind of see it as our job to help teachers develop that critical stance towards what's going on rather than just...

Mark jumped in and responded with this statement: "If critical pedagogy [were effective], it would bring about a regime change. It could change the direction of this new empire that is taking place right now in this country." Bailey agreed saying, "If you think about Freire and critical pedagogy, he took on the Church and the State – the two biggest public institutions."

I asked if there were any micro challenges to engaging in critical pedagogy, saying that the "No Child Left Behind" act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) and other governmental initiatives clearly represented a macro level challenge in their estimation. Participants said that there were some institutional obstacles that made it challenging to engage in critical praxis.

Institutional Obstacles

Participants responded that working within a post-secondary institution posed some challenges to engaging in critical pedagogical praxis. Mark said that, "There are challenges that concern young faculty members in university because of the impact of student responses on student evaluations." He gave an example of a young faculty member's first year of teaching at his university, saying:

She was a young black woman teaching multicultural [education] and she was trying to create a situation where all voices could be heard and students were invited to explain their experiences and this one fellow gets up. It turns out that he is a former attorney, a litigator, a rather large white guy, and says, 'Yes, I feel oppressed as a white male. I could not get in the school of my choice because I was white, somebody else got that spot. I couldn't get into the law school where I wanted to go because somebody else took

that position from me.' He then waved a couple of books in the air and he gets up saying, 'And this multiculturalism [stuff] and this stuff that Freire talks about is a bunch of crap' and he throws the books [at this young professor] and walks out.

Mark said that this incident raised a number of critical questions within the university community, including: "What did she do and did she act correctly?" Mark said that the more important questions to ask may be "What is going on here [culturally]?" and the professional and ethical question is, "Should this guy get credentialed?" Mark said another critical question to ask is, "If that professor would have looked more like our dean, a big white guy, would the same thing have happened?" He wondered about what it was that empowered and enabled this student to act that way - was it because the professor was young, was a female, was African American or was it related to the course content? Mark also wondered if that student felt some sense of empowerment or entitlement that, as an upper class white male, he had a right to speak out in that way?

Bailey responded that, "Certainly for women of colour, the risk of engaging in critical praxis is multiplied." She continued, saying, "All too often new, untenured faculty of colour end up teaching multicultural ed[ucation] courses and it is not okay [for this to happen]." Bailey said that faculty of colour often get asked to teach the "token" introductory course that focuses on multiculturalism and race relations because universities want to promote diversity and think that requiring an introductory course and having that course taught by a faculty of colour is one means to accomplish the goal of diversity. Bailey said that this assignment puts faculty of colour at a considerable disadvantage because those courses involve some inherent risk related to the content.

Sarah agreed with Bailey, saying that, "We have lost some faculty of colour who have been asked to teach those courses during their first year at the university. Their student evaluations, at least in the beginning, tend to be less positive." Sarah went on to say that, "Some

of the faculty of colour at her university have been able to effectively argue and demonstrate to administrators that those professors who look most like the students get higher evaluations.”

Bailey said that her university has been working on ways to better support the faculty of colour. She said that:

I've been at my institution for 18 years and when I came it was a department of 30 or so predominantly white men. Now there are 35 of us: two white men, many faculty of colour, and many more than the norm of gay/lesbian faculty. It is a faculty of people who are committed to walking the walk.

Bailey mentioned that the transition did not happen seamlessly however. She said that the faculty went through a seven to eight year period where there was a revolving door of faculty coming in and out. “We had to bring in faculty of colour and we had no idea of how to do this, how to support these colleagues, because they would [often] be teaching the most challenging courses [multicultural education, for example].”

Bailey concluded that there is more stability within the faculty now and better support for faculty of colour as a result. She said that:

We talk to our students before they do their first evaluations about [biases and the need to be accepting of difference and being challenged in the classroom]. We work with our colleagues of colour to really confront [the challenges that they face in teaching these courses] and it really has evolved into a place that is, although far from perfect, much better in terms of building community. We team teach and we focus on coalition-building. I sat in [another professor's] course for a whole semester to help me understand at a deeper level what some of the pedagogical challenges are when someone is teaching within the post-secondary classroom and he or she is a person of colour.

Catherine said to Bailey, “You’re modelling for your students how they’re supposed to work together as teachers.” Bailey responded that, “We’re trying and we still make mistakes all the time, but that kind of goes with the territory.”

Time Commitment

The final challenge that was raised by participants within the focus group session was the increased time commitment that is required of them when engaging in critical pedagogical praxis. Catherine said that, “I put a lot of time into planning and then I let it go during the term. I plan obsessively and I get the structure and then I put it out to the students and then I see what happens.” She shared that, “I’m sure that we all know it, but it is incredibly energy-draining to just be there with the students, particularly because I have these huge classes [over 100 students at times].” She concluded that there is a time and energy commitment to “always being there” and being fully present with them.

Sarah agreed that:

I look at people in other fields, not so much in education, but I do see a difference in time commitment. We are supposed to be paperless society, but I always come in with a stack of stuff. I do folders. Each of my students has a folder. And there is correspondence going back and forth every week. That is time consuming, but I believe that feedback is one of the most valuable ways to interact individually with students and so I do that. But I look at colleagues. I teach in the business school sometimes, and the [business professors] come in with a little CD and they pop it in their computer and the powerpoint comes up and they go up [and do their lecture]. I come in with a stack of books and folders and feedback on students’ writing. It takes so much time every week to do that.

She added, “There is always another article to read. Half the time it comes from him [points to Mark, across the table]. There is always something else to read and another activity to

think about and to do.” She said that it is time consuming, but “I think conversely that if it was not like that it would not keep me [interested].” Sarah concluded that having an engaged curiosity about the students, uncovering new material, and teaching as best as she could is what keeps her interested in teaching.

Both Sarah and Mark, who are from the same university, said that the time commitment is worth it because they like their colleagues and because they are in an environment where most people are committed and support each other. Sarah said that, “People have always commented about our relationships in the faculty. We confront the dean openly in meetings [too].” Sarah and Mark both agreed that it is not hard for them to be committed as a result of being in that kind of supportive environment.

Concluding Remarks

When I asked people if they had any further questions or anything to add, Mark said that he was intrigued by the fact that I was teaching in a School of Outdoor, Recreation, Parks, and Tourism rather than in a Faculty of Education. He asked me about my interest in critical pedagogy and how it related to teaching outdoor recreation. I told him that for a period of time, my teaching was focused on outdoor recreation and wilderness trips but as I more closely examined the purpose of that, I began to reflect upon the ideal of using outdoor recreation as a means to build community. I told him that I began to become aware that outdoor recreation and community building were linked to issues of social justice and began to be more purposeful about the social justice orientation of outdoor and experiential education as a result of that realization. I said that my research question arose as a result of reflecting upon my own teaching. Bailey said that she had wondered about the connection between critical pedagogy and outdoor recreation as well.

Catherine asked if I would include them all on the next email so that they would have each other's contact information. I told them that I would, and that I would send out the transcripts for them to review. I reminded Bailey that she had mentioned to me, at the end of her phone interview, that I should look into the possibility of presenting a panel discussion at next year's AERA conference related to the study. I asked if people would be interested in presenting some of the findings and talking about the study at next year's AERA conference and Catherine said that "Yeah, I would love that," and Sarah agreed, "That would be great." The focus group session ended at 5:55 p.m.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Throughout this discussion, I use the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003) as a means to approach my interpretation of the results. Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the coevolutionary search for new ideas, linking people's positive insights in working toward change by assuming that "every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2003, p. 3). My use of the AI framework does not preclude a critical analysis of participants' ideas or a critical examination of the review of related literature.

I explore these results and articulate my interpretation of them through my deepening knowledge of the field of critical pedagogy itself. Through the process of writing this dissertation and collecting data, I have developed a growing awareness of the role of schools in maintaining the dominant culture and the potential for critical pedagogy as praxis to offer a reconceptualization of schools as sites for liberatory "possibilities" (Gur'Ze'ev, 1998; Simon 1992).

That said, I feel as though I have arrived at a place of having acquired "difficult knowledge" (Lather, 2001) as well. In *Getting Smart* (1991), Lather argues that the seductions of and resistance to postmodernism can help us to "get smart" about the possibilities and limits of critical praxis. In *Getting Lost* (in press), Lather contends that it is not so easy to get smart. In Lather's view, asking hard questions about necessary complicities, dispersing rather than capturing meaning, producing bafflement rather than solutions, and valuing experiential ways of knowing versus interpretive authority lie at the heart of finding oneself and answers to questions and require first "getting lost."

I do feel a bit lost and although Lather (1998) may actually applaud me for being able to acknowledge the "stuck place" that I currently inhabit, it is nonetheless discomfoting. For me,

this stuck place (Lather, 1998) and the “difficult knowledges” (Lather, 2001) with which I am grappling are related to the poststructural ideal that a critical pedagogical praxis which challenges the hegemonic norms of a transmission-based model of education (Freire, 1970) and pursues the “possibilities” for education to serve as a vehicle for a more socially just world would appear to exist more as an ideal than as a lived reality, at least as experienced by the participants in my study. How do I deconstruct and respond to participants’ acknowledgment that their critical praxis is impeded by the “No Child Left Behind Act” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)? How do I work within the “stuck place” (Lather, 1998) of participants’ acknowledgement that their desire to engage in counterhegemonic praxis is confounded by issues of promotion and tenure and low scores on student evaluations? How do I remain respectful of participants’ experiences and efforts while simultaneously pushing them and myself to dig more deeply into some of their conclusions and assumptions?

In all honesty, and perhaps I am implicating myself and my own naivete here, I truly believed that I would end the process of dissertation research and writing with a set of critical pedagogical practices that I could, in essence, share with the world. I envisioned an edited volume of “*Best Practices*” for *Critical Pedagogues Working Within the Post-Secondary Classroom*. I additionally presumed that I would hear solid evidence of the success of these practices within the post-secondary classroom, adding to what I had, again naively, regarded as the heretofore somewhat paltry testaments in the review of related literature. Despite the challenges that I faced when writing the review of related literature and my attempt to locate some of these practices and examples of success within the critical pedagogy literature, I was unable to fully grasp underlying problems. Perhaps I am still unable to fully understand why there is less substantive evidence of some of the practices and success of critical pedagogy, but I perhaps understand just a bit better now why this lack of evidence may be.

This entire process has brought me to the “difficult knowledge” that Lather (in press) speaks of in *Getting Lost*. For me personally, the difficulty resides in my wanting to concretize the findings from this three-year project while, given my emergent and deepening knowledge of the field of critical pedagogy itself, acceding to the poststructural impossibility of ultimately naming, concluding or identifying anything as conclusive and legitimate (Britzman, 2003; Pillow, 2000).

How then, might I proceed? My intent is to offer an interpretation of the results of the three data sources: interviews, course syllabi (chapter 4), and the focus group session (chapter 5). I attempt to dislocate myself from the “stuck place” of needing to identify, quantify, measure and concretize the results and endeavour to heed the poststructural call to listen, respond to, deconstruct, and critically question suppositions (Pillow, 2000). I strive to draw some conclusions while simultaneously attempting to circumvent the “one size fits all” model of doing critical pedagogy. Trying to keep the tension alive means entering into this discussion with some reluctance and some doubt. I fear that the “difficult knowledge” of trying to avoid prescription and avoid the concretization of some ideas may result in my not saying much of anything at all.

In this discussion, I will attempt to practice a critical pedagogy that troubles critical themes and analyzes critical incidents and conclusions (deCastell & Bryson, 1997a). I pose critical questions and perhaps point toward some conclusions while attempting to avoid the reification of critical pedagogical praxis. This analysis also includes some confessional moments as I reflect back on what I would have done differently during the interviews and focus group session to elicit more in depth responses and to “push” participants’ and my own thinking a bit further. This interpretation is an attempt to find myself again and relocate myself and my understanding of critical pedagogical praxis through integrating the review of related literature with participants’ responses from the interviews and the focus group session.

This discussion focuses on the three main objectives of the research study: 1) To determine the ways in which professors who espouse critical pedagogy practice it within the classroom; 2) To identify and better understand some of the successes that critical pedagogues experience as they engage in forms of critical classroom praxis; and 3) To identify and better understand some of the challenges to engaging in the praxis of critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom. To my surprise, the raw data and analysis provided little evidence of differences in participant responses related to these three main objectives as a result of participant demographics. On the rare occasion when the analysis of data pointed to a result that could be attributed to demographic differences (e.g. gender), that is noted.

Before addressing these three objectives, I start with a discussion of the research results as they relate to definitions of critical pedagogy and its main purposes and influential theorists and related pedagogies. Overall, this chapter most closely mirrors the structure of the report of interview results from Chapter 4. Chapter 6 therefore includes a discussion of critical pedagogy definitions, purposes, theories, influential theorists, and related pedagogies, a discussion of post-secondary classroom praxis, a discussion of success with praxis, and a discussion of challenges to critical pedagogical praxis. Chapter 7 concludes this study with a discussion of the implications of this research on current pedagogical praxis and recommendations for future studies.

Critical Pedagogy - Definitions and Purpose and Influential Theorists and Related Pedagogies

I was quite curious to better understand individual participants' perception of critical pedagogy because I myself had seen a great deal of variance in definitions and purposes as a result of writing the review of related literature (Chapter 2). In essence, during the process of preparing to defend this study's research proposal, I was struck by Gur-Ze'ev's (1998) conclusion that there are numerous definitions and versions of present day critical theory and

critical pedagogy, and I wanted to gain a sense of how participants in this present research study perceived the “project” of critical pedagogy in relation to their own post-secondary classroom praxis. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, there were a variety of responses from participants when they were asked about their definitions of critical pedagogy and asked about the central aims of critical pedagogy.

Definitions and Purpose of Critical Pedagogy

A number of critical pedagogues, Burbules, Freire, Apple, and Giroux among others, regard critical pedagogy as representative of a “language of possibility” (Gur’Ze’ev, 1998). In this version of critical pedagogy, Giroux (1992) emphasizes the importance of differences among groups, persons, knowledge and needs. His educational project is to reconstruct or decipher the power relations that produce the subject, consciousness, identity, knowledge, and possibilities that act in and change reality.

Simon (1992) argues that the ultimate aim of critical pedagogy is to extend the notion of a pedagogy of possibility to consider actual forms of school praxis that both address and disrupt power and politics. Shor (1996), in essence, did just that by bringing the theory of critical pedagogy and, in particular, some of the educational ideals of Freire (1970), into the post-secondary classroom.

Gore (1993), alongside Lather (1998) and Kohli (1998), reasserts the potential for critical pedagogy to critique broader issues of hegemony that relate to race, gender, sexuality, as well as class. They further argue for a classroom praxis that reflects these educational ideals. Others emphasize the affiliations of critical pedagogy with poststructuralism (Pillow, 2000), transformative pedagogy (hooks, 1994), the psychoanalytic tradition (Britzman, 2003), and feminist pedagogies (Shrewsbury, 1987; Weiler, 2001).

Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa (2005) cited concerns regarding professors' difficulty with naming the justice-oriented nature of critical pedagogy in a study that they conducted with 17 physical education teacher educators and their personal perspectives regarding their practice of critical pedagogy. They concluded that 11 of the 17 self-identified critical pedagogues in the study had vague definitions of critical pedagogy, its principles, and its purpose and three of the study participants had no definitions at all.

The results from the Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa study suggest that while some people may self-identify as critical pedagogues, they may have little ability to articulate any clear definitions of the principles, let alone the justice-oriented nature of the pedagogical approach. Overall, this lack of understanding of the central aims and purposes of critical pedagogy and its social justice orientation may point to the value of exploring critical pedagogical praxis through purposeful dialogue. There may be value in broadening people's understanding of the central aims and purposes of critical pedagogy by encouraging an increased self-examination and assessment of one's own view in this regard.

The review of related literature for this present study therefore revealed both contradiction and overlap in my attempt to identify one overarching definition of critical pedagogy.

I approached the interviews and focus groups with a heightened level of curiosity regarding participants' own definitions of critical pedagogy and its central aims and purposes as a direct result of researching and writing the review of related literature. I became additionally curious when the external examiner for my research proposal, Seth Agbo, queried me about why the review of related literature was not explicit about what he referred to as the "social justice agenda" that is so central to critical pedagogical praxis. Specifically, he wanted to know why I was not more explicit about identifying social justice as the central aim of critical pedagogy. At that time, I felt I was not yet ready to conclude that social justice was the central aim of critical

pedagogy. Interestingly, although the definitions and aims of critical pedagogy and influential theorists and related pedagogies did not initially represent a main objective of the study, it did become an important “talking point” during the interviews and the focus group session.

When I first asked participants how they defined critical pedagogy and asked them to identify one or two of the central aims of critical pedagogy, there were a number of participants who echoed Gur Ze’ev’s concerns (1998) about trying to identify the one “true” definition of critical pedagogy. Bob said that he didn’t think that he could be clear or brief enough for it to be a definition and Larry stated that, in his view, there are many different definitions of critical pedagogy.

A number of participants, however, defined critical pedagogy quite clearly and succinctly. Bailey seemed to echo Gore (1993), Lather (1991), and Kohli’s (1998) contentions that the theory and practice of critical pedagogy provide a mechanism for a sociocultural examination of schools. According to Bailey, this sociocultural lens focuses on social structures, including race, class, gender, ability, and sexuality, and examines how these factor into life in schools and the larger society. Mark seemed to express a similar conclusion, stating that critical pedagogy provides a theoretical foundation for students to evaluate their social, political, and economic standing, and Donna contended that critical pedagogy allows students to question societal norms and how these norms perpetuate societal injustices. These participants believed critical pedagogy provided them with a framework for teaching and learning that focused on power, hegemony, and social justice.

Other participants focused their definitions on the importance of praxis. Linda stated that for her, the basic components of critical pedagogy were critical reflection and action. Sarah concluded that critical pedagogy involves the outside world and transformation, asserting the importance of activism. Both Linda and Sarah seemed to echo the ideals of Gore (1993) and Shor

(1996), among others, who assert the importance of turning the theory of critical pedagogy into a critical pedagogical praxis.

Catherine's definition seemed to focus on student-centred practices and constructivism and less on the political nature and transformative potential of critical pedagogy during the interview. In listening to others during the focus group session, she responded that she only recently understood, with more sophistication, the more critical aspects of her work as a teacher.

During the interviews, I was struck by the difficulty that many participants had in identifying the central aims and purposes of critical pedagogy. For example, during the interviews, Catherine and others seemed to neglect the political nature and the social justice orientation of critical pedagogy and asserted the centrality of constructivism as a main purpose of critical pedagogy. Simon (1987) urges critical pedagogues to tie their pedagogy intrinsically to "the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world which is 'not yet'" (p. 375) rather than to simply adopt a set of classroom techniques that have the potential to be counter-hegemonic. Ellsworth (1992) and Gainguest (1998) would agree that a set of teaching techniques and/or simple adjustment to the physical space of the classroom may not represent critical praxis because it does not attend to the critical pedagogical ideals of critical consciousness, liberation, and justice.

Many of the participants' ideals and examples of classroom practices regarding the purpose of critical pedagogy seemed to align with constructivist learning theory whereby learners construct knowledge for themselves - each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning - as he or she learns (Bruner, 1990). Constructivism, in this sense, is closely aligned with the student-centred ideal that learning should begin with the primacy of student experience and dialogue. Within this participant pool, constructivism and student-centred learning were identified most often as two of the central aims of critical pedagogy.

For example, in talking about the role of the professor and the role of the student within their praxis, both Catherine and Linda talked about their role as facilitators and the idea that the students and the professor act together as co-teachers. Mark said that one component of his student-centred praxis involved the need for him as the professor to establish some minimum structure within the classroom experience. Larry and Sam both referred to the collegial nature of the professor/student relationship at their respective universities. Bailey said that her students play a “pretty active role” in establishing the learning environment and in co-constructing the syllabus.

Britzman (2003) would most likely express some concern about this emphasis on constructivism and student-centred teaching techniques, asserting that pedagogues should be cautious about calling this “methods as ends” approach to teaching and learning critical pedagogy. She asserts that focusing on constructivism as an end in and of itself may reduce “the complexity of pedagogical activity to a technical solution and ‘forget’ that methods are a means for larger educational purposes” (p. 62). Danvers (2003) also discusses the need for critical pedagogues to recognize that classroom techniques and strategies clearly have a role to play in learning and teaching, but they should not become an end in themselves or be the sole agenda.

