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Public education continues to be a cornerstone of society in the United States. The process of public education has been touted as the way great equalizer in that it provides all with an equal opportunity to gain skills and knowledge to live out the American Dream. Rhetoric such as this strongly supports the notion meritocracy and marginalizes the most fragile in society. In reality public education has, and continues to be utilized as systemic structure that perpetuates the grave social, political, and economic inequalities in society.

Numerous factors such as accountability measures, attendance lines, school choice, vouchers, and the influence of capitalistic ideals in education impact the overall structure of education. To better understand the awareness of these factors, I studied current classroom teachers in the specific areas of their extent of critical consciousness. This purpose of this study was to explore the degree in which classroom teachers are aware of systems the social, political, and economic systems of power. Additionally, I studied the level of awareness teachers have regarding the impact these structures have on the structure of school, including how these factors impact students.

I approached this study through the lens of critical theory in order to gain an understanding of how the social construction of education has evolved to the current status. I utilized a compilation of published school data, a staff survey and individual teacher interviews to address the three posed research questions in this study. Results indicate current classroom teachers are in need of gaining awareness of systems of power

and how these structures impact not only students, but also larger social outcomes in society. Results of this study also indicate a need to address the content of pre-service experiences to prepare teachers to navigate a global classroom space.

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CURRENT
CLASSROOM TEACHERS

by

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I dedicate this to my parents and my grandparents.
My combined family lineage and life experiences continue to drive me grow.

APPROVAL PAGE

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The journey of this dissertation began with my interest in gaining insight into a different lens of education than what my daily work in the school systems provided. I was drawn to this specific program because of the challenging questions that would be asked about the system of education and I believed I needed to gain this perspective in order to better serve public education.

I would have not been able to complete this dissertation without the professors and fellow students I encountered over the course of my experience. I would like to thank Dr. Villaverde for providing critical spaces for me to question the history of education and push me to broaden my perspective on the influences of education. I would like to thank Dr. Bettez for providing critical instructional design to unpack sociological mindfulness, as well as color blind racism. Combined, both of these have assisted in not only this dissertation, but also in the way I now approach my profession. I would to thank Dr. Perkins for continuing to keep me grounded and focused throughout this work. She has provided valuable insight into the process and has been a strong advocate for my success.

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I have dedicated this dissertation to my parents and grandparents because I feel a strong sense of family lineage that continues to drive my work in education and democracy. My maternal grandfather was an educator and leader. His love for education, strong leadership skills, and outlook on life has provided me with the strength to serve in leadership positions in a way that fosters continues growth of others. My maternal grandmother provided me with the safest of places to feel compassion and love. Her impact on my life has helped me balance the need to continuously drive with sitting still and enjoying the smallest moments of time.

The life story of my paternal grandmother continues to stew within my bloodline. The hell she endured and the strength she had to keep moving in life rings loudly within my soul. She lived boldly and unapologetically. She took great chances and fought for

her life, and those of her two boys. I am thankful for her strength, courage and drive to keep moving. These three components serve as a bedrock of my life.

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PREFACE

As a young child, I knew she was different, she carried herself differently and interacted in a contrasting manner than other family members. Etched in my memory is the sight of my grandmother, my father's mother, staring in deep thought as I talked with her, or even completing the simplest of tasks. While growing up I strained to understand her spoken language through her thick Polish accent. When I spoke, she did not make eye contact, but rather read my lips and listened to my words, nodding as I communicated with her. My grandmother, Felicia, spoke her feelings and thoughts with no concern to her audience, always stating that life is too short to hold back.

By third grade I began to understand why my grandmother was less nurturing, blunt with her words, stern with her advice, and appeared to be lost in thought more than other adults in my life. My grandmother is a Holocaust survivor. Born in Poland in 1924, daughter of a high-ranking government official, Felicia was a teenager when Nazis invaded her home village. Days after witnessing her father's public execution she was taken from her high school and displaced to Germany where she entered numerous work camps, with the majority of her five-year imprisonment spent at Bergen-Belsen.

Her story, my family lineage is that of struggle, of overcoming insurmountable circumstances to not only survive, but to live life in an unapologetic manner. My father, born October of 1945, is a result of a German soldier's desire with my grandmother, and her second child born three years later is a result of succumbing to a continually abusive German. Felicia fled Germany in 1951, boarded a boat, and came to the United States

through Ellis Island where she was faced with a different set of challenges, however managed to gain a strong footing in the world. With the assistance of a local orphanage she raised both her sons, opened her own store, and some would say, lived life.