Boyce (n.d.) may be less concerned with participants’ focus on constructivism, arguing that perhaps the central idea of constructivism logically precedes the ideal of social transformation. If the premise of a liberatory education is to help learners realize that the social construction of knowledge serves some groups while diserving others (Boyce, n.d.), then the purposes of constructivist learning and issues of justice are intimately conjoined.

The results from my study may point to the need for critical pedagogy to work toward better explication and communication of its social justice orientation, alongside its constructivist orientation. There may still be some work that needs to be done to encourage educators to recognize that critical pedagogical praxis must go beyond a set of teaching techniques and attend

to the political, social, and economic factors that have conspired to marginalize people in the first place (Macedo, 1994).

As indicated in the results, participants did mention critical consciousness, transformation, and democracy as some of the other central aims of critical pedagogy. Taylor asserted that critical consciousness was central to her conception of critical pedagogical praxis. She said that developing a critical consciousness within a community of learners, versus developing this consciousness as part of an individual self-reflexive process, resulted in a critical consciousness that is socially constructed and reflects a multiplicity of diverse “voices.” For Freire (1970), this critical consciousness or “conscientization,” focuses on perceiving and exposing social and political contradictions and taking action against oppression. Sarah concluded that the purpose of critical pedagogy is to work toward praxis which involves interaction with the outside world and transformation of that world into something new and better.

“Democracy” was also cited frequently as one of the central aims of critical pedagogy. Although I did not push participants to define what they meant by democracy, I had the sense that the word was sometimes used as if we all shared the same meaning and that the participants’ themselves assumed that the definition of democracy was somewhat self-evident. Those participants who cited democracy often referred to Dewey or Freire within their discussion of the purpose of critical pedagogy.

Participants’ reference to Dewey and Freire provide some insights into their assertion that democracy represents one of the central aims of critical pedagogy. Dewey (1916) believed that a just and democratic form of schooling could pave the way to a more just and free society. He argued that reforms in early education could be, in themselves, a major lever of social change. In *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey asserts that a democracy is “more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience”

(p. 87). He believed that democratic practice takes into account one's own actions and their influence on others. These actions may serve to either build barriers out of difference in class, race, and national territory or break them down. In Dewey's view, a democratic educational ideal would modify traditional ideals of culture, traditional subjects of study, and traditional methods of teaching and discipline.

Freire (1998) believed that the critical educator who incorporates a democratic vision or posture in her teaching praxis cannot avoid an exploration of the critical capacity, curiosity, and autonomy of the learner. Freire (1985) argued that educators should not be afraid of using the word democracy. He asserted that many people have become skeptical about the word because they relate it to social democracy and reformism. Instead, Freire (1985) suggested, democracy can be associated with socialism and with revolution.

Both Dewey (1916) and Freire (1985, 1998) believed that the ultimate goal of education was to attain a socially just and democratic citizenry. Education was thus aimed at helping marginalized individuals and groups to use education as a means to bring about liberatory social change. Although I did not push participants to clearly define democracy, I suspect that their conceptions of democracy were closely linked to that of Dewey and Freire since they referred to both these theorists and their educational ideals in their responses. I now wish that I had asked participants to define democracy. I additionally wish that I had queried them about whether they regard democracy as an "end" of education in and of itself, or as a means to work toward issues of justice.

The overlapping and perhaps somewhat conflicting views of the participants' responses regarding their definitions and identification of the central aims and purposes of critical pedagogy seem to align with the review of related literature. Within critical pedagogical discourse there is reference to democracy (Dewey, 1916; 1938; Freire, 1998), an emphasis on cultural literacy (Kellner, 1998; Macedo, 1994), poststructuralism (Lather, 1991, 1998; Pillow,

2000), and the politics of identity and difference embodied in the discourses of class (Apple, 1990; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003), gender (Shrewsbury, 1987; Weiler, 2001), race (hooks, 1994, 2003), and sexuality (de Castell & Bryson, 1997b).

Kanpol (1999), Kessing-Styles (2003), and Kincheloe (2004) would argue that despite the multiple and varied meanings of critical pedagogy, the central purpose of critical pedagogy is to use education as a means to bring about a more socially just world. The social justice orientation of critical pedagogy was confirmed as one of the principle aims of this form of praxis within the focus group session. The interview results are perhaps a bit less conclusive on this point since constructivism and student-centred practices came up more frequently during the individual interviews.

Influential Theorists and Related Pedagogies

Much of the contradiction and overlap regarding participants' definitions and identification of the central aims of critical pedagogy is a result of the central ideologies and influential theorists that guide individuals' work. For example, some critical pedagogues approach critical praxis from a Marxist perspective that focuses on class (Apple, 1990; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 2003). Freire (1970, 1994) identifies the liberatory potential of critical pedagogy while some of Lather's (1991) writing focuses on neo-Marxist theories. Pillow (2000) employs a poststructural lens in her approach to critical pedagogy. hooks (1994, 2003) and Weiler (2001) adopt a feminist pedagogical perspective and Shor (1996) and Gore (1993) assert the need for the theory of critical pedagogy to move into the realm of praxis (see Table 1, Chapter 2 for more detail).

In reference to my study, I was struck by the ways in which one or two critical pedagogical theorists influenced and directed each participant's own pedagogical praxis. In other words, a participant's praxis was often intimately tied to the theorists and theories that most

influenced him or her. There were a total of 37 different influential theorists mentioned in my study (see Figure 3, Chapter 4). Some people referred to critical theorists who were wholly unfamiliar to me and did not appear in my review of related literature. Linda, in particular named one theorist, Kevin Kumashiro (2000, 2004), who guided much of her work and whom she knew personally.

Other participants reported that they had personal relationships with some of the influential theorists who they cited. For example, Graham and Mark both knew McLaren and Apple. Jack, Mark, and Meg all reported that they had worked with Freire either in Brazil or during one of his visits to the United States. These personal relationships may account for some of the results in my study. It may be that the frequency of citations is not necessarily the best indicator of influence. This result may point to the importance of personal networks and the influence those have on a person's pedagogical approach.

I was additionally surprised by the fact that some of the theorists who appeared repeatedly in the review of related literature, and who I would regard as being central to the theory of critical pedagogy, were mentioned with a relatively low level of frequency. For example, hooks (1994), Lather (1991), and Ellsworth (1992) were not mentioned as often as I would have expected. I wonder whether this is just a function of this particular participant sample.

Is it simply a coincidence that more male theorists were mentioned? Out of the 37 influential theorists that participants cited, only seven of these were female theorists. There was no difference in gender regarding participants' reference to those female theorists. In other words, both male participants and female participants brought up the names of female theorists with the same level of frequency. What is so surprising in my view is that the overall frequency of citations of female theorists is so low.

That said, in his most recent edition of *Life in Schools*, McLaren (2003) asserts that critical pedagogy must return to its Marxist roots and move away from its present emphasis on other counter-hegemonic praxis, including feminist pedagogy, cultural studies, and anti-racist education that he considers to be diluting critical pedagogy.

McLaren and Farahmandpur (2000) argue that radical and critical theorists “have been disinterred from Marxist soil where they first drew breath, and their graves now sprout the saplings of postmodern theory” (p. 26). McLaren and Farahmandpur further assert that the postmodernization of the Left and its accompanying retreat from class struggle has resulted in a laissez-faire evangelism. Rather than joining in the chorus of post-Marxists celebrating the death of universalism and grand narrative, McLaren and Farahmandpur (2000) believe that,

A critical reflexive Marxist theory – undergirded by the categorical imperative of striving to overthrow all social conditions in which human beings are exploited and oppressed – can prove foundational in the development of current educational research traditions as well as pedagogies of liberation. (p. 28)

hooks (2003) and Lather (2001), however, argue that repeated iterations of the preeminence of Marxist Social theory and the historical roots of the Frankfurt School ignore the feminist, anti-racist, and postcolonial educational projects that overlap with critical pedagogy, and discount the work of Women’s Studies and Ethnic Studies programs. The practice of tracing the historical roots of critical theory back to the Frankfurt School only serves to maintain the reification of a “founding fathers” mentality of critical pedagogy (hooks, 2003). In hooks’ opinion (2003), this version of critical pedagogy is antiquated. Sandy Grande (2003) similarly asserts that an overemphasis on class-based agendas that fail to engage race relations only leads to further marginalization of the political potential for critical pedagogical praxis.

Gore (1993), Lather (1998, 2001), and Kohli (1998) all assert that a contemporary conceptualization of critical pedagogical praxis should attend to issues related not only to class,

but to some of the broader social issues that have historically been less acknowledged, including race, gender, and sexuality. In Lather's (2001) view, the overlapping "projects" of feminist pedagogies, anti-racist education, and poststructuralism and their intersection with critical pedagogy will only strengthen the justice-oriented purpose of these pedagogies.

Lather (2001) explores why critical pedagogy is still very much a "boy thing." She believes that:

This is due not so much to the dominance of male authors in the field as it is to the masculinist voice of abstraction, universalization, and the rhetorical position of 'the one who knows,' what Ellsworth (1997) calls "The One with the 'Right' Story." (p. 184)

A tension exists here. As mentioned, I was initially struck by the fact that, overall, participants' definitions of critical pedagogy and their identification of influential theorists did not include a greater multiplicity of voices and perspectives. I had anticipated that more participants would have cited some of the influential feminist, critical theorists, for example, when queried about the theorists who most influenced their teaching and praxis. I now wonder about participants' responses in relation to some of the related literature.

A gap may exist between my participants' responses and the literature-based assertions that critical pedagogy should embrace the multiple discourses of "other" justice-oriented pedagogies as a means for critical pedagogical praxis to more fully flourish. It may be that McLaren (2003) and McLaren and Farahmandpur's (2000) conclusions better resonate with participants' conceptions of critical pedagogy. In light of this tension, I now wonder if perhaps participants themselves have fallen "prey" to the overabundance of critical pedagogy literature that focuses on a "founding fathers" mentality; the dominance of male theorists in the results of my study only adds to my suspicion. Of course, I also wonder if I am being overly suspicious about the paucity of citations of female theorists as a result of my own inclination to be wary of the "founding fathers" mentality.

Clearly, there is some tension that exists within the review of related literature regarding the preeminence of Marxist theory and its influence on the field of critical pedagogy. Significant complexity lies in the various counterarguments presented by those theorists who believe that all discussions of critical pedagogy are rooted in Marxist social theory and those theorists who believe that repeatedly tracing the roots of critical pedagogy back to Marxist social theory fails to engage the feminist and anti-racist-based agendas of critical pedagogy. More is said about this tension in the concluding remarks of this section on influential theorists.

Participants also cited a number of educational theorists who focused more on constructivism and student-centred classroom practices than on critical pedagogy *per se* in their responses, including Lev Vygotsky, Beverly Tatum, Alfie Kohn, and Jonathan Kozol. These theorists are best known for social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), theories about students of colour in the K-12 school system (Tatum, 1999), the role of discipline and the punishment/reward system in schools (Kohn, 1996), and the inequities in public schooling (Kozol, 1991). Generally speaking, those participants who made mention of these educational theorists were those participants who focused on school practices and identified student-centred learning and constructivism more frequently as the central aim of critical pedagogy.

Those participants who focused on issues of justice, particularly as they related to class, mentioned Apple (1990), Giroux (1997), and McLaren (2003) most often. Those participants who were praxis-oriented mentioned Shor (1996) more frequently than other theorists. Those participants who focused on using “critical works” to teach about critical theory and pedagogy mentioned Apple, Giroux, McLaren and additionally mentioned many of the introductory books on critical theory and pedagogy, including those written by Steinberg and Kincheloe (in press), Kanpol (1999), Kincheloe (2004), and Wink (2005).

Dewey (1916, 1938) was mentioned by those participants who focused on connecting the educational ideals of democracy to those of critical pedagogy. Mark, Donna, and Sarah talked

about the influence of Dewey on their critical praxis and said they thought that Dewey's ideals of democracy and progressive education had a significant influence on the field of critical pedagogy.

Freire was mentioned, unquestionably, with the highest level of frequency. In fact, Freire was mentioned 54 times during the interviews. The next highest frequency for any critical theorist was McLaren who was brought up in participant responses only 18 times in comparison. This leads me to believe that Freire has been central to both interview and focus group participants' conception of critical pedagogy since he was mentioned equally often in both venues. His writing, particularly *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), appeared on many participants' course syllabi as well.

Numerous participants brought up Freire's name and his educational ideals in response to the very first question regarding definition. In most cases, by the time that I posed the question regarding influential theorists, Freire had already been mentioned, signifying his influence on critical pedagogy.

The results regarding influential theorists seem to suggest that while Freire is regarded as one of the founding "fathers" of critical pedagogy, there is less universal agreement regarding the centrality of other theorists in respect to critical pedagogy. In fact, the results would suggest that, at least in regard to this particular participant pool, there is one principal theorist, in addition to Freire, who played a key role in participants' conception of critical pedagogy. The one or two theorists who participants did identify were closely related to the "subfield" and ideological perspective of the person teaching about critical pedagogy, whether that be a Marxist, feminist, poststructural, or praxis-oriented perspective.

Regarding these overlapping "subfields" of critical pedagogy, Lather (2001) has argued that ideally, attempts should be made for educators to approach critical pedagogy outside of the oppositional frameworks that are "differently engaged but nevertheless affiliated critical moves"

(p. 184) as a means to “keep in play the very heterogeneity that is, perhaps, the central resource for getting through the stuck places of contemporary critical pedagogy” (p. 184). She asserts the need for critical pedagogical praxis to embrace the multiplicity and overlap of the related pedagogies.

Gur-Ze’ev (1998) echoes Lather’s sentiments, concluding that the projects of critical theory and those of some postmodern and feminist thinkers might be united. In his view, the development of a critical pedagogy should be theoretically interdisciplinary and politically committed to social change (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998). Gur-Ze’ev suggests that this new project – one that rejects the “paternalistic” versions of critical pedagogy – be newly coined as well, suggesting that it be called *counter-education*.

In this sense, both Lather and Gur-Ze’ev encourage critical pedagogues to move away from focusing on trying to establish the “right” definition toward embracing the contradictory voices, counternarratives, and competing understandings that constitute critical pedagogy. Lather (1998) refers to this perspective as the move toward defining critical pedagogy as the “big tent” for those in education who are invested in doing academic work that is justice-oriented.

Participants’ responses in my study may either contradict or endorse Lather’s “big tent” metaphor, depending upon how those responses are interpreted. I wonder, could it be that Linda is delving into the work of Kumashiro as it relates to the “subfield” of anti-oppression and crisis within the “big tent” of critical pedagogy? Are Mark, Donna, and Sarah taking up the ideals of democracy and citizenship as a “subfield” within critical pedagogy? Is Taylor looking more closely at issues of race and its relationship to critical pedagogy while Sam is exploring a justice-oriented curriculum that places issues of class at the center? Bailey’s pursuit may reflect her focus on a critical multiculturalism that explores issues of culture, race, gender, and ability. I am troubled by my own difficulties with interpreting participants’ responses as they relate to the

overlapping purposes of critical pedagogy and my own desire to draw some substantive conclusion regarding these purposes.

Am I somewhat trapped in my own desire for reassuring certainties related to universal purposes and central theorists? Am I perhaps too antiquated in my own thinking as it relates to the field of critical pedagogy and the recent growth of the “subfields?” Am I expending too much effort on trying to conjoin these “subfields” into a singular overarching critical pedagogical praxis through my attempts to concretize information?

Perhaps my attempt to define, identify, and concretize critical pedagogy is what Lather (1998) describes as an inevitable impossibility of reductionist thinking. She regards the present day task of a critical pedagogical project as a need to “situate the experience of impossibility as an enabling site for working through aporias” (p. 495) and as a means to learn from ruptures, failures, breaks, and refusals. Lather is suggesting that there may be a positive quality to moving away from universal definitions. She further argues that the process of “working through” some of the overlap, contradiction, and dissonance regarding the one “right” definition and central theorists sets up a positive and productive tension (Lather, 1998).

Lather (1998) concludes that:

As an arena of practice, critical pedagogy might serve a transvaluation of praxis if it can find a way to participate in the struggle of these forces as we move toward an experience of the promise that is unforeseeable from the perspective of our present conceptual frameworks. (p. 497)

In other words, perhaps the very framework that attempts to universalize “truth” excludes the many possibilities of a critical pedagogical praxis that is multiple, overlapping, and contested. Perhaps I need to further critically examine my own concerns with my attempts to maintain a “big tent” mentality of critical pedagogy because it may inherently limit the potential of the more focused and singular agendas of some of the related pedagogies.

Perhaps I need to simultaneously be attentive to why it may be that McLaren is reasserting the importance of Marxist social theory. As previously mentioned, McLaren believes that the central purpose of critical pedagogy is to work toward issues of justice related to class. In asserting this, McLaren (2003) claims that if class issues were resolved then issues of racism and gender oppression would be lessened as a result. For McLaren and Farahmandpur (2000) differences in class conflate other systems of oppression. McLaren (2000, 2003) believes that if critical pedagogues were to “take up” issues related to social class, then other justice-oriented issues may be resolved. Perhaps some of the claims made within the review of related literature critiquing that repeated iteration of the importance of Marxist social theory is a “boy thing” (Lather, 2001; hooks, 2003) and the tension this creates need to be critically examined a bit further. In other words, it may be important not to be too quick to disregard McLaren’s assertions that issues of justice start with class. My intent in these concluding remarks is not to resolve some of the tensions that I have enumerated in this section but rather to acknowledge them. The next section explores examples of post-secondary classroom praxis.

Post-Secondary Classroom Praxis

The notion of praxis, as reviewed in Chapter 2, provided me with the language to explore the ideal of combining theory, practice, and reflection as components of the educative process. Early on in the review of related literature (Chapter 2), much of my focus was on the bifurcation between critical pedagogical theory and critical pedagogical praxis. I therefore took up the ideal of trying to identify this bifurcation as a false dualism, finding general support in the work of Bunch (1983), Britzman (2003), and Lusted (1986) and in specific reference to critical pedagogy, in the work of Gore (1993), Shor (1996), and Wink (2005). For these pedagogues, praxis seemed to represent an educational means to transform the world through reflective, critical, and dialogical action.

For Freire (1970), critical praxis is characterized by informed action and it demands curricular and instructional strategies that produce not only better learning climates but work toward the educational aim of a better society. In essence, Freire is advocating for the development of a critical pedagogical praxis and Shor (1980, 1982, 1996), in large part, attempted to put this into practice within the post-secondary classroom. In *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy*, Shor (1996) discusses his experiences with trying to engage in critical praxis in his Utopia course, highlighting the successes, challenges and lessons learned by both him and his students when trying to practice critical pedagogy.

Wink (2005), in a somewhat similar vein, wrote about her attempts to implement critical pedagogy. *Critical Pedagogy: Notes from the Real World* (Wink, 2005) is, in my view, part critical pedagogy primer and part manual for practicing critical pedagogy. For example, in her sixth chapter, entitled “How in the World Do you Do it?,” she enumerates many examples of how to apply the theory of critical pedagogy within the university classroom. Both Shor and Wink went beyond simply writing about the importance of engaging in this form of praxis to writing about their own experiences with attempting to implement critical pedagogical praxis.

Overall, however, I was generally struck in my review of related literature by the lack of depth and breadth regarding specific examples of how to implement critical pedagogy within the classroom. For this reason, I was quite keen to ask participants to share some examples of their classroom practices that most closely related to the ways in which they self-identified as critical pedagogues. I was also intrigued to learn how their post-secondary classroom practices reflected the varied purposes of critical pedagogy theory, particularly the justice-oriented nature of the theory.

I was simultaneously wary of asking participants to elucidate a set of “best practices” regarding how to implement critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom, knowing that Tania Cassidy (2000), among others, concluded that implementing a socially critical

pedagogy is not an easy task nor is it possible to provide a “how to” guide. And yet, as I mentioned earlier, I also envisioned that an edited book of “best practices” might be one tangible outcome from this study. I approached the interviews and focus group session cognizant of this tension.

I queried participants regarding their use of critical pedagogical praxis, encouraging them to include some specific examples of classroom practices. Participants had an opportunity to describe these practices during the interviews and to discuss them further in the focus group session. Many participants additionally provided me with course syllabi and assignment descriptions, providing written examples of the ways in which they practiced critical pedagogy. The following discussion relates back to the results, integrating the three data sources.