My grandmother passed away in January of 2007 at the age of 83. No longer having to fight her fight in this world, her life story has instilled in me the fire to fight, to continue her work. Having always felt a deep-rooted connection with her, my grandmother is the person who literally forced me to take my first step, the one who told me I had the same strength as her, and who sternly informed me I was to live boldly. As a result of her story, my bloodline, I approach my work in this project through this lens.

I am deeply compelled to continue living her truth, the truth of overcoming systemic structures of power, privilege, and oppression. Where I sit now, after having completed my coursework in cultural studies and about to approach this study, I realize her fight from a different perspective. Her fight was not her fight alone; her oppression was the result of systemic factors. Systemic structures of power, privilege, and oppression created her living hell starting in Poland at the end of 1939, throughout her time in concentration work camps, and throughout her lifelong liberation process.

Additional to my family lineage, I am engaging in social justice work in education as a result of my own personal experiences. The way in which I view and interact in the world is directly connected to the environment in which I was raised, my continued search for identity, and my professional experiences. Though I will discuss these in

isolation, they intersect, creating a tangible context for the lens in which I approach the work of this dissertation.

I was raised in both New Jersey and California in a white middle class family with two heterosexual parents, who have been married for over 40 years. Throughout my childhood and teenage years, I was afforded many opportunities to travel, be involved in activities, and live in a financially stable household, meaning my most basic needs were never a concern to me. Homecooked meals, family dinners, and overall sense of security outline my childhood and teenage years. This has shaped my meaning of family and has formed my perception of childhood experiences.

After graduating high school, I attended the University of Charleston in West Virginia in pursuit of a degree in education. Four years in a different state, away from the solid infrastructure of my family, challenged me to unpack my identity. I abruptly came to terms with my sexual identity, forcing me to confront how this new truth brushed up next to my previously-known truths. Additionally, my fieldwork in education during my undergraduate years provided me with a brief insight into childhood lives from a different perspective. Observing elementary, middle, and high schools in surrounding towns, outside of Charleston, afforded me the opportunity to interact in communities built on different structures than I knew.

It has been through my professional career in education that I have faced the most personally challenging times. I started my teaching career in a public elementary school in North Carolina. Working in an affluent school district, my classroom comprised of

mostly white students from middle to high socioeconomic families. The smallest population of students was comprised of minority students bused in from a specific neighborhood on the opposite side of the town. This class makeup created a complex web to navigate with the students and parents, as I was unsure how to literally integrate all students in what felt like a forced community at times.

My coursework during my undergraduate work included topics such as theory of reading, teaching mathematics, history of West Virginia, child development, assessment, and classroom management. Though I gained a broad understanding of teaching theory and instructional practices, I did not have the opportunity to explore multicultural education, cultural responsive teaching, or social justice education. Therefore, without this knowledge or practice, I relied on my lived experiences as a student and brief time observing and student teaching in the outskirts of West Virginia to navigate my classroom space. Due to not having a set of courses to explore education, or myself in a critical sense, I was not challenged to explore my viewpoints and biases of family, community, or childhood. As a result, my set perspectives overshadowed my teaching practices, including interactions with students and families. Without having an alternate perspective, I reified the systems of power, privilege, and oppression during my teaching career.

This theme carries throughout my teaching career and did not shift until I became a school administrator. It was during this time I became connected to schoolwide conversations about achievement gaps and disproportionality in discipline and special

education. This more global, comprehensive perspective of education became the point of searching for answers away from individual students and sought information in other sources such as written policies, school zoning, textbook adoptions, politics, and teacher beliefs, which ultimately led me to choosing to apply to The University of North Carolina at Greensboro to investigate these concepts further in the Ph.D. program. I became novicely aware of political, economic, and social structures creating socially constructed ideologies that were walking through the schoolhouse doors and being reinforced through the schooling systems. My interest became in exploring the intersection of these systems and impact in the classroom through the lens of the educator.

Though not wanting to belabor naming my identity, it is important to have a brief understanding of my positionality as I write this dissertation. I have and continue to experience both privilege and oppression. Living in this world as a white female working in education has afforded me privileged opportunities. Additionally, the coursework in leadership I took in undergraduate and graduate school gave me skills to continue to move to large-scaled, decision-making positions in education. My white skin has, and continues to privilege my life experiences.