Examples of Critical Classroom Practices

When queried about the ways in which they self-identified as critical pedagogues, many participants talked about the theory that they taught about and the theorists who informed their teaching. Both the bulk of critical pedagogy literature and the participants in this present study addressed the importance of engaging in critical pedagogical praxis, referring back to the work of Freire (1994), McLaren (2003), and Giroux (1997), but said little about actual classroom practices regarding how to do implement the theories. I therefore wanted to push participants beyond the rhetoric of talking about who they related to and what they regarded as important to include examples of how they actually practiced critical pedagogy. There were a variety of examples that arose within participants’ responses to this query, as described in the results.

Most participants talked about adaptations to the physical space of the classroom. Many participants talked about the importance of dialogue and student voice. Others talked about their use of group work and journal writing as a means to engage students. Most participants said that developing a classroom community was central to their praxis. Some participants talked about

issues of safety and some of the inherent risks to engaging in critical praxis. Curriculum negotiation was cited as another example of a critical classroom practice. Participants discussed their use of alternative methods of assessment and evaluation. Finally, participants cited some examples of the praxis-oriented classroom practices that they employed. Each of these examples of critical classroom practices is addressed in more depth in this next section. I conclude this section with a summary and critical analysis of these examples of classroom practices.

Physical space

A few research participants talked about adaptations to the physical space of the classroom. A number of them acknowledged that altering the physical space of the classroom, for example, taking the chairs out of rows and placing them in a dialogue-oriented circle, was not necessarily connected to issues of social justice per se, but did nonetheless result in a productive paradigm shift regarding issues of power and authority. These pedagogues would most likely find support for their conclusions in Wakefield's (2001) assertion that a change in the physical environment in the classroom does disrupt the hierarchy of lecturer-authority/student-apprentice and that there may be much to be learned about power and "voice" simply from that change in physical environment.

Horan (2004) suggests that to help encourage students to find their voices and to help set the tone for collaborative learning, she puts desks or tables in a circle on the first day of class. Horan asserts that "the very arrangement of the classroom furniture becomes a critical lesson as students question why the circle is a 'deviant' arrangement; for, the classrooms are [generally] all set up in the traditional rows with the obvious place for the teacher in the front" (p. 42). Horan said that she talks to students about the ways in which the physical space of the classroom reflects hierarchical arrangements and believes that students are quite literally dismantling some of the hierarchy when they come into the room and rearrange it.

Wakefield (2001) argues that even more radically, activities and lessons can be designed so that students themselves are moving about the room and engaging with one another, both physically and intellectually. Bailey said that if someone were to walk down the hallway of her university, she would observe groups actively engaged in dialogue, moving about the classroom, engaged in group work, and/or sitting in a circle more often than sitting in rows.

Macedo (1994) asserts, however, that a dialogic classroom is not simply one where everyone sits in a circle or moves around the classroom and shares their opinion. This next section explores the importance of dialogue and voice within critical pedagogical praxis.

Dialogue and student voice

Shor (1996) believes that moving chairs into a “circle is not enough by itself to constitute a counterhegemonic, critical-democratic pedagogy” (p. 65). He argues that defining circle seating as empowerment by itself is simply too easy, advocating instead that dialogical education expects professors to listen to their students and to learn about the issues and problems that are important within their students’ communities. He further asserts that professors need to ask questions that will enable students to understand various societal issues from a broad-based socio-cultural perspective and then figure out ways to take political action to work toward addressing some of these societal issues (Shor, 1992). Most participants in my study seemed to echo this conception of dialogue.

As mentioned in the results, Bailey described a technique called the rotating chair that she said she borrowed from women’s studies’ professors at her university. In this technique, students take turns facilitating dialogue, and the chair is turned over after each interchange to whoever they feel has spoken the least. Meg talked about her use of computer technology to generate ongoing discussion outside of the formal class time. Bob reported making comments in students’ “dialogue journals” about course content and their personal reflections about the

classroom experience itself. Sarah focused on the importance of listening as a central component of meaningful, in-depth dialogue. Taylor, Donna, and Nancy also said that they try to encourage “student voice” through small group work and focusing on this during the first weeks of the semester with name games and sharing in pairs.

These responses were not unexpected nor were they earth-shattering. Now, I wish that I had probed participants a bit further regarding their assertions about dialogue and voice as a critical pedagogical practice. I would have queried: Does dialogue happen automatically? What happens when certain voices dominate? Is everyone required to speak? What happens when voices bump up against one another? In what way is dialogue justice-oriented? What is the difference between dialogue and discourse?

Freire (1970) advocates a purposeful problem-posing approach to attending to issues of justice. This problem posing method of dialogue wherein “the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student and student-teacher” (Freire, 1970, p. 67) more aptly reflects a justice-oriented praxis. Freire’s problem-posing approach to education suggests that power and authority are reconceived and shared jointly by both students and teachers.

Some of the questions that may be asked when dialogue is used toward this more justice-oriented and liberatory purpose may include: What would an education system look like if the main goal of education were to create a more socially just world for all? In what way can pedagogues work toward attaining visions of “that world that ought to be” within a given course? What can educators do within their own individual classrooms to begin to create that vision (Giroux, 1997; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Macedo, 1994)?

These queries have been addressed in some depth by feminist pedagogues such as hooks (1994) and Shrewsbury (1987). The work of Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule (1986) provides some of the keenest insights regarding dialogue and voice. They

conducted research with 135 women regarding why it was that women often felt silenced in their families and schools, and finding that many women experienced a conflict between the dictates of authorities and their own subjectivities and experiential wisdom. Using a constructivist lens, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) explored the concept of dialogue, what they referred to as “real talk,” that focuses on listening to and speaking with others while simultaneously speaking with and listening to the self. This form of dialogue provides people with a way of connecting to others and acquiring and communicating new knowledge.

Interestingly, in my study, female participants talked about dialogue more frequently than male participants during the interviews. Bailey, in particular, cited the influence of her colleagues in women’s studies on her own “critical” classroom practices. I now wonder, in light of the review of related literature and participants’ responses, if the use of dialogue is a classroom practice that is generally used by women more often than men. I also wonder about some of the claims made regarding dialogue.

Although there exists some evidence that using dialogue to engage student voices can enhance learning (Jarvis, 1996) and impel students to reconceptualize “traditional” power relations (Lather, 1991; Shor, 1996), others would argue that the notion of liberatory dialogue and authentic voice represent a repressive myth in the field of critical pedagogy. Women, in particular, are marginalized as part of a culture in which being female automatically puts them in a position of unequal power (Gore, 1993; hooks, 1994; Luke, 1992). hooks (1994) asserts that speaking in a female voice that is unlike that of the dominant culture (white and male) means that a woman’s voice may go unheard. She believes that to be taken seriously women academics are often required to take on the voice prescribed by the dominant culture. As Horan (2004) has discovered, prescribed forms for “voicing only serve to muffle non-dominant voices; adherence to the dominant way of knowing limits and excludes voices necessary to the discussion” (p. 28).

Kohli (1998) asserts that many critical pedagogues rely on “rational” dialogue – one that separates reason from emotion and rejects an understanding of the emotional/psychological dimensions of oppression. Kohli claims, “It became clearer and clearer to me that one did not change deeply held political, social, and philosophical positions simply by acquiring new knowledge or new perspectives through conversations with others” (p. 516). Kohli thereby questions the “easy” claims that critical pedagogues make regarding the educative values of dialogue.

Ellsworth (1992), Gabel (2002), and Luke (1992) further argue that the very idea of dialogue is based on the false assumption that anyone can engage in it. Ellsworth (1992) came to regard as naïve her own assumptions that any attempt to empower students within the post-secondary classroom would automatically be liberating. She maintains:

When participants in our class attempted to put into practice prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, student voice, dialogue, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against. (p. 91)

Ellsworth concluded that acting as if the classroom was a safe space in which dialogue was not only possible but was happening did not necessarily make it so. All voices in the classroom were not equal, in large part, because of the constraints imposed by the dominant culture and larger society. Certain students felt more empowered to speak than others.

Students whose practices and perspectives are being challenged by critical discussions of power relations may react not only with discomfort but also with hostility (Solomon, 1995). Students may also be expressing forms of the dominant ideology regardless of their socio-economic class or gender because that is what they have been taught in schools and society (Hoodfar, 1992). As Lensmire (1998) suggests:

Rather than pushing classroom participants' thought and action forward to increasingly critical evaluations of their world, such [critical] questioning could encourage students to not speak their mind, or to look for the correct thing to say to please the teacher. (p. 275)

Davis (1992) argues that it is often the students who have power and privilege who self-protectively want to remain at an abstract or intellectual level when discussing stratification and the influence of the dominant culture. Mimi Orner (1992) agrees that, "Discourses on student voice are premised on the assumption of a fully conscious, fully speaking, 'unique, fixed and coherent' self" (p. 79). This assumption represents one that may be false – one that ignores students' multiple identities, social positions, and authorities and ignores some of the very same issues of privilege and oppression that the praxis of critical pedagogy is attempting to trouble.

Another myth regarding dialogue and voice relates to the issue of language itself. With a growing number of students using English as a second language (ESL), both in the United States and in the parts of Canada where English remains the dominant language (Meyers, 2003), there is a need for schools to examine equity and justice through a lens that looks at ESL (or French as a Second Language in parts of Canada) students in relation to the ideals of critical pedagogy. Rhetorically emphasizing the importance of student voice may not be enough to ensure that people speak and are heard. Macedo (1994) asserts that students must be able to speak their own language in the classroom because it is through that language that they make sense of their reality and their own experiences in the world. A critical pedagogy which provides students with the tools for transforming their own reality needs to recognize the plurality of students' voices and engage them in learning that democratically accepts all languages (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Through their own language, students can begin to develop the means to more authentically name their world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Universities have the power to privilege certain languages over others, thus granting higher status to those groups able to speak the dominant language (Degener, 2001). Degener (2001) goes on to claim:

When language-minority learners are forced to read their world using a language in which they lack proficiency, they are unable to develop a voice that goes beyond the surface level of understanding. They may learn the appropriate labels for things, such as "food," "money," or "job," but they will not be able to go beyond that level of understanding to reflect on and interpret their reality. The transformation of their reality, which depends on their ability to read and reflect on their world with much greater depth of understanding, will be impossible. (p. 15)

There is clear evidence in much of the social science and feminist literature that male-female differences in speech are enacted in various ways both within the classroom and within the larger society, privileging certain individuals (often males) over other individuals (often females) (Sandler, 2006). In my study, Laurie acknowledged that her attempts to try to ensure that no one is invisible in her classes or goes unheard do not always work. In reference to this issue, Gur-Ze'ev (1998) claims that often critical pedagogues fail to more fully examine their use of dialogue and voice alongside the broader issues of who gets heard, what gets said, and who has authority, asserting that professors start with a critical self-examination of their own practices, similar to what Laurie is reporting that she does. Dialogue and voice are thus further complicated by differences in gender, socio-economic status, culture, and ability.

Attempts such as Laurie's initiative to ensure that no one goes unheard do not always work despite these self-examinations, however, because, as Shor and Freire (1987) assert, not all students may be able to or may want to speak up and students have the right to be silent if they so choose. Belenky et al. (1986) argue that silent women, or those less apt to speak, are often the most socially, economically, and educationally deprived. The findings from their research

demonstrated that out of the 135 women interviewed, those women who came from a lower socio-economic class said that their experiences resonated more with feelings of being “deaf and dumb” rather than working toward “gaining a voice” (Belenky et al., 1986).

Issues of language, voice, and dialogue are further complicated by differences in culture and linguistic practices. Susan Gal (1994) argues that, “More pervasively than any other institution, schools judge, define, and categorize their charges on the basis of linguistic performance” (p. 417). Gal believes that the linguistic practices required by schools serve the interests of some individuals and groups better than others. In her view, the interactional constraints of the classroom setting are neither gender neutral nor culturally neutral. Cross-cultural evidence indicates that linguistic practices can be constructed in different ways (Gal, 1994). For example, “silence and inarticulateness are not, in themselves, necessarily signs of powerlessness” (Gal, 1994, p. 408). Within certain cultures, silence itself is subversive (Wang, 2001). Further, poetry and performance have historically been employed as oppositional discourses (Gal, 1994).

Bourdieu (1977) argues that institutionalized linguistic practices that require people to speak represent a form of linguistic domination that gives credence to certain practices over other practices, thus marginalizing individuals. In this way, schools and other institutions privilege those individuals who adopt the “right” linguistic practices over those individuals who may choose to be silent and may opt for other forms of linguistic practice (Gal, 1994). Gal (1994) argues that attention to linguistic detail, context of performance, and the nature of the dominant linguistic forms of a particular individual need to be taken into account if the complex issues of language, voice, and dialogue are to be better understood.

Given some of these “real world” constraints related to dialogue and voice, Gabel (2002) queries, “Can we locate a pedagogy wherein discourse is as liberatory as possible, where caring yet vulnerable and risky relations exist and where pedagogical participants are narrators of their

own texts” (p. 184)? She goes on to question whether this can be “authentically” accomplished when students and teachers have diverse abilities, not only intellectually but physically, suggesting that another myth of critical pedagogy is the assumption that all people are physically able as they engage with critical praxis. Participants in my study did not address physical capability at all. Gabel (2002) queries whether critical pedagogical praxis can include people who need a significant amount of assistance, who communicate primarily with eye or head movements, for example, further problematizing the notion of justice within critical pedagogy.

In light of the above, dialogue must be critically interrogated. Participants’ idealistic notions about dialogue and student voice and some of participants’ “easy” claims regarding what participants “felt” might be happening in their classrooms to provide students with a “voice” and to ensure that no one goes unheard may need to be further critically interrogated. I now wish that I had probed participants to critically examine some of their claims regarding their use of dialogue and student voice a bit more deeply. This next section includes some additional references to dialogue and student voice as participants discussed the importance of classroom community and “safe” space within the critical pedagogical classroom.

Classroom community

In my study, Bailey talked about how challenging it is to create an authentic community of learners when certain students regularly dominate the emotional, vocal, and physical space of the classroom. Despite the challenges, she is committed to the project of developing a classroom community. Developing a “safe space” and classroom community was attempted through various means by participants in my study.

Some participants reported that they use the various praxis-oriented and experiential activities that are central to community building. There are numerous activity-based examples of counter-hegemonic praxis, including some of the community building initiatives advocated by

experiential education theorists (Cavert & Frank, 2003) and hegemony treasure hunts where students hunt for “artifacts” that relate to the “hidden curriculum” (Fawcett, Bell, & Russell, 2002). A number of participants in my study said that they engage students with name games and team-building activities at the outset of every course to create classroom community, something common to experiential education and critical pedagogy alike (Breunig, 2005).

Sarah “checks in” with students at the start of every class. She claimed that students bond with each other and with her through this process. Early in the semester, students may start off by not saying much during “check in” but as the semester progresses, Sarah sees them start to build more personal relationships and start to use the check-in as a forum to more fully invest in each others’ lives. . In my study, Larry noted in one of his course syllabi that a major aim of the course was to develop the class into a community of inquiry – one in which the students care about the issues and care about each other. Catherine also referred to the importance of caring as a classroom practice.

I returned to a review of the literature to further examine the concept of classroom community and caring. In one study, involving students from three feminist composition courses, Fey (1994) reported that her attempts to use dialogue and to encourage student voice fostered an environment of caring and connection that resulted in life-changing discoveries for students. Her students reported that they looked at social issues more closely and were more sensitive to a variety of perspectives as a result of attempts by Fey to foster a caring learning community that was premised on shared authority (Fey, 1994).

Researchers have found that students learn better and are more engaged in their learning when they perceive that the classroom is premised on an ethic of care (Goh & Fraser, 1998; Noddings, 1984). In Australia, one study evaluated the teaching and learning environment and its impact on student achievement and attitudes toward learning and found that a caring classroom environment improved student achievement and students held generally positive attitudes about

the university (Aldridge, Fraser, Fisher, & Wood, 2002). Nel Noddings' (1984, 1992) extensive research on the relationship between caring in schools, classroom community, and student learning has demonstrated that student engagement is higher in caring classrooms and students are better able to develop some of the critical thinking skills that are central to critical pedagogical praxis.

I am left wondering, though, what "caring" actually looks like in practice. I additionally wonder, in reference to the studies that are cited above and participants' reports, if there is some assumption that we all share the same, universal definition for caring. I should have probed participants a bit further regarding their definitions of a caring classroom and how caring actually plays itself out in practice within their classrooms.

In reference to the notion of classroom community, over half of the participants in my study provided additional examples regarding how they tried to develop a classroom community, including their use of collaborative learning techniques and journaling. Some participants in my study reported using collaborative learning as a means to encourage students to engage with the justice-oriented curriculum of critical pedagogy, including small group dialogue, group work, and think-pair-share, reporting that, in their view, students often felt "safe" working in small groups.

The concept of collaborative learning, including small group work and activities similar to think-pair-share wherein the instructor poses a question and gives students a limited time to consider a query (think) and then asks students to turn to partners and share their responses (pair) and then those student responses can be shared within larger groups or with the entire class (share) (Lyman, 1981) have been widely researched and advocated throughout educational literature (McKeachie, Pintrich, Lin, Smith, & Sharma, 2000).

Anurhadha Gokhale (1995), for example, examined the effectiveness of individual learning versus collaborative learning in enhancing the critical thinking skills of 48 university

students using a pretest/posttest questionnaire and found that students who participated in collaborative learning performed significantly better on the critical-thinking test than students who studied individually. Gokhale attributed this performance difference to a collaborative learning medium that provided students with opportunities to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate ideas cooperatively. According to Gokhale (1995), facilitated discussion and group interaction helped students to learn from each others' scholarship, skills, and experiences. The students had to go beyond mere statements of opinion by giving reasons for their judgments and reflecting upon the criteria employed in making these judgments which enhanced their overall abilities to think critically.

Jerome Bruner (1996) contends that cooperative learning and group work improves students' problem-solving strategies because the students are confronted with different interpretations of a given situation. The peer support system makes it possible for the learner to internalize both external knowledge and critical thinking skills and to convert them into tools for intellectual functioning. This research alongside participants' responses in my study regarding their use of group work and collaborative learning techniques may point to a key practice within the realm of critical pedagogical praxis. In light of this, I now wish that I had explored participants' responses in more depth, asking them what successes they had observed with their use of group work and what they perceived as the outcomes of this praxis.

Catherine and Jeff talked about their use of journals as a means to foster relationships with students and to create a caring classroom community. Catherine said that she tries to find ways to develop one-to-one relationships with students by keeping an ongoing professor/student journal throughout the course of a semester so that individual students can have a less public opportunity to ask questions and reflect on the course content. Jack also uses reflective journals as a means for students to engage with the course content on a more personal level. None,

however, were able to provide evidence that demonstrated the effectiveness of the practice of journaling.

In the literature, there is conflicting evidence regarding the effectiveness of journals. Mindy Blaise et al. (n.d.) examined the effectiveness of what they referred to as “shared journals.” They articulated how they attempted to create a pedagogical space for preservice teachers to explore the values and beliefs they have about teaching and learning within their courses, their professional practice sites, and their past learning experiences through journal writing. The study revealed that many students wanted to know more specifically how to use the journals (when to write, what to write, how much to write, etc.), ensuring that they were on the right track. Blaise et al. concluded that those preservice teachers who were used to prescriptive and clearly outlined tasks struggled with the lack of guidance and structure that the professors were offering in respect to reflective journal writing.

These findings were echoed in a study conducted by MacDonald and Brooker (1999) that examined the effects of a professor’s use of critical pedagogical practices with 67 physical education students. One of the classroom practices they employed was the use of a journal that was intended to provide students with an opportunity for personal expression and reflection upon their experiences. A content analysis of students’ journal entries demonstrated that much of students’ writing and thinking remained at a level of technical, non-integrated description and summary rather than providing a demonstration of students’ ability to critically analyze their experiences. Macdonald and Brooker concluded that students lacked preparation for engaging in some of the higher level critical thinking and writing that the authors had hoped to see.

This result may be unsurprising in light of additional findings that there may be some question as to how effective journal writing is as a means for student reflection and increased engagement with the course content if direct instruction about journaling and reflective writing is lacking (O’Connell & Dymont, 2004). I wish that I had followed up more thoroughly with

participants' accounts of their use of journal writing as a means to build classroom community *per se*; in my opinion, the practice of journal writing represents one area for further exploration.

When addressing the importance of classroom community and citing some of the practices that participants employed to create "safe space" within their classrooms, participants in my study noted some of the risks involved with the idea of creating a classroom community as well. A number of participants said that once "safe space" was established, students and professors alike were more willing to take "risks" with what they revealed personally. In one of her course syllabi, Catherine provided a great deal of description related to her own values and beliefs about teaching and learning and her aspirations for the development of a classroom community. She noted her hope that students would feel open to taking risks and being open-hearted in what she referred to as a co-constructivist environment of teaching and learning.

According to Lawrence Grossberg (1994), developing a classroom community of co-learning requires a pedagogy of risk that begins with teachers acknowledging their role within the institutionalized power structures of universities. They must also name and locate their own stories alongside those stories told by students in an effort to work toward dismantling these power structures. In Grossberg's (1994) view, teachers take risks by sharing their stories and by interrogating dialogue and mapping articulations between discourses, domains, and practices.

In other words, the ideal of creating a classroom community is presumably much more complex than participants may have let on in their responses. As I am writing up this analysis, I am aware that participants' assertions regarding their reports about the importance of establishing a caring and safe classroom community are making me nervous. I believe that some of their responses represent claims to success without adequate articulation of "how" they actually engage in practices that encourage classroom community and some of the risks and challenges to attempting to create "safe" space. In light of this, I now wish that I had probed more deeply into some of the participant responses that seemed to lack rich description and

specific examples to better understand how participants went about creating classroom community and how they negotiated some of the challenges to creating classroom community.

I have found some resonance of my concerns within the literature that suggests that any attempt to develop a “safe” learning environment does not automatically make it so (Bell, Morrow, & Tastsoglou, 1999). Creating an environment where students feel sufficiently “safe,” affirmed, and nurtured to talk about their own experiences while simultaneously encouraging students to recognize the ways in which their own privilege contributes to the maintenance of dominance and hegemony may be much more challenging than critical pedagogues assume (Bell, Morrow, & Tastsoglou, 1999). Sandra Bell, Marina Morrow, and Evangelia Tastsoglou (1999) found that maintaining safety while fostering a critical “culture of dissent” were almost diametrically opposed concepts within their experiences in the critical pedagogical classroom. Gabel (2002) believes that many critical pedagogues are generally naïve in concluding that “safe” space can even mean the same thing for each individual.

In my study, Sarah’s conclusion that students “bond” and the implicit assumption that students become “closer” both interpersonally and physically as a result of these community building activities may need to be questioned. According to Gaskell (1992), a student’s life experiences and multiple positionalities within the world shape her experiences in the classroom. Sherry Shapiro (1994) suggests that the nature of critical pedagogical discourse overemphasizes the cognitive, making it a disembodied discourse that ignores some of the feminist work that grounds knowledge in the body. Jeff Overboe’s (2001) current research examines how the embodied wisdom of disabled people is affected not only by an overemphasis on logic but by some of the other base assumptions within mainstream educational systems, including space, time, and aesthetics, which serve to privilege a non-disabled embodiment. Overboe (2001) argues:

More often than not, people of differing races, genders, sexualities, and abilities who are successful within educational institutions are socialized to incorporate the embodiments, sensibilities, and characteristics of this white masculinist prototype that has been invoked as the personification of rationality and logic. (p. 171)

In fact, critical pedagogical praxis that fails to take into account people who may be sight-impaired, who use a wheelchair, or who may have hearing difficulties, for example, only serves to perpetuate a myth that “safe” space exists and classroom communities are created simply because the professor wills them to be so (Overboe, 2001).

Matthews (1998) and Overboe (2001) argue that embodied ways of knowing and wisdoms thus must be considered alongside intellectual ways of knowing. Because people come to know themselves and each other through a way of knowing that is experiential, involving the senses, perception, and mind/body action and reaction, the intellect and the body cannot be separated. In this sense, “locating” oneself epistemologically in the classroom and the “bonding” and community building process becomes much more complex and multi-layered when contested by issues of physical ability and well-being. Gustafson (1999) suggests that an awareness of and respect for peoples’ embodied experiences needs to be considered alongside the more cognitive aspects of employing critical praxis to disrupt hegemonic norms.

Kohli (1998) asserts that discussion about the body are “in.” She claims that, “The body – the “lived” body, the “material” body, the “inscribed” body, the “disciplined” body, the “abject” body, the “medicalized” body, the “performed” body, the “historicized” body, the “transgressive” body – is now fashionable (p. 518) and argues that while the body has not been totally absent from critical pedagogy, most attention to it has still resulted in the equation of neutral body = male body. She considers how critical educational theorizing might look if we changed the equation. Further, Kohli (1998) concludes that we must continue to challenge normative associations of intelligence and the role of reason that will address both the macro

structures and the micro structures that shape collective and individual experiences, including the classed, raced, and gendered body.

Participants' responses in my study did not address notions of embodiment or the physical, focusing more on the intellectual aspects of building community and creating "safe" space for the exercise of students' intellects. This finding suggests that some knowledge of the multiple discourses of the body may add to professors' understanding of the complex lived experiences of their students (Kohli, 1998). In light of this finding, I now wish I had explored many of the above participant examples related to classroom community and "safe" space in more depth.

Curriculum negotiation

Curriculum negotiation was another theme that arose when participants' cited examples of critical classroom practices. One way that critical pedagogy can encourage students to become active participants in their education is through a process of curriculum negotiation (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Macedo, 1994; Shor, 1992). According to one study, students who are active participants in co-creating the curricula tend to engage more fully with the course content, the professor, and other students (Degener, 2001). Cocreating the curricula with the teacher helps to ensure that students' needs and interests are given primary importance (Degener, 2001).

In reference to my study, Linda said that she shows up to class on the first day with only the first page of the syllabi and students co-construct it from there. Catherine reported that she uses a process of curriculum negotiation as a means to develop the classroom community by engaging students with co-creating the syllabus, co-decision-making about what texts get read and what curricular material gets valued, and determining methods of evaluation and assessment.

Bob has two parts to his course syllabi. Part I represents the non-negotiable part of the curriculum that he constructs and presents to the class as a whole and Part II represents the

negotiated curriculum that accounts for the co-constructed aspects of the course. The latter includes readings, assignments, and assessment and evaluation. Jeff adopts a similar approach whereby he identifies some fundamental topics and readings within the curriculum and leaves room for significant negotiation. Shor (1996) maintains that, in his experiences, when students are invited into the process of co-constructing the syllabus, they often become engaged constituents in the educative process rather than continuing to serve as disinterested spectators.

Negotiating curriculum may provide a means through which students share authority in the classroom. Garth Boomer, Nancy Lester, Cynthia Onore, and Jon Cook (1992), for instance, outline a method in which at the beginning of each unit, teachers and students ascertain what students already know about the topic, what they want to find out, how they will find it out, and how they will assess their accomplishments. Shor (1996), similarly, begins a course by designing the syllabus in collaboration with the students, and invites students' critique of course activities and content as the semester proceeds.

Joshua Sean Thomases (n.d.) provides one account of how he engages students in the process of curriculum negotiation. He uses Boomer, Lester, Onore, and Cook's book, *Negotiating the Curriculum* (1992), and Freire's (1970) notion of generative themes as components of curriculum negotiation within his classroom. Thomases (n.d.) introduces students to the four questions that are posed in *Negotiating the Curriculum* which include asking the students: 1) What do we know already?; 2) What do we want to and/or need to find out?; 3) How will we go about finding out what we want to know?; and 4) How will we know, and show, what we have found out when we are finished? Thomases (n.d.) said that his role is to facilitate a consensual process that values the multiplicity of voices that students bring to the classroom as they attempt to collectively respond to these central queries. Thomases concluded that it is not easy nor does it always work, conceding that much of the success of the process of curriculum negotiation is based on the students who are in a course during any given semester.

A democratic process of curriculum negotiation involves negotiating authority as well (Kanpol, n.d.). Dewey (1938) argues that without some authority and some minimum necessary structure there can, in fact, be no freedom. Students who are accustomed to the authority and structure of a more traditional classroom may actually resist some of the freedom that ideally would accompany the curriculum negotiation process (hooks, 1994; Horan, 2004; Shor, 1996).

Curriculum negotiation within a critical pedagogy may require some of the traditional notions of authority to be troubled. Kanpol (n.d.) asserts that authority within a critical pedagogical praxis is not wholly absent. As Mark so aptly put it in his response within the focus group session of my study, there is authority in his classroom, but the professor is not the only authority in the classroom. How then does authority get negotiated?

Kanpol (n.d.) believes that the educator represents one authority over her subject matter. Teachers and students share each other's knowledge and learning this way becomes reciprocal and dialogical. Freire (1994) would advise the teacher to assert herself in providing constructive, critical feedback on thoughts that are shared in dialogue, particularly those that may lead to further oppression. Roberts (2000) argues that not all contributions should be accepted uncritically. Horan (2004) asserts that teachers may often be called upon to be authoritative in the classroom, to work through crisis and to facilitate dialogue, for example, and argues that being authoritative without becoming authoritarian represents a delicate balance.

Students often expect the teacher to be the bearer of knowledge and when a professor opens up the classroom as a space for negotiation of curriculum and negotiation of authority, she may be seen as not knowing the subject matter, as inexperienced, or as being incapable of holding authority (Hoodfar, 1997; Ng, 1997). This may be particularly the case if the professor is a woman (Buchanan & Bruce, 2004/2005; Horan, 2004).

Horan (2004) is particularly concerned that critical pedagogical theorists are reluctant to acknowledge issues of gender in regard to authority. She argues that if one of the main premises

of critical pedagogy is to challenge power relations and authority within critical praxis and when the theorists themselves name gender as one of the existing conflicts within the struggle against the dominant ideology (Shor, 1996), then how is it that so “little is said about how that conflict plays out and complicates the pedagogical struggle when the critical teacher is female” (Horan, 2004, p. 274)?

In reference to my study, Mark told a story about one of his colleagues, a young black woman, who teaches a multicultural education course. According to Mark, she was engaging in critical pedagogical praxis, asking students to examine issues of privilege and oppression and asking them to “name” and “locate” themselves and their power within various political and societal structures. One particular student who was a heterosexual, white male stood up and waved some books in the air proclaiming that “multiculturalism is a bunch of crap” and threw the books at the professor as he was walking out of the room.

Mark said that this raised a number of issues within the faculty regarding whether or not this student would have reacted in the same manner if the professor had been a white male, rather than an African-American woman. Bailey said that too often it is untenured faculty of colour who teach the introductory multicultural education and race relations courses and it is these courses that often involve more “risk” to the professor because of the nature of the course content.

Kathleen Ting (2003) conducted a qualitative study that looked at the experiences of 12 faculty of colour teaching multicultural education courses. She said that these professors experienced both resistance to the course content and rejection of them as professors. Ting (2003) said that although the literature that addresses the challenges related to the teaching of multicultural courses is burgeoning, there is little attention paid to the experiences that instructors teaching those potentially volatile and emotionally draining courses are facing.

Bailey said that her university has tried to address resistance proactively by educating students about the “challenging” nature of some of the course content for the more “critical” courses. She mentioned that many professors publicly confront students if they hear racist comments in class and student advisors meet with students to teach them about the justice-oriented mission and vision of the university. Bailey’s university has also found that team teaching and coalition-building across the university campus, in addition to focusing on increasing the number of people of colour who are hired, has made a significant difference on the learning community and teaching environment. Taylor said that as a Chicana, she is often confronted by students who claim that some of her content is biased because she herself is a Chicana woman. She knows that those same students would never confront her male colleagues in that way.

Following Horan’s (2004) critique that issues of authority need to be examined through multiple lenses, including gender, race, and ability, I believe that the field of critical pedagogy needs to take up these participants’ questions and comments. More will be said about this in the conclusion.

Assessment and Evaluation

The theoretical talk about authority and the reality of the use of authority within post-secondary classroom practices is often confusing in light of the actual realities of post-secondary institutions (Horan, 2004). Critical pedagogues are also severely limited by the institution that demands that they provide students with a grade (Horan, 2004). In my study, many participants listed grading as the most significant institutional obstacle to critical pedagogy. Spademan (1999) asserts that, “While I am committed to inclusive pedagogy, assessment still acts as part of a constellation of forces to (re)produce canonical hegemony” (p. 28). In my study, Meg, in fact,

said that if she could make one change to the overall post-secondary educational system, it would be to get rid of grades.

It is perhaps unsurprising that students express some resistance to critical pedagogical praxis, questioning its authenticity, in light of the fact that professors still maintain the ultimate authority of needing to assess, evaluate, and mark students' work (hooks, 2003; Shor, 1996). The critical teacher, too, is placed in a conflicting position between engaging in critical praxis and a legal obligation to the system (Maher & Thompson Tetreault, 1994). Through many years of formal schooling, students develop an understanding that they are members of an educational community that essentially denies them any formal authority (Shor, 1996). Students may therefore question the authenticity of shared authority. "Students also resist/engage/manipulate the teacher, the process, and the institution through their formal power" because this often is what they have learned through many years of formal schooling (Shor, 1996, p. 17).

What then is to be done in reference to assessment and evaluation regarding attempts at shared authority? Many participants in my study explored what Shor (1996) refers to as a dialogic approach to assessment and evaluation. Keesing-Styles (2003) affirms that it can be an institutional obstacle, but also suggests that assessment can still serve as a powerful contributor to the learning process if students are empowered to participate in establishing the assessment criteria (see also Tillema, 2003).

Keesing-Styles (2000) concludes that when students were involved in either collectively and/or individually generating the criteria for a practicum course that she taught, they were more prepared for practicum visits and were better able to identify which particular criteria were most relevant to their own work and contexts and which areas they needed to personally focus on more completely in their practice. She also concluded that in her experience, the students generate criteria that are as good as those that she may have conceived and the criteria have the added advantage of being owned by the students. According to Keesing-Styles (2003), "Because

our program is based on students reflecting on their own experiences in teaching, they are developing confidence and competence in defining assessment criteria that truly reflect their own contexts and that also reflect the qualities of excellent teachers” (p. 13).

Within my study, many participants provided examples of alternative methods of assessment and evaluation that, in their views, were justice-oriented because they addressed students’ multiple learning styles and lived experiences. About one-half of the participants noted that they employ methods of peer and self-assessment. For example, Bailey asks students to co-construct the assignment rubrics with her and then asks them to do self-assessments on many of their assignments. Nancy similarly asks students to provide input on the rubric and to self-assess with an explanation of how they self-rated. Other participants use portfolios that include written, artistic, and action-oriented assignments.

Bob said that he does not give tests or quizzes; rather, he teaches what may be regarded as a relatively traditional math curriculum using predominantly in-class assignments and group work. Since assessment and evaluation have traditionally been the purview of the professor and one means for professors to maintain authority and power within the classroom (Shor, 1996), Bob’s decision not to use tests and quizzes as a means to exercise “control” of students is, in essence, liberating for him and he believes that it is additionally liberating for his students.

Within the literature, there is resonance with Bob’s claim regarding authority and power in the classroom. Students rely on reason, rationality, and testing within the math and science-based disciplines (Spademan, 1999). Testing has traditionally represented a quantitative measure that is masculinist, white, and capitalist, and one that represents a business model of operation (Spademan, 1999). Bob’s decision to encourage students to develop co-constructed answers to complex mathematical questions, rather than to test students’ knowledge through individual testing, provides some testament to his non-authoritarian approach to his critical math praxis.

In reference to assessment and evaluation, a few participants in my study also cited their use of contract grading and explicated this a bit further in their course syllabi. Mark's use of contract grading involved some choice and some structure. Students were provided with a list of criteria and the completion of those base criteria would most often result in a B. Mark then enumerated two additional assignments and those students who hoped for an A in his course could choose to complete one of those two assignments.

Amber Dahlin (1994) outlined a method of contract grading that allows students some choice with assessment and evaluation. In her learning contract, she lists a number of outcomes, including, read a wide variety of literature, write three formal essays, explore different kinds of literary criticism, and share responses. Dahlin (1994) then describes, as Mark does, that a student earns an A if he or she completes all eight listed outcomes, a B if they complete seven, a C if they complete six and so on.

Regardless of the chosen method of evaluation, Tillema (2003) argues that assessment should allow a student to monitor her own development through a continuous feedback process and should communicate discrepancies between a student's self-perception and/or self-assessment and external sources of information about a student's competencies as a way to inform her about further learning. Assessment should also primarily benefit the student through providing her with an increased awareness of development in competencies, and it must reflect the competencies acquired, evidencing both the processes and the products of learning. Tillema assessed these four main conceptions in one study that employed a portfolio, self-assessment, and peer-assessment. She reports:

Construction and implementation of a far-reaching system for assessment and evaluation alongside the renewal of a curriculum at an institute for higher education proved to be a time-consuming and cumbersome process of negotiation and fine-tuning, where success depended highly on situational constraints and supportive infrastructure. (p. 121)

Tillema (2003) concluded that adopting alternative methods of assessment and evaluation requires a certain level of expertise on the part of the professor. At the same time, he discovered that the use of alternative methods of assessment and evaluation can be made more effective if professors are provided with some preparation regarding how to establish alternative methods that comply with external, institutional requirements and some instruction about how to encourage the active participation of students in the process and how to help students improve their abilities to self-assess and peer-assess.

Shor (1996) argues that despite some of the advances of alternative methods of assessment and evaluation, the reality may still be that critical pedagogy continues to be limited by the institutional authority of some of these alternative methods. Horan (2004) asserted that her own efforts with “contract grading, student-negotiated grading rubric, and teacher-designed grading rubric” (p. 256) generally did not produce the liberatory results that she had hoped for. Horan (2004) claims that students are not particularly interested in contract grading, believing that they have a better chance of getting a B if they do not contract for it. According to McQuillan (2004), students believe that teachers have lower expectations for them than they would if they were to self-assess. These lower expectations, alongside students’ perceived ability to manipulate teachers, may account for their lack of interest in self-assessment (Horan, 2004; McQuillan, 2004).

Negotiating rubrics was another alternative method of assessment and evaluation which a few participants in my study reportedly employed. For example, Bailey and Nancy ask students to co-construct the assignment rubrics with them. In part, rubrics may respond to some students’ need for structure and guidelines when it comes to marking. Including students in the process of negotiating the rubric and establishing the criteria for assignments involves a critical analysis regarding standards and in itself can be a form of critical praxis (Lee, 2000).

Amy Lee (2000), in her book *Composing Critical Pedagogies: Teaching Writing as Revision*, was surprised at students' reactions to the negotiation process in her writing courses. She said that when students came to meet about their final mark and expressed what they felt that they had earned, they essentially disregarded the co-constructed rubric altogether despite the fact that they had asked for some criteria, co-constructed the rubric, and supported it. She believed that students simply replicate previous grading policies that they have known and those that are most familiar to them (Lee, 2000).

In reference to my study, I find myself now asking the ways in which the various assessment practices discussed here are actually critical. I wish I had been more deliberate during both the interviews and the focus group session to voice this query more overtly because in my opinion many of these examples seem to "fit" more easily with theories about student-centred teaching and learning and constructivist theories of education than with the justice-oriented aims of critical pedagogy. I found myself asking, more to myself than directly to the participants, what exactly is critical about this and in what ways is this justice-oriented? The next section will examine some of the more praxis-oriented classroom practices before examining the above query in more depth.

Praxis-oriented classroom practices

Participants cited some of the praxis-oriented and experiential activities that they employed within their post-secondary practices. Some of the examples cited include the use of video and other technology, providing students with opportunities to "experience" the readings, community service-learning projects, and social action projects.

Bailey, Catherine, and Graham discussed the ways in which they use video as a means to try to bridge the gap between what many students perceive to be abstract theory. They talked about their use of media and pop culture as a means to generate justice-oriented dialogue.

Considine (1995) and Douglas Kellner (1998; n.d.) would agree that the skills students need to be taught in schools and the abilities workers must have as they move toward the 21st century can often be best acquired through media literacy activities that incorporate film and current events.

Bailey and Catherine both use videos like “Crash” (Haggis, 2004) to engage students with issues of oppression and justice. Bailey and Graham use the video “Colour of Fear” (Mun Wah, 1994). Lori Norton-Meiers (2002) notes that the notion of films as visual texts worthy of academic study has been growing within the postsecondary academy for some time. The critical film studies field has grown in prominence, and there are now academics who use critical theory to study film at nearly every major university in the U.S. She believes that these recent developments point to the legitimacy of popular films as academic texts worthy of critical interrogation by urban educators and their students (Norton-Meier, 2002).