Juxtaposed with this privileged space is living as a lesbian in North Carolina, which has embraced institutionalized systems of heterosexism. Having previously stated I am in a privileged space with my chosen profession, being a lesbian in education within the kindergarten through 12th grade public school system has forced me to closet my sexuality, even with recent legal changes. Living out the hegemonic mindset of

oppression while working in education has created an apprehension and fear for being fully embodied while engaging in my work.

My current work at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) as the statewide Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and Implementation Specialist, I am charged with leading statewide educational initiatives that impact the lives of about 1.2 million public school students. This particular job continues to challenge me as I am pulled between the directives of NC state legislative decision-making and my continued beliefs about education. I find myself both deeply troubled by right wing conservative views of not only education, but also society. Though troubled, I find that I can utilize my current position to challenge decision-making and influence policies and practices that has potential to create a more socially just framework for public education.

Today we are in a precarious time in education. As the United States is becoming more global, education is matching this continued shift with intense focus on accountability, creating an even more narrow definition of success. Public schools are framed as a failed experiment. Political campaigns are espousing school choice as a viable solution, yet in truth it creates a systematic method to strengthen privilege and oppression. In times like this I am reminded of the importance of what can happen when society focuses on success, rather than freedom and equality in its truest form. I am reminded of the levels of oppression my grandmother, father, and uncle fought through, and realize those currently fighting are faced with even an even stronger opponent in the

social structures of our nation. My hope is to engage in work to challenge these systems in education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education has served as a cornerstone throughout the history of the United States. It has been used as a powerful weapon to define success and is significant in the political terrain of both the right and left side of government ideals. Throughout the paradigms of educational structure and reform, formal education is still viewed and portrayed as a beacon of hope for a better future. As a nation, access to a free appropriate education is referred to as both one of the nation's greatest successes and greatest concerns.

We are in a time when public education is being scrutinized through an extraordinary number of viewpoints, platforms, and spaces. Mass messaging that public schools are failing is centralized in competitive ideology, giving room for substantial reforms to be implemented at the federal, state, district, and school level. These reforms rely on raising standards, imposing higher levels of accountability, and producing the landscape for widespread implementation of school choice that has implications for the highest level of segregation the nation has seen since before the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Silent from current messaging is scrutiny of the existing grave inequalities that are continually reproduced by these so-called reforms.

Changing academic standards, raising accountability measures, and giving a false sense of school choice smokescreen the root of error within the system of schooling. Schools are supported by the same social, political, and economic platforms that create

societal inequities. Therefore, current structures of schools are a spoke in the wheel of reproducing these same inequalities. Mass messaging regarding this view is inaudible and contested by the prevalent belief that schools are the great social equalizer allowing every child, regardless of social capital, to achieve the finite definition of success, as long as the child puts forth the needed effort.

Central to this context are the educators who are surrounded by the turmoil of political decisions made in the name of reform. What is occurring in colleges and universities to inform future teachers the impact these reforms will have at the macro and micro level? How does their awareness regarding the connection between social structures and schools impact the views and beliefs they have of students, education, and success? If education is such a strong social, political, and economic force, then we must consider the level of awareness teachers have regarding systems of inequalities. Why? Educators have the opportunity to reproduce or challenge these systems through their instructional methods, curriculum choices, and interactions with students. Student experiences will equip them with tools to also reproduce or challenge systems of inequalities. The levels of awareness educators have directly impact outcomes for students, making educators a viable group to investigate.

Examining the Extent of Teacher Critical Consciousness

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the extent to which classroom teachers are conscious of systemic structures of power, privilege, and oppression. This study is being conducted during a time when standardized testing and accountability are at an all-time high and are connected to teacher evaluation and job security. To bring

together the full continuum of teachers' awareness, specific attention will also be given to the preparation received during undergraduate and, if applicable, graduate coursework in the learning and understanding of socially constructed systems of inequality.

Questions and methods for this research study will be conducted through a critical theory paradigm. Critical theory seeks to “reveal and critique . . . distorting ideologies and the associated structures, mechanisms, and processes that help to keep them in place” (Prasad, as cited in Glesne, 2011, p. 9). Critical theory touches on both the macro and micro lens in structures, giving triangulated insight to supports that continue to keep structures of inequality in place. Therefore, the research will be guided by the three research questions:

- To what extent are current classroom teachers conscious of power, privilege, and oppression?
- What can be revealed about how teachers are prepared to address power, privilege, and oppression?
- What are the beliefs and practices of teachers regarding power, privilege, and oppression and to what extent do they reflect their preparation as teachers?