In my study, a few participants asserted that other media literacy activities help connect some of the abstract theory with the “real world” as well. According to Kellner (n.d.), media literacy can help develop students’ critical literacy and can promote multicultural education and sensitivity to cultural difference. In Kellner’s view, educators, students, and citizens are called upon to rethink established curricula and teaching strategies to meet the challenge of confronting and dissecting cultural representation. Critical literacy can teach students the skills that will empower them to become sensitive to the politics of representations of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and other cultural differences and empower them to promote democratization (Kellner, n.d.).

According to Kellner (n.d.), “new” technologies that are altering every aspect of society can be used to understand and transform the world. Rhonda Hammer (2006) finds that using technology, including videos, cameras, and computers, often clarifies and gives new meanings to many of the theoretical notions that she is teaching about in her course. She asserts that

technology can engage technologically savvy students with various sociological, pedagogical and feminist concerns and bring practical relevance to these pedagogical theories.

In reference to my study, Meg reported that she uses an activity called “photovoice” which consists of an action research project whereby people take pictures of their communities (people, buildings, businesses, library, etc.) as a means to examine issues of hegemony. Mark talked about his use of an activity based on Milgram’s (1974) research on obedience and authority that helps students to explore their values. The activity is designed to take students by surprise regarding the gap between students’ espoused theoretical values and the ways in which they apply those values in response to Milgram’s research. According to participants, such experiential classroom activities may help students connect with the theory and the readings on a more personal and deeper level.

A number of participants also noted other examples of how they connected students with the reading. Mark said that he uses a technique that puts into practice Freire’s (1994) ideal of “reading the world by reading the word.” Mark calls this “close reading” technique the 2RA pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. He defines this as a pedagogy constituted by reading, reflection, (2R) and action (A). For example, Mark said that students may read an article about education and democracy; they may reflect upon that reading and submit a reflective summary, and they may then go out and do interviews with K-12 administrators about the purpose of K-12 education and the ways in which education and democracy are interconnected. By applying the reading to a “real world” context, students begin to see the way that literature and texts can speak to the needs and concerns of society (Horan, 2004).

Bailey uses Peggy McIntosh’s (1989) article, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack,” as a way for students to recognize some of the unearned privileges that come with skin colour, gender, and socioeconomic class. She has students engage in a “take a stand” activity whereby students take one step forward if they respond “yes” to a query from

McIntosh's white privilege checklist and one step back if they answer "no." She then has students talk with a partner and write a reflection about this activity as a means for students to further develop a more personal understanding of privilege and oppression.

In this sense, both Mark and Bailey appear to be engaging students in a form of critical literacy that focuses on developing students' ability not only to read and write, but also to critically assess texts in order to understand the relationships between power and domination that underlie and inform those texts (Hull, 1993). Critically literate students may better understand the socially constructed meaning embedded in texts as well as the political and economic contexts in which texts are embedded (Hull). Ultimately, it is hoped that critical literacy can lead to an emancipated worldview and even transformational social action (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003).

About one half of the participants in my study also cited numerous out-of-classroom action-oriented projects, echoing the sentiments of McLaren and Donna Houston (2004) who assert that "critical pedagogy needs to flee the seminar room" (p. 36). Anne and Sam reported that they ask students to engage in community service-learning projects. Academic service-learning combines academic study with community service (Eyler & Giles, 1999). According to Lori Simons and Beverly Cleary (2005), "This pedagogical method requires students to apply theoretical knowledge to 'real world' situations" (p. 165).

Asking students to look beyond the four walls of the classroom and to engage in academic service-learning was noted by a number of participants in my study. Anne asks students to work in homeless shelters where they conduct interviews with shelter guests as a means to better understand issues of homelessness and individuals' experiences. Both Sam and Laurie encourage student activism and incorporate activism into the curriculum. Laurie said that she will often meet up with her students at rallies and other events.

McLaren and Farahmandpur (1999) confirm that community service-learning can connect students and professors to the broader community and can serve as a means to linking what goes on in the classroom with what goes on in society. Anne concluded that community service-learning, in her experience, integrates the theory of critical pedagogy with an action-oriented praxis that focuses on issues of justice within a “real world” context.

Researchers have found that students often change their attitudes toward themselves and the community as a result of engaging in service-learning projects (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000). Students modify their often prejudicial attitudes after interacting with culturally different community recipients and their perceptions regarding race, class, and economic injustices can be altered as a result of these service-learning activities (Green, 2001). Community service-learning contributes to students’ comprehension of course material as well (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Given this research, it is interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that participants cited examples of both community service projects and the numerous community-based action research projects that are components of their critical praxis.

Meg, Anne, Sam, and Laurie said they use action research projects within their curricula as a means for students to combine theory with practice in a “real world” setting. Laurie said that students design a research project that examines a particular aspect of teaching and learning and conduct actual research in K-12 schools. Sam asks students to conduct a similar action research project. Both Laurie and Sam have had students conduct research, write up their results, and occasionally present these projects as poster sessions at conferences. Meg said that it is important to her that if she is going to be teaching students about action research that she helps students to connect the action research projects with students’ own practice. Teaching about action research and the action research project itself can be dually oriented toward social change (Fletcher & Coombs, 2004) and toward improving teacher practice.

Donna has students read Dewey (1916, 1938). She then asks student to consider the K-12 school context and to try to identify and propose some changes that could be made within that system that would demonstrate some of the principles that Dewey presents in *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Experience and Education* (1938). Students engage in social action projects whereby they actually propose some of these changes to school administrators and local school boards.

Graham and Jack also reported their use of action research projects as components of their curricula. Graham said that he tries to help students better understand that they can make a difference in the world through the educational ideals they are taught in his courses and asks students to do social action projects with K-12 students and in the community. One group of students started up a breakfast program. Sarah and Graham both asserted that any and all field trips into the community were valuable.

Given these responses, I now wonder how community service projects and social action research projects are enacted. Are students assigned a particular service or action project? Do students do an “audit” of the community and base their projects on community needs? Given some of the time constraints previously mentioned, are there projects that can address community needs within the constraints of a semester? I also wonder what some of the actual learning outcomes are from these projects? I now wish that I had probed a bit more deeply into some participant responses regarding praxis-oriented classroom practices.

Summary of Critical Classroom Practices

As I attempt to summarize this section on critical classroom practices, I am left with a feeling of unease. I am somewhat wary of linking all of the above classroom practices with critical pedagogical praxis although I am also hesitant to wholly negate this connection since there is clearly some evidence that certain practices and certain participants in my study did

adopt a justice-oriented approach to their critical praxis. Bailey, Mark, Sarah, and Catherine, in particular, seemed to assume a justice-oriented approach in their application and use of dialogue and classroom community. Bob, Jeff, Linda, and Catherine seemed to use the practice of co-constructing the course syllabi as a means to include students' voices and to provide students with an opportunity to share authority in this sense.

I will address two main tensions that arose regarding participants' examples of classroom practices in this summary. The first will examine my unease with the critical nature of participants' examples of classroom practices. I will examine what may materialize from a more explicit communication about the justice-oriented nature of critical praxis. The second will address my unease with the potential for critical pedagogues to "lead" students toward a curriculum that may be just as repressive as the one they are attempting to replace.

The justice-oriented nature of critical pedagogical praxis

In my view, the challenge for the pedagogue who is attempting to engage in a critical pedagogical praxis that is not only student-centred but social justice-oriented may be in purposefully focusing on the justice-oriented aims behind some of the classroom practices. For example, during the focus group session, Mark talked about his use of an activity that helps students explore their values. As previously mentioned, the activity is designed to take students by surprise regarding the gap between students' espoused theoretical values and the ways in which they apply those values in response to Milgram's research (1974). Mark said that he uses surprise to be a bit less explicit about teaching students about values and issues of social justice. He deliberately avoids any explicit communication about the justice-oriented nature of his curriculum. In reference to this, I now wonder, is taking students by surprise a sufficient means to bring about an increased awareness of the content that is being taught?

I returned to the research that examines student-centred practices since I was unable to find research that could help me answer some of the critical queries that I have posed throughout this section on classroom practices within the critical pedagogy literature. There is a great deal of research that does not address critical pedagogical praxis *per se* or the use of these practices to work toward issues of social justice, but it does examine some student-centred practices, including: assessment and evaluation; student voice and dialogue; and classroom community.

According to Felder and Brent (1996), for example, student-centred instruction involving active learning, student involvement, experiential activities, and cooperative learning led to increased motivation to learn. Even with students in large classes (between 200-300 students), using techniques such as group work and peer assessment resulted in students having a more positive response to class, attending class more often, and developing effective learning strategies (Scott, Buchanan, & Haigh, 1997).

Cabrera, Colbeck, and Terenzini (2001) surveyed 1250 students at seven different universities. They investigated the relationship between classroom practices and students' gains in professional competencies and found that collaborative learning was positively associated with students' self-reported gains in problem-solving skills and group skills. Jeffrey Dorman (2002) provides a comprehensive overview of research into the effects of classroom environment on student learning. Results from studies that employed nine different classroom environment inventories provided convincing evidence that the quality of the classroom environment in schools is a significant determinant of student learning (Dorman, 2002). In other words, students learn better when they perceive the classroom environment more positively.

This research on constructivist-oriented classroom practices leads me back to my query regarding justice-oriented praxis. If students are engaged with content and are motivated to learn through constructivist approaches (Felder & Brent, 1996; Meyers & Jones, 1993), but there is no explicit communication of the ways in which these practices can be used as a means to bring

about a more socially just world, then critical pedagogues may need to be careful about some of the claims that they make regarding the liberatory nature of their praxis.

This leads me back to asking, what is critical about participants' practices and how do students know that their praxis is justice-oriented if professors are not being explicit? Are participants more explicit about the justice-oriented nature of their praxis than the results from my study would indicate?

In other words, I am struck by how both participants in my study and some claims made in the literature point to the effectiveness of critical praxis but are not evidence-based. Rather, many of these claims seem to be based on personal experience or intuition or perhaps even on wishful thinking. Had I probed participants further about how they communicate the justice-oriented nature of their curriculum, I might have had a better sense of this. And perhaps I should have shared my own reactions to what appeared to be student-centred and constructivist examples of classroom practices that in my view were not particularly "critical." Perhaps the critical element was there, but I did not ask the right questions to get at it. Perhaps some participants found it difficult to articulate the critical nature of their praxis.

Perhaps some participants engage in critical praxis but their praxis represents an implicit approach to teaching and learning about issues of justice. If that is the case, can this implicit praxis still be called critical pedagogy? I returned to the interview and focus group data to see if my perceptions about the differences between explicit and implicit instruction were accurate.

In my study, both Bailey and Catherine said that over time they have adopted a pedagogical approach that involves more metacognitive processing and sharing with their students as a way to explicitly "teach" about the justice-oriented nature of their classroom practices. Metacognitive strategies are centered on empowering the learner to take charge of her own learning in a highly meaningful fashion (Novak, 1998). For example, Catherine will tell students that the process of curriculum negotiation is meant to mirror the concept of shared

authority that is found in the critical pedagogy literature. She tells them that by engaging in the curriculum negotiation process, students are meaningfully acting on the theory that is espoused within the literature.

For the critical pedagogue, *metalearning*, or learning about meaningful learning, and *metaknowledge*, or learning about the nature of knowledge, may serve as potentially powerful tools in helping to bridge the gap between teaching about issues of justice and teaching toward a more just world (Novak, 1998). The importance of metacognitive sharing and an explicit emphasis on the central purposes of critical pedagogy resonates with Mary Brewer (1999) who argues, "There is little point in transforming our degree programs, revising the aims and objectives of courses or their content, or introducing new pedagogical discourses if our students do not know the purpose behind the changes" (p. 24). Joseph Novak's (1998) research on metacognition has shown that very few students in secondary and post-secondary education have had any formal metacognitive instruction. In Novak's view, most instruction related to "how to study," has focused primarily on techniques for time management, concentration, test taking, and memorization.

When successful, metacognitive strategies lead to understanding how humans construct knowledge and also offer practice in the process of constructing knowledge claims and value claims (Novak, 1998). Students may develop keener critical thinking skills as a result of an explicit focus on metacognition. Certainly, Peggy Ertmer and Timothy Newby (1996) claim that metacognition facilitates the development of so-called "expert" learners who become capable of providing the critical educative link between meaning and control of the learning process.

Interestingly, in my study, Mark said that he believed that there may be much to be learned about justice without explicit instruction. As previously mentioned, Mark, in fact, said that often he will be deliberately less intentional about the social justice agenda of his teaching so that students, through group work, discussion, and written assignments, can come to that

conclusion on their own. In this sense, Mark was asserting that a constructivist approach to learning may often be enough if the professor orients the curricula toward the purpose of social justice. I can't help but wonder, however, if this method of implicit instruction represents a professor's tacit manipulation of his students.

I wonder if Mark is "leading" his students toward his own agenda without adequate explication of this agenda. Then again, can any pedagogue claim that she engages in co-constructed liberatory practices that constitute shared authority without imposing her own agenda, subjectivity, and positionality?

Critical classroom practices as a repressive myth

Catherine Fox (2002), for one, wonders if leading students toward some other "truth" is simply a rerun of the traditional paradigm that alternative pedagogies are attempting to transform. Fox (2002) concedes:

I become uneasy, because my comments, which are intended to encourage critical thinking, often point to my unintentional use of it to guide my students to the 'right' answer, the 'right' perspective-which is always my answer, my perspective. (p. 3)

In this way, critical pedagogy may be just as misleading and repressive as the "banking model" of education if it simply reinforces a prescriptive set of "different" practices (Freire, 1970). As previously mentioned, Ellsworth (1992) confessed that her own attempts at liberating students may have simply replaced one set of "non-liberating" classroom practices with a different set of equally oppressive practices.

Becky Flores (2004) expands upon this critique of critical pedagogy, suggesting that too many critical pedagogues purport a praxis that exemplifies its own hidden curriculum, one that may be as oppressive as the more transmission-oriented pedagogies. Flores argues that "the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically

appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world that is ‘not yet’” (Shor, 1987, p. 375), is anchored in a cultural logic that is itself subjective and personalized.

In Flores (2004) view:

The question for critical pedagogues, therefore, becomes not so much one of revealing the injustices or oppressions in the world – as if students are nothing more than unenlightened members of the masses who simply need to be told *false* truths – but to interrogate existing truths to consider them in alternative ways we may never before have thought possible. (p. 2).

In Flore’s (2004) view, critical pedagogy should impel students to consciously envision the current social realities through their own epistemological and ontological lens rather than having their interpretation of social reality filtered through the professor’s lens. The task of the critical pedagogue is not to “lead” students toward some vision of “reality” but to provide them with the necessary tools and a learning environment that is conducive to their own exploration of that reality.

In reference to my study, Jack said that he exposes many of his values and beliefs when teaching from a critical perspective and wonders if students feel that these are not simply exposed but are imposed. Anne said that she is wary about being seen as a preacher. She wants to impel students to consider critical praxis but does not want that practice to become simply another hegemonic imposition on student thinking and learning. Larry says that critical pedagogues in general need to be wary of thinking that by providing a teaching and learning environment with a different structure and ideal they may simply be replacing an overly rigid transmission-based structure with an equally “narrow” dialogic and critical structure.

Ellsworth (1992) and Gore (1992) would echo participants’ concerns, advocating that pedagogues ask themselves continuously if the practice of critical pedagogy is just as controlling

as that of the teacher-centered pedagogy that they are seeking to challenge and replace. As Horan (2004) reminds us, “Our daily practices are enmeshed or embedded in our own situatedness, and the more aware we become of our own place in that complex construction, the more challenging our practice becomes; everything cries out for scrutiny and examination: grading, attendance, evaluation, classroom dynamics, voicing, the reality of everyday behaviour” (p. 265).

In reference to attempts to articulate classroom practices, Freire (1997) cautions pedagogues to avoid any attempt to establish a readily “transportable” and “prepackaged” set of clearly defined techniques that are intended to liberate. He argues that the first priority for an educator is to confront questions about human beings and the world, after which methodological issues can be addressed (Roberts, 2000). In this sense, there is no such “thing” as a perfect set of practices when asking people to identify examples of critical pedagogical praxis (Tinning, 2002).

In fact, the idea that it is somehow right and proper to aspire to such conclusions concerns Richard Tinning (2002) who concludes that the whole ideal of postmodern thinking is rooted in the lack of certainty in knowledge production and the rejection of metanarratives (Lyotard (1993). On the other hand, Harvey Siegel (1995) wonders if the rejection of metanarrative itself may constitute a metanarrative.

Critical pedagogues thus may need to consider the overall goals and strategies of their praxis in light of each individual classroom context. As a critical pedagogue, Horan (2004) has come to recognize that she must critique the very practices and tools that she uses in critical praxis since they too emerge from a situated place and, as such, are heavily influenced by cultural context. Katherine Haake (2000) argues that to privilege one interpretation over another is, once again, putting a dominant meaning at the centre. And yet, with these assertions, I myself return to the “stuck place” of being left with some of the very same “difficult” and conflicting knowledges that I started out with in this chapter. I am still wary and slightly unsettled by the

claims that critical pedagogues make regarding transformation, liberation, and change and the lack of evidence regarding many of these claims.

I want to push critical pedagogues to critically interrogate some of the claims that they make regarding their success with critical praxis. I also believe that the review of literature and participants' responses within my study may point to the need for metacognitive sharing and explicit communication of the justice orientation of critical pedagogical praxis to occur if classroom practices are meant to be transformational and liberating. More is said about this at the end of this next section, which more closely examines participant claims about success with critical pedagogical praxis.

Success with Praxis

Both the review of related literature and the results from my study seem to point to the need for more empirically-oriented research assessing success with critical pedagogical praxis. I asked participants about whether or not they experienced some success with their critical pedagogical praxis and how they knew if they were successful. A number of participants immediately acknowledged that I was asking a good question and one that, in their opinion, was difficult to answer.

Theory/Practice Congruence

Most participants in this study said that they at least “feel” the most successful when they have achieved some congruence between the theory that they are teaching about and their actual classroom practices. For example, Larry said that for him critical pedagogy is not just a content area to teach about but a way of being in the world. Laurie said that, for her, the congruence between critical pedagogy theory and practice reveals itself through her social activism.

Connecting teaching to a “real world” context was achieved by other means. Bringing in outside speakers and asking (sometimes requiring) students to spend time in schools led

participants to believe that there was greater congruence between the theory of critical pedagogy and the intent of professors to engage in critical praxis. Participants who self-identified as action researchers said they engage students in action research as well; in their view, they were modeling and putting into practice some of the theoretical ideals that they were teaching about.

Anecdotal Examples of Success

There were numerous anecdotal examples of success cited by participants in my study. Many of these examples came from feedback on student evaluations. Graham said that his students often report that his class is the best class that they have ever taken and often refer to his passion for teaching. Catherine said that she measures success by events that she observes in the classroom, including a high level of student engagement and enthusiasm and improved critical thinking skills. Taylor's students have told her that her course has reshaped their relationships with other people. She said that students have reported that they have developed a more tolerant attitude toward others. Jeff's students recount stories about how they have adapted Jeff's lessons into their own K-12 teaching practices, and Jeff regarded this as one measure of success. Nancy said that she has observed one of her students who teaches in a charter school and those observations have convinced Nancy that some of her teaching has been successful.

Sophie Degener (2001) argues that more research is needed to better understand how critical pedagogy is implemented in schools and how such an approach can have an impact on learners. She notes that there is a significant deficit in research that is aimed at helping educators who seek to develop a more critical pedagogical approach to their teaching, and she believes that related research may provide educators with ideas about critical classroom practices and how to engage students in bridging the gap between critical theory and praxis.

Degner (2001) also asserts that critical praxis might be taken more seriously if there were more evidence-based research that responded to the current trends toward standards-based

education and standardized assessments and adopted that approach to doing research. What she advocates here contradicts the claims of some participants in my study. Mark, in particular, argued that the field of critical pedagogy itself does not lend itself to hegemonic research methods (eg. outcomes-based research). Because Mark did not expand on this assertion nor did I probe him any further, it was unclear what Mark was advocating in regard to critical pedagogy research.

Despite these numerous anecdotal claims of success, I do wonder about participants', and my own, inclination to draw substantive conclusions from these stories, and I wonder about the ways in which these stories provide any "real" form of evidence regarding success. Many of participants' examples of success with praxis related to success in their attempts to bring theory and practice into better congruence, but did not necessarily point to success with achieving the central aims and purposes of critical pedagogy, including social change, for example.

Nancy said that a long term study should be done to measure success with critical praxis and student activism and/or social change, asserting that she herself was uncomfortable making any claims related to success with praxis as a result of student feedback. Alas, I did not ask her to elaborate on how she would conduct such a study. I will explore some of the tension between the various claims to conducting critical pedagogy research after exploring empirical examples of success with praxis.

Empirical Examples of Success

When I asked participants in my study to identify empirical examples of success with critical pedagogical praxis, Bailey said that she was currently conducting a study to determine changes in students' multicultural awareness as a result of the students' perception in the course, "Culturally Relevant Teaching." She did not yet have any results from the study but she said that

students were taking a pre-test and a post-test survey to measure the effects of the course on students' multicultural awareness.

Jack said that his university sends out a questionnaire to alumni to assess the effect that the social justice-oriented curricula has had on students. According to Jack, students often respond that the social justice-oriented curriculum has influenced their work, but Jack said that it is hard to regard these results as being conclusive because students may just be saying what they think the university wants to hear.

Catherine was the subject of a single-case doctoral research study that examined what it means to be a creative teacher. The doctoral student observed Catherine for one term and interviewed her students. The student concluded that Catherine did fit the profile of someone creative and someone who brings creativity into the classroom, but Catherine felt that this was unrelated to critical pedagogy and teaching for social justice *per se*.

In returning to the literature, I am reminded of two studies related to physical education teachers and their attempts to implement critical pedagogy. Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa (2005) discovered that while they had expected the physical education teachers who self-identified as critical pedagogues to practice what they preach, there were only a few notable, observable examples of the congruence between self-identifying as a critical pedagogue and practicing critical pedagogy. Although the teachers were able to engage in "teacher talk" that suggested their engagement in critical pedagogical praxis, Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa observations seemed to not be wholly "in sync" with what was being said.

A two-year study of 67 physical education (PE) teachers and their use of critical praxis was conducted by Macdonald and Brooker (1999) who examined physical education teachers' reactions to a critical pedagogy that focused on negotiation, reflection, and praxis in working to develop professionals who were socially responsible. The students engaged in a process of curriculum negotiation that included journal writing, alternative methods of assessment and

evaluation, and reflection upon their learning. These classroom practices were designed to engage students in examining taken-for-granted assumptions and dominant educational practices, including responding to queries, such as: “What is worthwhile PE knowledge in schools and what is the function of PE in schooling” (p. 56)? According to Macdonald and Brooker (1999), these questions were designed to assist students in broadening their understanding of educational hegemony and in engaging in the ideals of critical pedagogy.

Macdonald and Brooker (1999) interviewed the students and found that the student teachers in their study were more confident, socio-politically aware, innovative, and caring when they moved into their subsequent major practice. They also concluded that their study pointed to a need for the development of a research-based discourse to contest and extend a framework of how to employ critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom.

In light of the results from these two studies, I now wonder about my ability to draw substantive conclusions, especially given that I did not observe any of my participants in their classes or conduct interviews with any students. I believe that one major methodological weakness of my study is that it relied solely on self-reports and those course syllabi and assignment descriptions that were provided by the participants who chose to share them. Classroom observations might have provided additional insights into some of the reported claims of the participants. I had previously mentioned my own concerns that any lack of congruence between what is self-reported and what is actually practiced would be difficult to identify (Scott, 1997). It may be additionally hard to claim, however, that observations would have provided me with any further evidence of participants’ classroom practices because participants’ practices on any given day of observation might merely represent a researcher-oriented performance when the professor knows that she is being observed (King & Ahlquist, 1990; Scott, 1997).

The most extensive study that I found related to critical pedagogical praxis was a qualitative study, entitled “Finding Oneself in the Classroom: A Critical Autoethnographic

Narrative Chronicling the Risks and Rewards of a Teacher and Her Students as They Engage in the Practice of Critical Pedagogy” (Horan, 2004). Her main sources of data included sample student work, course evaluations, student journal entries, her own reflections, and an analysis of classes, out-of-class interactions, and critical encounters over a 10-year period.

In her study, Horan identified some of the successes and challenges that she and her students experienced when attempting to put the theory of critical pedagogy into practice. Horan (2004) noted her experiences with assessment and evaluation, trying to encourage student voice and developing a community of learners within her post-secondary classroom, and some of the tensions that arise from these practices, including student resistance and institutional obstacles within her study. Horan also noted the lack of research related to critical pedagogical praxis in her review of literature.

So, what is to be made of this paucity of research within the field of critical pedagogy? As previously asserted in my study, Meg and Mark both believe that there may be fewer empirical studies that exist because, in their views, the field of critical pedagogy may itself reject hegemonic research methods. That said, I believe that both the review of related literature and the results from this present study point to a clear need for more empirical research to be done within the field of critical pedagogy, particularly if pedagogues are going to continue to draw conclusions and relay claims about the impact of their praxis.

For me as researcher and pedagogue, the question remains, what is to be done in reference to this tension? This question is particularly critical apropos the current academic and political climate that values outcomes-based research (Degener, 2001) and an academic climate that is directed at boosting evidence-based research within the field of education (Hargreaves, 1999). Clearly a pedagogue cannot make assertions of success solely through intuitive and experiential ways of knowing.

Likewise, it would be foolish to wholly disregard some of the above claims, both within the review of related literature and in reference to this present study, regarding success with praxis. In my view, there is significant work that remains in bridging the gap between laying claims to success with critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom and the need for empirical research to be done to better confirm some of these assertions.

I am also sensitive to Audre Lorde's (1984) advice that people should be aware that there may be danger in using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. If the master's tools and *his* house are predicated on dominance and the intent of critical pedagogical praxis is to dismantle dominance and hierarchy then perhaps critical pedagogical researchers need to adopt a different set of tools (research methods) other than those used by the master (quantitative methodologies). In other words, perhaps critical pedagogical researchers needs to consider research methods that are ideologically "in sync" with the field itself.

I am equally aware of Lather's (2001) concern that critical pedagogues need not strive for a prescriptive universalizing narrative that communicates the "right story" of critical pedagogy. She notes that critical pedagogical discourse itself is constantly moving, incomplete, and difficult to define. Lather (2001) describes critical pedagogical praxis as "a praxis of not being so sure, of working the ruins of critical pedagogy toward an enabling violation of its disciplining effects" (p. 184).

Lather (2001) thus encourages the critical pedagogue to essentially embrace the ruptures and the impossibility of certainty that accompany a critical pedagogical praxis situating itself as a "double-edged story" (p. 191). The "telling" of the story itself "registers the limits of it [critical pedagogical praxis] as a vehicle for claiming truth" (Lather, 2001 p. 191). In Lather's view, "such a practice is a topology for new tasks toward other places of thinking and putting to work" (p. 191). In this sense, critical pedagogical research may be conceived as a counterhegemonic

exploration of the impossibility of certainty – one that rejects the hegemonic norms of research – those that attempt to identify, quantify, and measure (Lather, 2001).

In reference to my study, Meg commented that measuring success empirically may be antithetical to the field of critical pedagogy itself because the counter-hegemonic nature of the field is not particularly focused on measurable outcomes. As I consider her concern and as I think back to Mark's response that trying to conduct evidence-based research within the field of critical pedagogy is problematic because of the nature of the discipline, I have a deepened understanding of their remarks.

I now understand that critical pedagogical praxis may need to move away from a dogmatic and prescriptive discourse to one that troubles the very notions of what constitutes research and success with praxis. As Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) so aptly assert:

Whereas traditional researchers see their task as the description, interpretation, or reanimation of a slice of reality, critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site or constructed in the very act of research itself. (p. 305)

They go on to argue that research in the critical tradition takes the form of self-conscious criticism because the researchers themselves are becoming aware of the ideological imperative and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective and normative reference claims (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In this light, researchers' subjective and normative claims need to be critically examined.

In my study, some participants conceded that they had concerns about engaging in critical pedagogical praxis, calling into question their own subjectivities as researchers. Horan (2004) believes that critical pedagogues need to push themselves to examine the degree to which they engage not only in teaching practices but also research practices that may privilege only one way of thinking. In reference to her own research practices, Horan (2004) asks herself:

Am I valuing cognitive logic and reason over intuition, emotion, even spirituality, privileging a masculine western paradigm over a feminine, eastern or native one? Isn't my "knowing" a matter of my training and acculturation in a traditional western and male paradigm? (p. 326)

In reference to the review of related literature and reflecting upon some of the participants' responses in my study, I am better able to recognize some of my own biases regarding my need to quantify and measure success with praxis and the way that my own "positivist upbringing" may have influenced the interview questions and my own need to satisfy what I have previously regarded as the paucity of research related to critical pedagogical praxis. I myself may have fallen into the trap of attempting to evaluate qualitative research against the positivist criteria of validity and reliability that attempts to quantify and measure data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

I find some resonance with this dilemma in Russell's (in press) conclusion that working across and with methodological, epistemological, and ontological difference when doing education research is a challenge. Russell cites Aaron Pallas (2001) who suggests that many graduate students in education currently receive a lack of exposure to "epistemological diversity."

Pallas (2001) suggests that, "to prevent a recurring pattern of epistemological single-mindedness," researchers "need to engage with multiple epistemological perspectives to the point that members of different communities of educational research practice can understand one another, despite, perhaps through, their differences" (p. 7). Russell (in press) argues that engaging in understanding epistemological differences may help in facilitating "critical appraisals and reimagining of all research approaches" (p. 8). If research is meant to reflect the researcher's beliefs about the world in which she lives and wants to live, as Lather contends (1991), I find solace in my own evolving understanding of what constitutes "evidence" but

simultaneously feel compelled to explore the epistemological diversity that Russell (in press) is advocating.

If the results from my study and the review of related literature point to the notion that critical pedagogy may be theory rich and praxis and research poor, which has been argued throughout this dissertation, then wouldn't research of any nature not only be warranted but also preferable? I believe that the answer to this query is a resounding "yes."

Challenges with Praxis

After indicating some examples of success with praxis, every research participant next identified the many challenges to critical pedagogical praxis. As noted earlier, within the review of related literature, there exist many more examples of challenges to praxis than evidence and examples of success with praxis, which appeared to be the case in reference to my study as well. Jarvis (1996) and Williamson (1988) provide some explanation regarding this difference. They suggest that critical pedagogues may be prone to an examination of the "failures" and challenges to engaging in critical pedagogical praxis more readily than identifying its successes through research.

I am beginning to wonder if participants in this study might be better equipped to critique systemic issues than they are at self-critiquing some of their own claims to success with praxis, given some of their resistance to my queries regarding the paucity of research within the field. Because I had not considered this earlier, I did not probe further into what I perceived as resistance to research nor did I probe very deeply into why it was that participants were able to articulate so many challenges to praxis but struggled somewhat with naming examples of praxis.

The main themes that came up in my study relating to challenges of critical pedagogical praxis included: institutional constraints; "realities" of the K-12 classroom; and the U.S.-based

“No Child Left Behind” act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002); student resistance; and lack of preparation for engaging in critical praxis.

Institutional Obstacles

Every participant discussed the challenges of engaging in critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary institution. For them many of these challenges represent obstacles that are inherent to working within a university context, in participants’ views. These institutional obstacles include: time constraints; risk; and issues of promotion and tenure.

Time constraints

Every participant in my study noted that there simply isn’t enough time to fully engage in critical pedagogical praxis. According to participants, university timetables, often consisting of courses that occupy two or three hour blocks, make it difficult to schedule out-of-classroom, praxis-oriented experiences for students.

It is additionally challenging to engage in the curriculum negotiation process within the space of a two or three hour block in many participants’ views. It is difficult to have students generate themes, identify solutions, and engage in praxis that works toward solutions in the amount of time allotted for a typical university course (Solorzano, 1986). In my study, Bob and Linda had a two-part syllabi that included some proposed readings but left many openings for student input regarding course content. Still, Sweet (1998) and Jakubowski and Visano (2002) argue that because books must be selected and ordered long before classes first meet, the process of curriculum negotiation and student input into course materials becomes more challenging,

Most participants also reported more general time constraints related to critical pedagogical praxis. Because the costs of post-secondary education are on the rise, students often attend university full-time while working part-time or full-time to support themselves (Boehner & McKeon, 2003). According to participants in my study, a result of these time pressures often

makes it difficult for students to find time in their schedule to engage in critical praxis and out-of-classroom experiences. Students who are more in control of their time and money are often in the privileged position of being able to more fully engage with curriculum negotiation and with contract grading that is quantitatively based on the amount of work done (Shor, 1996). These same students may also have more available time to engage in some of the more praxis-oriented activities, including community service and attending rallies.

There are additionally many constraints on a professor's time if he or she chooses to engage in critical pedagogical praxis versus a more transmission-oriented form of teaching and learning (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002). All the participants in my study said they put a great deal of time and effort into their course preparations. Catherine said that she often prepares two or three different lessons for any given day and then enters the class and gets a "feel" for where the students are at before choosing which lesson to employ. Jakubowski and Visano (2002) assert that, as critical pedagogues, they often "spend more time regularly modifying our readings, syllabi, lecture materials and means of evaluation in response to student concerns" (p. 28). If critical teaching and learning advances a pedagogical model that is praxis-oriented, professors may have more community-related obligations (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002).

Bob, Catherine, Graham, and Anne all said that each semester brings new challenges and each semester requires preparation that is specific to each new group of students. Sweet (1998) asserts that, unlike educators who adopt a more transmission-oriented approach, "Radical pedagogues require a fresh approach with each class each semester" (p. 105). Shor argues (1992) that teachers who use the same syllabus year after year do not need to invest a great deal of time and energy into preparing for their classes, which makes traditional pedagogy less time-consuming than critical pedagogy. For many pedagogues, lecturing is also a "safer, more reassuring way to teach because teachers can establish a position that keeps students at a

distance” (Shor, 1992, p. 102). Some participants in my study said they were generally wary of their colleagues who used the same “canned” lectures year after year within their classrooms.

That said, however, some participants in my study believed that aspects of their critical pedagogy required them to use a more transmission-oriented approach to teaching and learning at times. A number of participants said they employed lecture as a means to communicate what they view as essential content. This finding would resonate with Gimenez’s (1998) conclusion that:

To make sure students learn the basic intellectual skills necessary to be able to think critically and with self-assurance about their experiences, [conventional] pedagogy is likely to be more radical – in the sense of challenging the status quo to a higher degree – than student-centred approaches that often cater to student prejudices and reaffirm them in the pragmatic, eclectic, and relativistic ethos dominant today. (pp. 117-118)

Gimenez is advocating that educators fully examine their practices in determining what pedagogical approach is warranted within any given circumstance.

About one-half of the participants in my study mentioned that it was important not to wholly reject some of the more transmission-oriented classroom practices in favour of purely experiential and praxis-oriented activities. Many participants said there is a balance that needs to be maintained and that the job of the critical pedagogue is to read the group and facilitate an optimally educative experience for students. A number of participants cited Dewey’s (1938) notion of not rejecting the “old” (traditional) in reaching for the “new” (progressive), emphasizing that they agreed with Dewey’s ideal that the educator must act as a facilitator.

The project of “facilitating” teaching from a critical perspective, one that takes each individual context and group of students into account, is complex (Dewey, 1938; Shor, 1996). Brookfield (1995) argues, “Before educators can ask groups of strangers to turn to each other, form small groups, and reveal something about their own experiences, those educators must

somehow model the process themselves” (p. 27) and engage in similar work. In other words, the pedagogue must “situate” herself, interrogating her positionality in relation to pedagogical decisions and authority and analyse how that position affects her teaching and learning (Ellsworth, 1992; hooks, 1994).

Jarvis (1996) explains how, “Attempting to teach about positioning and critiquing dominant discourses calls into question my own abilities to examine positioning and to critique dominant discourses” (p. 11). Jarvis recognizes how her own “positionality” as the professor affects the classroom dialogue. The belief that one’s own reality is the only reality worth speaking about can be the most dangerous of all delusions (Sefa Dei, 1996), not only for students but for professors as well. Developing a process of “naming” oneself, including one’s positionality and biases, is an essential first step in the process of creating an authentic classroom community.

This process is generally time-consuming and emotional. Some participants in my study articulated that they have found a way to work through some of the tension and discomfort with coming to terms with themselves. Others, including Linda, Graham, and Bob in particular, said that they find it difficult to sustain their critical efforts because of the time-consuming and emotional nature of their efforts. Ursula Kelly (1990) describes her work as a teacher as being fraught with some of the same tensions and inevitable contradictions that were raised by participants in my study. She (1990) states that:

Teaching to and for social change is only possible as and when we teach for subject change...[necessitating] that each of us critiques the place of our own practices as teachers...[while setting up] a terrain of sharing through tension, difference, and critique, a terrain on which are acted out the moments of race, class, gender, sexual, regional and able constitution which are our subjective and social selves. (p. 37)

Because a student-centred approach to pedagogy involves meeting the students on their own terms and developing some understanding not only of the professor's positionality but also an understanding of students' positionalities and lives, students may begin to develop relationships with professors. Students and professors often develop a "pedagogical friendship" (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002) within the critical classroom. This may also result in increased obligations to attend and support student activities, to meet with students, to advise students, and to provide students with letters of reference, since students will most often ask a professor who "knows them" to provide such services (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002). Some participants described the resulting increased time commitment as being a challenge. Many of them said that they have an open door policy while at work but that they have learned over time to work at home one or two days a week so they could devote some time to research and writing as well.

Risk

Another obstacle that a few participants cited as a challenge to praxis was the notion of risk. In Mark's view, some professors who engage in critical praxis may risk being marginalized by students. In my study, Mark said that he has the most polarized student evaluations of any professor at the university. If the measure of successful teaching is a standardized teaching evaluation and a critical praxis cultivates student resistance, then teachers may receive lower scores on the student evaluations, and those professors in probationary positions may find themselves in tenuous positions with school administrators (Bohmer & Briggs, 1991). Standardized teaching evaluations, in general, tend to lack indicators designed to assess the effectiveness of radical teaching (Sweet, 1998). In my study, Donna said that students mostly just circle numbers on the student evaluation and provide very few comments. Mark said that he believes that course evaluations may hinder professors' willingness to engage in critical praxis

because the evaluations, in his view, promulgate a very conservative notion of what “good” pedagogy is by the questions that are on the form.

Taylor said she has received some low marks on end-of-the-semester student evaluations. She believes these low marks are due to the fact that much of her critical praxis impels students to examine their own privilege and their own roles as oppressors and this makes students uncomfortable. She has been asked to observe some of the so-called “master pedagogues” at her university as a result. She said that those professors were very transmission-oriented in their teaching and, in her opinion, did not disrupt the hegemonic norms and were therefore more valued by the institution.

In this sense, pedagogues are often initiated into pedagogical practices that are designed to reinforce hegemonic norms through faculty mentors (Pocklington & Tupper, 2002). In Chawla and Rodriguez (2001), Chawla explains how his own teaching practices focused on being in sync with the dominant pedagogical order because he was never taught how to resist the mainstream in his teacher preparation program. Eyre (1993) says that, “I question the possibility of liberatory pedagogy in teacher education, and ultimately in schooling, when prospective teachers are establishing their own identities and are concerned about job security” (p. 273).

Most participants in my study mentioned that there is additional risk of being marginalized by students as a result of their attempts to share authority and negotiate curriculum. Students often perceive professors’ willingness to negotiate curriculum as a sign of incompetency or as a sign of weakness (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002). Students and colleagues may query, “Can a student-centred class teach anything significant” (Shor, 1992, p. 102)?

Students and professors who have only been exposed to hegemonic practices, including lecture, testing, and teacher authority, may seriously question how content can be taught in a participatory way that allows for negotiation and student voice. Catherine said that students question her authority regularly. When she begins the process of curriculum negotiation, she said

that students often get the “Hey, this class might be a free A” look in their eyes. She said that she has to do a lot of work to dispel that myth initially, telling students that freedom results from some minimum necessary structure and a strong sense of academic rigour.

In addition to the risk of being marginalized by students, professors run the risk of being marginalized by a more traditional academic culture that views a critical pedagogical approach to teaching and learning as subversive (Brookfield, 1995). Professors who teach in “radical” or “critical” ways are often regarded as controversial and they may risk repercussions from academic administrators who are less open to alternative ways of teaching and learning (Jakubowski & Visano, 2002).