To explore these research questions, six individual teacher interviews will be conducted at one traditional elementary school enrolling a diverse population of students in the categories of race and socioeconomic status. Additional to the interviews, one schoolwide survey will be conducted through an electronic platform to all school personnel at this same elementary school. Interview questions will be centered on gathering insightful perspectives from teachers on awareness and perspective of power,

privilege, and oppression. Survey questions will be on a Likert-type scale, allowing participating personnel to anonymously respond to questions regarding personal views on systems of inequality.

Collected data will be indexed in order to find themes and patterns to discern relationships between the interviews, survey responses, and the given research questions (Glesne, 2011). During the coding process attention will first be given to capturing the perspective of each interviewee regarding the questions before interpreting the response (Watts, 2013). The goal is to provide a summary of teachers' consciousness of systems of inequality and point back to teacher preparatory programs as a place of possible interjection for these understandings.

The following sections of this chapter are divided into five main topics and will give context to the reason for conducting this study. Overall context of inequalities will serve as the first explored concept, as it will serve as the backdrop throughout the remaining sections. Throughout this topic, the notion of democracy and the conflict between the stated principles and the existence of racism and poverty will be investigated. This particular topic also introduces capitalism and the stronghold it has throughout societal structures. History of schooling, the second topic, investigates the early ideological structures of school, including purposeful inequality. This sets the stage for the current political and social context of school to be explored in the third topic. Accountability and school choice will be unpacked in this section with intentional focus on capitalism. Section four moves into understanding the current teacher population, teacher training, and challenges the disconnect between the current social, political, and

economic constructs. All of these sections lead up to the last section, critical education, which reinforces the need and desire for this study to be conducted. The end of this chapter briefly explains the content that will be covered in the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

Cultural Context: Inequalities

Massive social and economic inequalities exist in society and these grave inequalities exist as a result of the constructs of power, privilege, and oppression. Power, for the context of this work, is referred to as “the ideological, technical, and discursive elements by which those in authority impose their ideas and interests on everyone” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 52). Privilege refers to “the rights, advantages, and protections enjoyed by some *at the expense of* and beyond the rights, advantages, and protections available to others” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 58). Oppression refers to “a set of policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, and explanations (discourses), which function to systematically exploit one social group to the benefit of another social group” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 39). Power, privilege, and oppression are ideological, cultural, and historical. It is embedded in social, economic, and political structures; therefore, it is not earned or removed, rather it is imposed upon groups of people (Johnson, 2006; Schwalbe, 2008; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Contrary to this is the perception of the American Dream, which is rooted in the belief of meritocracy, “a concept of society based on the idea that each individual’s social and occupational position is determined by individual merit, not political or economic influence” (Spring, 2005, p. 288). Serving as a smokescreen to inequalities, meritocracy

points to deficits in motivation rather than finding fault in political, social, and economic decision-making structures. To unpack this contradiction further it is important to understand the intention of democracy and how the intention is challenged with the socially constructed and institutionalized systems of inequalities.

Democracy

Democracy is closely associated with politics; however, when stripped away of its connection to government, democracy becomes the means by which we operate and function as individuals and groups. Democracy reaches far beyond an act of voting, as its purpose is to serve as a protection for freedom and equality. From this stance, the impact of democracy is infinitely impacting on the lived experiences of individuals and groups of people in society.

Democracy is a complex concept; therefore, for the purpose of this work insight will be gained from sources explaining John Dewey's view of democracy. Dewey's view is grounded in critical pragmatism, which appreciates multiple viewpoints, sets of knowledge, and ideas. Critical pragmatism negates absolute truth, and embraces multiple truths within each perspective (Forester, 2012; Kadlec, 2006, 2007). Dewey's critical pragmatic view is evident in his goal for democracy:

Government, business, art, religion, all social institutions have a meaning, a purpose. That purpose is to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals without respect to race, sex, class or economic status. And this is all one with saying that the test of their value is the extent to which they educate every individual into the full stature of his possibility. Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-around growth of every member of society. (Dewey, as cited Kadlec, 2006, p. 537)

If we take John Dewey's view of democracy, then we assert individuals and shared group experiences continuously mold society. Results of these shared experiences, or interactions, form societal structures in which we operate. According to Dewey, these societal structures are to be designed in way that intentionally remove barriers for individuals, and groups, in order to experience freedom, equality, and equity (Kadlec, 2007).