A few participants in my study said that resistance to critical praxis from other faculty within their department and across the university is one issue for them. Mark said that although he understands why faculty are resistant, because there is a lack of institutional support for critical praxis, he still believes that professors use that excuse too liberally as a means to opt out of the time commitment required. Larry has had other faculty tell him that he is lowering the standards by engaging in critical praxis and “allowing” the students to negotiate the curriculum. He said that he generally replies that he does not see his teaching praxis as lowering standards but rather he sees it as introducing other standards which the mainstream considers to be wrong. Larry asserts that others regard those “new” standards as abnormal and that in itself becomes a critical pedagogical issue.

Shor (1996) agrees that producing critical thought in an institution that is conservative is challenging. Chawla describes how as a teaching assistant he found himself entrenched in a university where his attempts at emancipatory pedagogy were too risky and too challenging and he instead found himself merely perpetuating the dominant ideology (Chawla and Rodriguez, 2001). He said that pushing his students to interrogate their ontological and epistemological positionalities and encouraging students to question their realities resulted in student resistance.

Chawla also asserted that because he was not prepared to deal with student resistance, he resorted to a more transmission-oriented pedagogy.

Scott (1997) argues that often professors who initially attempt critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom may resort to traditional instructional methods that rely on order and discipline when their initial attempts at critical praxis are challenged by students and by colleagues. According to Anver Segall (2002), most teacher preparation courses in colleges and universities do not provide students with an opportunity to analyze the ideological assumptions and underlying interests that structure the way that teaching is taught. Consequently, students who are training to be teachers, themselves come to believe and accept that the rules, regulations, and social practices that undergird and inform life in schools are necessary if learning is to be successfully accomplished (McLaren, 2003).

It may not be surprising, then, that Chawla concedes that his pedagogical praxis evolved into semantic resistance to the hegemonic norms of the institution: "I understand the oppressive knowledge the system generates, and I resist, but not enough to transform" (Chawla & Rodriguez, 2001, p. 9). Chawla believed that being accepted and respected by his students and colleagues was important and feared that too much resistance would have fully marginalized him. He regrettably concluded that in many ways his resistance to the mainstream actually served to perpetuate the dominant pedagogical order because he was only willing to go so far with resisting and his return to the more "traditional" may have represented further confirmation of the normative power of the institution (Chawla & Rodriguez, 2001).

In reference to the above claims made by Chawla (2001) and in reference to participants' responses in my study, there appears to be a clear need for an increased focus within teacher preparation programs on how to engage in critical pedagogical praxis. There may be the need for more explicit instruction about some of the challenges, including student, faculty, and institutional resistance.

Most participants in my study believed that despite the lack of preparation for engaging in critical pedagogical praxis and despite some of the institutional constraints and risks to engaging in critical praxis, any attempt at critical praxis was worth the investment in. Some participants said that the risk of simply pledging allegiance to the dominant ideology presented much more risk to the future of their countries and to society as a whole than the risks and challenges of engaging in post-secondary critical praxis.

When I asked participants about what kind of support would help them to more fully engage with critical praxis, some participants responded that being part of a group of like-minded colleagues within their faculty groups helped them to remain passionate about their work. Laurie said that everyone in her faculty taught from a critical perspective. Sarah, Bailey, Sam, and Mark found this support not only within their departments but within the university as a whole. There is resonance between participants' responses and Kumashiro's (2004) conclusion that critical pedagogues and educators who are "doing" justice-oriented work can benefit from identifying kindred spirits within the university and beyond.

A number of participants additionally mentioned the importance of staying current with the field of critical pedagogy and building a network of colleagues through association with affiliations and by attending conferences. During the focus group session itself, a number of participants expressed the value of socially constructing and building upon each others' responses and said they always look forward to the networking that happens at the American Educational Research Association conferences.

Promotion and tenure

In my study, issues related to promotion and tenure were identified as another institutional obstacle to engaging in critical pedagogical praxis. One or two participants noted that because teaching within their universities is valued less than research in regard to promotion

and tenure, they have been advised by colleagues and administrators to minimize the time that they commit to course preparations. Taylor, in particular, said that she struggles with the requirements of promotion and tenure.

This concern echoes Marchant and Newman's (1994) sentiment that career-minded professors should consider minimizing the time that they invest into the quality of their teaching and devoting more time to publishing. Tom Pocklington and Allan Tupper (2002), in their research on Canadian universities, concluded that quantity of publications is decisively more important than teaching. In fact, they concluded that:

It is possible for a barely acceptable teacher to be granted tenure if she publishes extensively. But it is not possible for a brilliant teacher to be granted tenure if she does not publish, no matter how learned she may be. (p. 43)

In my study, Bob, Graham, and Linda said they have focused on what is required by the institution while simultaneously investing a great deal of time and energy into teaching. They consequently feel overworked. Graham said that his practice has become more mainstream and conventional as a result of pressure related to tenure and promotion and fitting in with a conservative group of colleagues.

Still, other participants said that they do not see promotion and tenure as constraining. Anne said that her teaching and research are conjoined and mutually complementary and said that she has published some autoethnographic papers related to her critical teaching praxis. She went on to say that she is not worried about promotion and tenure. Jack said that some institutions seem to encourage a strong sense of individualism and instigate a culture of fear regarding issues of promotion and tenure. However, he also noted that professors can choose to be subsumed by that pressure or not. Jack reported that he believes in working hard and working collaboratively and he is okay if others choose to work less. Jack mentioned that although he is committed to engaging in critical praxis, he does not believe that everyone should be or needs to

be. He argued that part of what makes the university environment stimulating is that professors' maintain various ideological stances, work ethics, and ways of being that add to the overall university culture. A number of participants mentioned that the "realities" of the K-12 classroom represented another obstacle to critical pedagogy.

"Realities" of the K-12 Classroom and "No Child Left Behind"

"Realities" of the K-12 classroom and the U.S.-based No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act were mentioned frequently as challenges to critical pedagogical praxis. Donna said that there are many challenges to teaching critically within the demands of a post-secondary institution teacher training program that has a set of requirements and a prescriptive framework. She said that the current K-12 climate that is becoming more and more focused on testing, accountability, and standardization has real effects on post-secondary teacher training programs. Donna said that students question the applicability of being taught to practice critically. They want to know how to maintain order and discipline and how to help students receive high test scores since that is what they see as being valued within the K-12 school system.

Sarah said the new accreditation requirements for post-secondary teacher training programs within the State of California look a lot like the NCLB (2002) act within K-12 schools. She said that responding to the imposed standards and preparing the documentation for accreditation has meant that the faculty has had to engage with a more prescriptive curriculum within their post-secondary teaching. Sarah said that the teacher training standards that she responded to in 2000 had some prescriptive elements but most standards were listed as recommended guidelines. She said that she is engaged in 2006 in reaccreditation and that the new standards are prohibitively prescriptive and more limiting to critical praxis.

The U.S.-based NCLB Act was mentioned only a few times during the interviews, but became a focal point of the focus group discussion. Out of the four focus group participants,

three professors taught at universities in the United States and one professor taught at a Canadian university. Sarah said that it is very challenging for her to discuss with her post-secondary education students how to pursue a critical pedagogical praxis and use education as a vehicle for social change and justice alongside the reality of a conservative educational climate within the United States. Jacqueline Edmondson (2004) asserts that approaching teaching and learning from a critical perspective is challenging within the current educational climate in which the federal legislation is based on a conservative ideology that emphasizes scripted instruction and the idea that teaching can be a neutral process.

Sarah said that her students are aware of the requirements of teaching in the K-12 system and the conservative climate, specifically as it relates to increased standards and testing. She said that the students themselves experience a tension between what they perceive as the reality of the K-12 classroom and the more critically-oriented teacher training that they receive at her university.

When Catherine said that as a naïve Canadian she was curious to know what would happen if a state were to say “no” to implementing NCLB, Mark said that from what he understands about NCLB, a school could lose all their funding if it doesn’t comply. Sarah said that there are some individual districts that have resisted the act and that resistance is growing. She said that Utah has asserted that NCLB is in conflict with its state laws. Connecticut is in the process of suing the federal government over the NCLB mandated curricula claiming that the state cannot comply with both its state statute and the federal Department of Education's rigid, arbitrary and capricious interpretation of the NCLB mandates (Orson, 2005).

Research suggests that the process of trying to prepare students for the NCLB tests and administering the tests to them is unreasonable and educationally inappropriate (Dawson, 2003). Kelley Dawson (2003) said that the school where she teaches and other schools engage in teaching toward the test because the law requires it and because the stakes are high. She said that

many school specialists and non-classroom teachers, including the special education teacher and the mentor teachers in her school, have been pulled from their other duties in order to work intensively with the fourth-grade students on test-prep and the administration of tests. Dawson asserts that while it may help certain students test better, it negatively impacts students at other grade levels in her school. She and her colleagues fear that if they do not demonstrate increased test scores that the school may face sanctions in the form of funding costs.

Bailey believes that there is more public accountability now than there was in the 50s and 60s. She said that number-crunching report cards and student marks have become an integral part of the educational system and this creates an oppressive system. She believes creative teachers are less inclined to teach within a public school system that is oppressive and prescriptive.

These sentiments resonated with Pocklington and Tupper (2002) who assert that with the massive growth of post-secondary institutions in the United States and Canada, higher education became something that most middle-class people experience. At the same time, according to Pocklington and Tupper (2002), starting in the 1960s, undergraduate programs and teaching began to take a back seat to graduate studies and research as university priorities. A new vision of the professor also emerged. She was to be a researcher, a director of advanced research by graduate students, and an undergraduate teacher. This new vision of the “ideal professor” was accompanied by a new vision regarding the sense of purpose of the university itself. Universities began to take on a uniformity that embodied the mainstream ideals of faculty research and graduate studies (Pocklington & Tupper, 2002).

Universities became linked with government as well. Government funding provided financial stability and government policy began to shape university policy (Pocklington & Tupper, 2002), resulting in a higher level of accountability. This trend has continued. In my study, Bailey asserted that young professors may be less prone to risk engaging in critical pedagogical praxis as a result of this more conservative educational climate. She said that many

professors are actually afraid of administrators and the implications of not following government mandates.

Within teacher preparation programs, post-secondary students “know” the repercussions of not following NCLB and other governmental mandates within their K-12 classrooms as well, according to a number of participants in my study. Sarah said that one of her former students has talked to her about the ways in which he has to steal time “here and there” for the teachable moments that arise within his K-12 classroom because the principal is always breathing down his back to ensure that he is on the “right page” of the curriculum on any given day. A number of participants reported that student resistance was a challenge to critical pedagogical praxis.

Student Resistance

Student resistance was an issue for many participants in my study. Linda said that students express their resistance to critical pedagogical praxis in a number of ways. Linda mentioned that students feel as though she is not doing her job when she comes to class with a relatively blank syllabus and says that the students are going to help co-construct the syllabus. Catherine said that students often tell her that she is being lazy because she is not preparing enough content-oriented lectures in class and is making the students present and do all the work. Larry said that many of his students want, and are used to, “quick fixes” and immediate answers to questions and problems. When he responds to questions with other critical questions, students sometimes become frustrated and think that he doesn’t know the answer.

These sentiments are echoed throughout the review of related literature that suggests that students express resistance to critical pedagogical praxis in a number of ways (Shor, 1980; Shor & Freire, 1987). After many long years of traditional forms of schooling, students may find it difficult to give voice to their different experiences and to participate fully in the exploration of other counter-hegemonic practices that are encouraged within critical classroom praxis

(Jakubowski & Visano, 2002). Students may be resistant to the practices as well as to what they may perceive as controversial course content.

Kumashiro (2000), reflecting on his own experiences, concluded that many students feel that teachers should be morally neutral and that schools are not responsible for social change. He concluded that other students felt that teaching in ways that address oppression would detract from the academic standards that schools were supposed to meet.

Shor (1996) argues that students often resist in a number of ways, including: they do not want to share authority (it is easier for them to be the recipients of knowledge than it is for them to take responsibility); they do not like the process of curriculum negotiation (they want the “teacher-expert” to tell them what things mean and what to do); they do not trust the professor’s sincerity or the authenticity of the process of curriculum negotiation; and they are reluctant to take public risks by speaking up in an unfamiliar process. Their reluctance may be tied to a variety of reasons: they may be shy, they may lack confidence, they may feel at risk if they have typically felt marginalized or oppressed within the classroom environment, or they may prefer not to draw attention to themselves.

In trying to confront student discomfort over being asked to become active participants in their learning and viewing the teacher as co-learner rather than someone with all the answers, the pedagogue is often challenged by student resistance (King & Ahlquist, 1990). Yet, in King and Ahlquist’s (1990) view, this resistance should not be surprising, “particularly given the long pattern of passive apathy toward school most students have established by the time they are adolescents” (p. 18). King and Ahlquist argue that despite the fact that it is not easy to “combat some of the long-established patterns of boredom and emotional distance students have learned” (p. 18), they have found that persistence pays off and most students come to understand the meaningful and significant learning that can occur when they are able to incorporate their

knowledge and experiences into the curriculum. They believe that teaching from a critical perspective is worth dealing with the resistance.

Ellsworth (1997) and Britzman (2003) regard pedagogy as slippery and interminably difficult. According to Ellsworth, learning is simultaneously traumatic, surprising, uncomfortable, disruptive, troubling, and intolerable because it always involves new awakenings alongside disruptions in thinking. They suggest these various emotions may reveal themselves as resistance. Britzman (2003) proposes that pedagogy should be dialogically restructured to begin with “the recognition that multiple realities, voices, and discourses conjoin and clash in the process of coming to know” (p. 49). Britzman believes this clash should be explicitly communicated and student resistance should be openly addressed within the critical classroom.

In reference to my study, Jeff said that he sees resistance as a healthy “thing.” Davis (1992) confirms Jeff’s stance asserting that because students will usually opt to go with the status quo when there is risk and crisis, some resistance is both natural and healthy because it suggests that students are struggling with the issues and taking them seriously.

Similarly, dian marino (1997) agreed that the very notion that as educators we can somehow articulate our positions, challenge authority, and engage students in counterhegemonic praxis without some resistance is unimaginable. While part of her wanted to heal hurt and pain, avoid resistance and even deny it, overtime, she found that resistance was often accompanied by revelation, and thus worth engaging seriously and even welcoming.

Lack of Preparation

Almost every participant in my study said that they do not blame students for resisting critical pedagogical praxis. Linda said it is hard to blame students for being unprepared to engage in critical praxis when their previous school experiences have prepared them to passively take in the information that is offered to them and to go with the flow. Jack asserts that students are

actually programmed for passivity by school, society, their parents, and their peer group. Many students have been taught from early on that to be a “good” student means to be silent, passive, and accepting and that a “good” student’s primary purpose is to learn the knowledge the educator imparts in an unquestioning manner (hooks, 1994). Often the primary lesson that is taught in K-12 is to learn obedience to authority. Holtz (1989) and Sweet (1998) assert that students are often unprepared to participate in “real” critical thinking and dialogue because of inadequate preparation for college and university-level work.

Davis (1992) submits that most students soon realize that by either giving lip service to what they think the teacher wants to hear or withdrawing into silence, they will receive a higher mark in many courses. Chawla agrees that, as a student, he understood early on that writing what he thought the instructor wanted him to write and not what he was feeling or experiencing in regard to the course worked in his favour (Chawla & Rodriguez, 2001).

In my study, Catherine said that students in her class want to be liberated but also want to know how to get an “A.” Shor (1996) contends that he is continuously surprised by the fact that “critical inquiry and power-sharing have virtually no profile in student experience” (p. 19). Students arrive in a critical classroom with little practice in what Shor refers to as democratic rhetoric. He maintains that although some students do know how to follow or frustrate authority, they have little experience with how to assume authority. A teacher’s attempt to encourage students to experiment with different written rhetorical forms may be limited by students’ prior experience in other courses (Simon, 1992).

Bob said that teaching math, in particular, presents challenges for engaging in critical praxis. Students are accustomed to learning math through tests and quizzes, not through a process of critical questioning. He said that he encourages students to critically question canonical knowledge within the field of math, including some of the basic axioms and some of the theorems. Bob said students are very inexperienced with knowing how to be critical and he

has had to refine his teaching over the years. He said he talks to students about the critical pedagogical literature that focuses on challenging educational assumptions and examining the “hidden curriculum” in schools (Giroux, 1997), challenging them to examine this specifically in relation to math.

Another challenge is that some students may find it difficult to address issues of oppression and privilege when they have had little such “real world” experience. From the outset, students “may deny the existence or importance of inequality or may argue that conditions are improving so rapidly that no intervention is needed” (Davis, 1992, p. 232). Some students may remain on an abstract or intellectual level when discussing stratification and the influence of the dominant culture (Davis, 1992). Students may want to avoid introspection and recognition of how power differences between groups are played out in the interactions of everyday life, especially one’s own life (Shor, 1996), particularly when they have not been adequately prepared for this kind of work within their previous educational experiences.

Concluding Remarks

As I reread what I have written in this chapter, especially the number of these pages filled with description of challenges to engaging in critical praxis, I am concerned about readers being filled with a sense of discouragement or despair. While the project of engaging in critical pedagogical praxis may indeed feel discouraging at times, as critical pedagogues, we must not despair. I can’t help but smile when I think about how Paulo Freire himself wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970 and then *Pedagogy of Hope* in 1994. In describing the ideal of hope, Freire (1994) describes it as an ontological need that should be anchored in practice in order to become historical concreteness. He argues that, “Without hope, we are hopeless and cannot begin the struggle to change” (Freire, 1994, p. 8). Without hope, Freire (1994) asserts, there is inaction, hopelessness, and despair.

Kumashiro (2004) argues that authentic critical pedagogy entails addressing the partial nature of our own teaching. He believes that hope can bring about change when pedagogues are able to focus on “one unit, or one lesson, or one moment of our teaching, and rethink the possibilities for change within the particular social, historical, political, and pedagogical context in which it arose” (p. 107). For Kumashiro, (2004), this process gives him hope that anti-oppressive education is possible.

I too am hopeful. I hope that this discussion remains rooted in the possibilities of the “impossibilities of critical pedagogy,” one that represents an ongoing search for meaning while simultaneously purporting that the universality of meanings and concretization of ideals is impossible (Lather, 1998). Perhaps I need to embrace the possibilities of getting “lost” and then hanging out at a “stuck place” (Lather, 1991). Conceivably, within the tension and the struggles that occur within this “stuck place,” there is the possibility for new meanings and the conception of multiple realities.

According to Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins (2004), the critical pedagogue who re-reads some stories of the past while simultaneously exploring pluralistic conceptions of “reality” can more fully conceptualise themselves in the present. It may then be possible to know ourselves better as lead actors in a pedagogical drama in the present. Jones and Jenkins (2004) assert that:

If we consider ourselves bit players in a past storyline overwhelmingly controlled by others, it is harder to envisage ourselves as (re)producing a positive storyline now. To put it another way, the act of re-reading historical moments is not merely encountering a different past; it is also re-learning about the present and its possibilities. (p. 145)

In this sense, critical pedagogues are called upon to embrace some of the tensions that have been addressed throughout this chapter, critically interrogating some of the historical contingencies of critical pedagogy alongside some of the contemporary contingencies.

Gur-Ze'ev (1998) argues that:

Praxis education of this sort is conditioned by the possibility of developing people's competence to demystify reality, decipher its codes, and critically reconstruct the demolished potential for human solidarity, cooperation, and the realization of their dialogical essence, while acknowledging that in the current historical stage these two missions contradict each other. (p. 486)

This conception of praxis is far from the one that is common in today's standard versions of critical pedagogy, according to Gur-Ze'ev (1998). Instead, it is premised on the ideal that counter-education can and should acknowledge the multiple historical and contemporary contingencies that inform it by encouraging pedagogues to explore the infinite possibilities created by this tension. Rather than encouraging pedagogues to engage in attempts to constantly locate themselves within a non-existent utopia that is free of these tensions, the critical pedagogue should embrace and work within the tension (Gur-Ze'ev, 1998).

There is hope when pedagogues can engage with an incomplete, localized, ruptured, and partial understanding of critical praxis (Gur-Ze'ev, 1998). In this sense, I may have achieved the goal that I had established at the outset of this chapter. Perhaps I now *find* myself, as a result of my own emergent and maturing critical capacities, better equipped to understand and embrace the inevitability of the "stuck place" (Lather, 1991) and "difficult knowledges" (Lather, in press) that constitute a critical pedagogical praxis.

The final chapter considers some of the implications of this study on the field of critical pedagogy alongside some recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

My intent in this final chapter is to suggest some of the ways in which the results from my study may add to a terrain of knowledge that can work within some of the “difficult knowledges” I outlined in the concluding remarks of Chapter 6. My intent is to trouble and worry ideas more so than to try to understand them (Kumashiro, 2004; Jones, 1999; Lather, 1991, in press). I briefly summarize the implications of my study for the field of critical pedagogy and offer some general recommendations for future studies related to critical pedagogical praxis.

I am wary about my own attempts to summarize the findings from my study and am wary of any attempt to try to tie them up in a neat, little package which is what researchers are so often compelled to do when concluding a research study. Instead, I attempt to embrace the uncertainties and multiplicities of critical pedagogical work (Jones, 1999) as I enter into this conclusion.

I believe that the results from my study are embedded in the same kind of tension that is found in the review of related literature – there is a call for the critical pedagogue to engage in practices that are congruent with the theory of critical pedagogy (Gore, 1993; Shor, 1996; Sweet, 2003; Wink, 2005) and a call for more empirical research within the field of critical praxis (Horan, 2004; MacDonald & Brooker, 1999; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005; Sweet, 1998) and yet there is perhaps an even greater call for the very nature of critical pedagogical praxis and critical pedagogical research to be troubled and complicated (Britzman, 2003; Lather, 1996, in press). This somewhat paradoxical tension represents one of the key “findings” in my study.

In light of this paradoxical tension, I am somewhat hesitant to engage in presenting some of the other key findings from my study because I am aware that some of them do represent “a call to the critical pedagogue” to at least consider some of the potential of outcomes-based, quantitative research methods to address the paucity of current research, particularly as it relates

to purposes and definitions of critical pedagogy and classroom practices. But, that said, it would be an oversight for me not to point to some of these findings within this conclusion.

I hope this conclusion represents a discursive and critical space that serves to trouble critical pedagogical theory, practices, and research by using the paradoxical tension to point toward some conclusions, pose new questions, and seek new insights. The key findings from my study and those that will be summarized in this conclusion include: 1) Some of the “easy” claims related to purposes of critical pedagogy need to be troubled; 2) There exists a need for ongoing articulation of “critical classroom practices” and how to implement these within the post-secondary classroom despite some of the challenges; 3) Some of the specific claims regarding participants’ success with critical praxis require further critical interrogation; 4) Approaches to research about/in/for critical pedagogy need to be troubled and complicated; and 5) Some of the critical questions that have arisen as a result of this study can serve to inform future studies.

Lather (1996) would accede that to trouble and worry ideas is sometimes more important than understanding them, arguing that “becoming clear” is part of the process of knowing. Attempts at “being clear” suggests there is an end point to one’s interrogations (Lather, 1996). “Being clear” is not a posture of knowing, but of dogma and stasis, according to Lather (1996). In light of this, the results from my study will trouble some of the claims that critical pedagogues made as they articulated their attempts to turn the theory of critical pedagogy into critical pedagogical praxis within the post-secondary classroom. My attempt is focused on becoming more clear about the potential for critical pedagogical praxis to attain the justice-oriented goals that the theory purports by summarizing some of the key findings from my study.

Findings from my study point to the need for the overarching purpose of critical pedagogy to be critically interrogated. The results from my study would suggest that some self-identified critical pedagogues need to move beyond constructivism to reassert the justice-oriented intent of critical pedagogical praxis. This finding is further substantiated by the

discussion in Chapter 6 regarding the importance of metacognitive knowledge and the educative potential for explicit communication about the justice-oriented nature of critical praxis.

Both the participants in my study and the review of related literature seem to suggest that there may be a need for critical pedagogues to continue to broaden their understandings of the justice-oriented nature of critical praxis and to begin to articulate this intent more explicitly within their post-secondary classroom practices. This need is particularly true if the intent of critical pedagogical praxis is to use education as a vehicle to bring about a more socially just world (Kanpol, 1999; Keesing-Styles, 2003; Kincheloe, 2004).

In terms of future research, a great deal remains to be done. As I was conducting this study, I was talking with a friend who was studying with a critical pedagogue who has been cited throughout my review of related literature and cited throughout participants' responses in my study. She informed me that, to her surprise, this particular professor taught very traditionally and demonstrated a lack of congruence between his theory and practice. My friend thus saw value in my study.

As a result of my friend's reaction to her experiences with this so-called "master critical pedagogue" and in reference to my study, I believe there is value in continuing to critically interrogate the practices of self-identified pedagogues and the need for all of us to participate in an ongoing examination of the congruence, or lack thereof, between the ways in which we teach about the theory of critical pedagogy and the ways in which we practice. Embedding this research within a framework that critically queries, problematizes, and troubles the possibilities of the "impossibilities" of critical praxis represents an area of future research. In this sense, then, the findings from my study point to the need for critical pedagogues to bring their teaching practices into better congruence with the theory of critical pedagogy and to reassert and articulate the purposeful nature of their critical pedagogical praxis.

The second finding from my study is in reference to specific claims regarding participants' examples of classroom practices. In my view, areas which require further interrogation include: dialogue and voice; classroom community; students as embodied beings; curriculum negotiation; and critical methods of assessment and evaluation.

I have already indicated throughout Chapter 6 those many instances where I wish that I had probed participants to look more deeply at some of the "easy" claims that they made in reference to their praxis. For example, I now wish that I had asked participants for more concrete examples regarding "how" they engaged with some of the classroom practices that they cited throughout the interviews and focus group session. In fact, my PhD supervisor, Connie Russell, repeatedly wrote in the margins of my initial drafts of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 the words, "show me, don't just tell me." Yet, when I returned to the data, I became aware of the fact that I had neglected to "push" participants to be more specific and that participants had, in turn, not always provided me with some of the details that I now deem worthy of further exploration.

As a result, participants' examples of the justice-oriented nature of their classroom practices (e.g. dialogue and voice and classroom community) remained only superficially interrogated by the participants in my study and I feel somewhat responsible for this lack. I also believe that many examples of critical classroom practices remained largely unnamed by participants in my study.

An area for future research related to this finding, then, is the need for ongoing work focused on articulating some of the ideas related to practicing critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom and on attempting to address some of the gaps found within the review of literature related to examples of classroom practices. I confess that I no longer envision an edited book of "best practices" as I had at the outset of this dissertation process. I now better understand the subjective, contextual, shifting nature of trying to "do" critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom.

This “finding” points to another tension in reference to my study: how best to address some of the gaps in the literature while simultaneously avoiding prescription and embracing the subjective and shifting nature of critical praxis. I believe that future research should consider the potential for a discourse-oriented approach to articulating examples of classroom practices and exploring the critical nature of these practices through focus group sessions.

As previously noted in reference to my study, participants reported that their own understanding of the critical nature of their praxis was improved as a result of their participation in the focus group session. Additionally, participants’ claims about the overall value of networking are significant. Participants noted that networking through conferences and engaging in dialogue with like-minded colleagues at their universities enhanced not only their understanding of critical praxis but their willingness to take risks and engage in critical praxis.

Denzin (2001a) refers to the social construction of knowledge that happens between colleagues as interpretive interactionism. The deepened understanding of a specific topic that can result from interpretive interactionism seemed to occur during the focus group session. Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain:

In focus groups, the goal is to let people spark off one another, suggesting dimension and nuances of the original problem [or idea] that any one individual might not have thought of. Sometimes a totally different understanding of a problem [or idea] emerges from the group discussion. (p.127)

I believe that future research should focus on the possibilities for critical pedagogical praxis to be interrogated through the interactive nature of the focus group session in light of the results from my study and in light of Denzin’s and Rubin and Rubin’s suggestions.

I therefore believe that the results from my study point to the potential for ongoing dialectically-oriented conversations about the justice-oriented nature of critical pedagogy to reaffirm a vision of the world that “ought to be.” If researchers were to further engage in this

dialogue, there would be implications for the field of critical pedagogy that are “not yet” possible to identify or conceive.

The third finding in my study is in reference to participants’ claims to success with praxis. In my study, participants were able to provide numerous anecdotal claims to success with praxis but when probed more deeply, participants said their conclusions were predominantly intuitive. A number of participants believed that attempting to draw any substantive conclusions regarding success with praxis reinscribed the hegemonic norms that the field of critical pedagogy itself was attempting to reconceptualize and trouble.

Findings from my study would suggest that some of the “easy” claims to success with critical pedagogical praxis may need to be contested and critically examined through ongoing research. That said, the findings from my study also suggest that attempts to draw conclusions and evaluate the outcomes of critical praxis will always be situated, partial, and contextual. As a result, there exists a tension between the need for empirical research and the critical pedagogical ideal that suggests that “telling” and concluding anything is always partial and governed by the discourses of time and place (Britzman, 2003).

The fourth finding points to the need for a reconceptualization of critical pedagogical research to be reaffirmed in light of the results from my study. These results, alongside a review of related literature, suggest that there is a paucity of research within the field of critical pedagogy. There also appears to be a tendency to reject research because it often mirrors the hegemonic norms that the field itself contests.

This finding points to the conclusion that critical pedagogical research needs to engage in research processes that are in better congruence with the theory and praxis of critical pedagogy itself. As Macdonald and Brooker (1999) suggest, there is a need for a research-based discourse to create spaces, structures, and processes that encourage socially critical pedagogues to work

within and against some of the contemporary constraints related to accountability, standards, and testing.

This reconceptualization would constitute the adoption of a discourse-oriented approach to doing research that would not wholly reject some of the hegemonic research norms that require pedagogues to identify, quantify, and measure but one that would consider the need for other kinds of research norms to be regarded as potentially equally valid and potent as those quantitative methods. This reconceptualization would build upon some of the hallmarks of qualitative research, including: acceptance of postmodern sensibilities; capturing the individual's point of view; examining the constraints of everyday life; and securing rich descriptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) without rejecting the need for systematic analysis of any of the above. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), these concepts reflect a commitment to different styles of research, different epistemologies, and different forms of representation.

One possibility of participating in such a project is the creation of reconceptualized research methods that “promise to deliver voices that have been previously shut out of normative educational research and [ones that] remedy the ways educational research normalizes populations through its imposition of categories that situate individuals as the site of the problem” (Britzman, 2003, p. 251). In this sense, critical pedagogical research can embrace methodologies that embody a justice-oriented commitment that recognizes the impossibility of telling everything while still saying something (Britzman, 2003).

A discourse-oriented research methodology thus conceived might provoke a different way of thinking. Britzman (2003) argues that this new way of thinking, theorizing, and practicing could represent an ethic that refuses the grounds of objectification and normalization and that worries about that which is not yet. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), critical pedagogical research conceived in this way is “always evolving, always encountering new ways

to irritate dominant forms of power, to provide more evocative and compelling insights,” (p. 306).

In light of the above, I believe that the critical pedagogical researcher needs to construct and engage in methodological approaches that are not random but represent an approach to doing research that critically examines some of the “easy” claims of positivist research but also some of the “easy” claims resulting from an “intuitive” sense of what may be happening as well.

Finally, I believe that some of the critical questions that have arisen as a result of my study can serve to inform future studies. I have gone back to Chapter 6 (Discussion) and compiled a list of the critical questions that I rhetorically posed at the end of many of the sections within that chapter. I believe that some of these queries regarding what I would have done differently to attain some greater depth to participant responses can serve as a useful tool for future studies related to critical pedagogical praxis.

Because I would add these questions to the original set of interview questions, I have embedded these below in bold italics to more clearly distinguish between the original questions and the queries that have arisen as a result of my study. Of course, depending upon the depth of participant responses and the examples that participants cited, the specific questions that may be posed in future studies would vary. The questions I have embedded below would serve as a framework to build upon participant responses in reference to my study.

Guiding questions for future studies:

- How do you define critical pedagogy?
- If you were to identify one or two aims of critical pedagogy, what would they be?
- In what ways do you self-identify as a critical pedagogue?
- In what ways do you teach about the theory of critical pedagogy?

- Who are some of the theorists who influence your teaching?
- Do you believe that you engage classroom practices that reflect the theory of critical pedagogy?
- What are some examples of your classroom practices that reflect the ways in which you employ critical pedagogy?
 - *Does dialogue happen automatically? What happens when certain voices dominate? Is everyone required to speak? What happens when voices bump up against one another? In what way is dialogue justice-oriented? What is the difference between dialogue and discourse?*
 - *How do you specifically address the concept of student voice when students may or may not wish to speak or may not feel safe to speak? How do you go about valuing student voice and building a classroom community with students who do not speak English as their first language? How do you address the varying abilities, both intellectual and physical, when working toward attaining the goal of a classroom community?*
 - *Given some of the time constraints previously mentioned, are there praxis-oriented projects that can address community needs within the constraints of a semester? I also wonder if you could tell me about some of the actual learning outcomes from these praxis-oriented projects?*
 - *Do you think that most of your classroom practices are critical, in the sense that they work to attain the justice-oriented purposes of critical pedagogy or are they constructivist, in the sense that*

they are student-centred? In your view, is there a distinction between these two approaches and, if so, how would you articulate that distinction? Can you provide some specific examples of your own classroom practices that represent critical classroom practices and some examples that represent constructivist classroom practices? Are you explicit with your students at the outset of your courses about the justice-oriented nature of your praxis? How do you articulate this?

- *What would an education system look like if the main goal of education was to create a more socially just world for all? In what way can pedagogues work toward attaining visions of a socially just world within a given course?*
 - Do you do anything specific in this regard related to assessment and evaluation?
 - *In what ways are the various assessment practices that you discussed actually critical?*
 - *In what way do you believe that some of the alternative methods of assessment and evaluation that you cited work to attain the justice-oriented aims of critical pedagogy?*
- What has guided your pedagogical decisions within the classroom? Are your decisions research-based, theory-based, or are they more experiential and intuitive? Please explain.
 - What has shaped your teaching?

- Do you think that employing critical classroom practices alongside instruction about the theory of critical pedagogy will attain the goals of that theory? Please explain.
- How do you know?
 - What are some of your success stories with engaging in employing critical pedagogical practices?
 - Any anecdotal or empirical evidence to support your conclusions?
 - *Do you find that there is adequate research within the field of critical pedagogy? What, if anything, do you feel may be missing in regards to research within this field? What kind of research would help to inform your critical pedagogical praxis?*
- What are some of the challenges that you face when engaging in critical classroom praxis?
 - *What are some of the ways that you address students' lack of preparation? What are some of the ways that you find balance between the institutional constraints and your belief in the value of critical pedagogy? How do you negotiate engaging in critical pedagogical praxis without imposing your own agenda, subjectivity, and positionality?*
- What would help you better understand the ways in which you can engage in this form of praxis?
 - Or what advice or recommendations would you provide for your students regarding this?
- What would be needed either on an individual level or on an institutional level for you to be more able and willing to engage in this form of praxis?

- Demographics
 - age, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, administrative responsibilities, more grad. than undergrad. courses, tenured or not, ESL

Finally, in light of the results from my study, I would recommend that classroom observations be incorporated into future studies. I do believe that observations and student interviews would provide additional insights into some of the participant reports. I would additionally consider doing a set of detailed second interviews with participants in future studies because I think that the depth and breadth of participant responses and interview questions would be more significant as a result of some form of follow-up.

In closing, I have become aware that people have a vision for critical pedagogy and/or a critical pedagogical ideal that may not be wholly congruent with critical pedagogical praxis. I believe that my study serves to highlight some of the ways in which professors who espouse the theory of critical pedagogy actually practice it within the post-secondary classroom. I also believe that the results of my study represent a rallying cry to those pedagogues who self-identify as “critical” and justice-oriented to more fully examine some of their claims regarding success with critical pedagogical praxis. I hope that the findings from my study can serve to guide future studies. I am hopeful that an ongoing articulation of critical classroom practices will encourage critical pedagogues to more fully examine the congruence between their espoused values and beliefs and their practices.

I am additionally hopeful that ongoing research will serve to add substantive evidence to some of the claims made by critical pedagogues regarding success with praxis. I believe that critical pedagogical praxis may be at an important crossroads regarding the gap between pedagogues’ articulation of a vision for critical pedagogy and success with praxis and evidence of the ways in which people practice critical pedagogy and measure success. I wonder if the

“next wave” for critical pedagogical praxis will be focused on filling in the gaps between that vision and the realities of post-secondary classroom praxis. I look forward to continuing the conversation.

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Appendix A – Interview Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am inviting you to participate in a study concerning critical pedagogy within the post-secondary classroom. The title of the study is “Critical Pedagogy as Praxis.”

I am a doctoral student at Lakehead University in the PhD in Educational Studies program, offered jointly by Brock University, Lakehead University, the University of Western Ontario, and the University of Windsor. I am conducting this study to understand the ways in which professors employ the theory of critical pedagogy within their post-secondary classroom practices. There has been very little research done on the successes and challenges of critical pedagogical praxis. The purpose of this study is to open an area of inquiry for self-identified critical pedagogues to share their own experiences.

As a participant in this study, you will be invited to participate in a phone interview. The interview will be tape recorded. The interview will consist of a series of questions that explore the successes and challenges that you encounter as you endeavour to apply the theory of critical pedagogy in post-secondary classrooms. If you choose to participate in this study and you are planning to attend the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in San Francisco in April, you will be invited to additionally participate in a focus group either before, during, or after that conference. The date and time of the focus group session will be mutually agreed upon by those people who volunteer to participate.

PLEASE MAIL YOUR SIGNED CONSENT TODAY. I will be interviewing the first 15-20 participants who volunteer for this study. Please provide me with three preferred interview dates and times between now and the end of January. After I receive your signed consent form, I will be contacting you regarding an interview date and time based on your preferences. You may withdraw from the study at any time. The information from the interviews will be transcribed, coded, analysed and securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. Your identification will be kept confidential. The findings of this study will be made available to you, at your request, upon completion of the project.

It may be valuable to you as a participant and for me as a researcher for you to share written materials that are related to your courses, as not only evidence of the ways in which you engage in critical praxis, but to provide additional “talking points” for the interviews. These materials may include course descriptions, course syllabi, and course assignments, among others. If you wish to voluntarily share some of these written materials, please send them to me at the address that is listed below, or fax them to me at (807) 346-7836, or email them as attachments to mary.breunig@lakeheadu.ca. I will mail these materials back to you upon request. These materials will remain confidential.

Informed Consent

I, _____, have read and understood the covering letter of the study entitled, "Critical Pedagogy as Praxis." I agree to participate in an interview for this study. I am aware that the interview will last approximately 1 hour and will be tape recorded. I am aware that after the interview, I may volunteer to participate in a follow-up focus group with other study participants. I understand that the data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office for seven years.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I recognize that all information and my identify will remain confidential and that the results from this study will be made available to me, upon request, at the end of this project.

Print Name	Signature of Participant	Date
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Please provide me with a mailing address where I can send the transcripts. I will additionally send you a report with the findings of this study upon your request to the same mailing address.

Interview Preferences (February 1st-March 15th)

	Date	Time
1	_____	_____
2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____

Are you planning to attend the AERA conference in San Francisco in April?

_____ Yes _____ No

If yes, would you be interested in participating in a focus group session related to this topic?

_____ Yes _____ No

Informed Consent

I, _____, have read and understood the covering letter of the study entitled, "Critical Pedagogy as Praxis." I agree to participate in a focus group for this study. I am aware that the focus group will last for approximately 60-120 minutes.

The focus group session will be tape recorded. The information from the focus group session will be transcribed, coded, analyzed and securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I affirm that I will not publicly disclose the identities of the focus group members.

Print Name

Signature of Participant

Date

I will send the transcripts to you for you to review. I will also send you a report with the findings of this study.

Appendix C - Script for phone interviews

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I anticipate that this interview will last between 1 hour and 3 hours. I am tape recording the interview. I would like to remind you that your responses will remain confidential and that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. All data will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office for seven years.

Because I have received your signed consent, I know that you are already somewhat familiar with the study. Just to remind you, the purpose of this study is to open an area of inquiry for self-identified critical pedagogues to share their own experiences. The interview will consist of a series of questions that explore the successes and challenges that you encounter as you endeavour to apply the theory of critical pedagogy in the post-secondary classroom.

I have designed a list of questions for this interview, but if we digress from this list, that is not a problem.

Do you have any questions for me about this study or about your participation?

I will start with my first question.

- How do you define critical pedagogy?