Richard Rorty adds democracy is also connected to hope. John Dewey believed this form of democracy would instill a level of hope "to believe that the future will be unspecifiably different from, and unspecifiably freer than, the past" (Rorty, 1999, p. 120). John Dewey's critically pragmatic vision of democracy has no end; rather, its existence and progress is grounded in growth of individuals and groups of people in the name and direction of freedom.

Here rests the conflict between the historical birth of democratic ideals through a Deweyan perspective and current practices in the name of democracy. Mainstream messaging connects democracy with access to voting; therefore, it may be more conceivable to consider democracy as something more concrete, such as voting practices, rather than growth towards freedom in the Deweyan perspective. Taking the word democracy and applying it to a new context requires a paradigm shift in not only thinking but also in political, economic, and social structures.

What is the barrier hindering this shift to occur? Systems of power. In order to live out the ideals of freedom, equality, and multiple truths, current structures that reify systems of power must be deconstructed, as these structures are the antithesis of the

described democratic principles. Schooling structures are a direct recipient of this disconnect between democratic ideals and current practices in the name of democracy. Schools are built upon the same systemic principles rather than John Dewey's pragmatic view of democracy. This dangerous messaging continues to intensify as the inequality gap continues to expand as a result of this divide in practice.

Conflict between Democratic Principles and Inequality

Capitalism is one of the greatest threats to democracy as it breeds intense competition and thrives on the premise of extreme economic divide. How embedded is capitalism in society? Adam Smith, the first theorist of capitalism, formulated this idea on the very belief individuals were selfish (Eisler, 2008; Wells & Graffland, 2012). Therefore, capitalism is rooted in the belief of "individual acquisitiveness and greed (the profit motive)" and at its inception "relied on rankings (the class structure), continued traditions of violence (colonial conquests and wars), and failed to recognize the importance of the 'women's work' of caring and caregiving" (Eisler, 2008, p. 142). At its core, capitalistic belief rests in "the unfettered freedom of individuals, or corporate business that are treated as if they are individuals, to use their skills, knowledge, and entrepreneurial acumen to gain as much profit as they possibly can" (Shapiro, 2006, p. 145). Capitalism, by deep-rooted design, breeds intense competition between groups and individuals. This supports the ideology of the American Dream and gaining strong footing in the world on the backs of others' systemic challenges.

Capitalistic mindset also reaches to the depths of self-identification. Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno speak to this in their 1972 text *Dialectic of*

Enlightenment, stating, “the economic mask coincides completely with a man’s inner character” causing people to “judge themselves by their own market value and learn what they are from what happens to them in the capitalistic economy” (as cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 70). Ideals of capitalism support notions of spending, obtaining material goods, and purchasing; therefore, groups and individuals find identity in consumption of materials. Shapiro (2006) echoes this, stating “we cannot forget that the core dynamic of the consumer world is the way we are encouraged to constantly compare ourselves with others” (p. 28). Competition to out-consume another is in direct contradiction of the democratic principles of ensuring freedom and equality.

Capitalism has shaped the ideology for the dominant group to maintain power and reflects the “beliefs, values, and practices” in social structures (Brookfield, 2005, p. 68). Economics follow these same structures as they “both reflect and perpetuate the underlying social structure and values, in a constantly interactive process. If the social structure and values orient to the dominant system, so will economics” (Eisler, 2008, pp. 147–148). At the most fundamental level, capitalism negates democratic principles, creating grave concern for the continued reinforcement of structures of power (Brosio, 1998; Shapiro, 2006). Cornelius Castoriadis states,

The triumph of democracy has been proclaimed as the triumph of “individualism.” But this “individualism” is not and cannot be and empty form wherein individuals “do what they like”—any more than “democracy”—can be simply procedural in character. “Democracy procedures” are each time filled by the oligarchical character of contemporary social structures—as the “individualistic” form is filled by the dominant social imaginary, the capitalist imaginary of the unlimited expansion of production and consumption. (as cited in Giroux, 2001, p. 239)

Democracy as a way of life challenges inequalities and structures of power; yet, capitalism thrives on this foundation, and therefore capitalism is a threat to democracy (Giroux, 2001; Rorty, 1999). Schooling systems are built and also thrive on this same ideology of capitalism. Fear of losing a strong capitalistic mindset and way of functioning in society outweighs the premise of instilling democratic principles into society. Since capitalism is dependent upon competition between individuals and groups, it creates a breeding ground for social inequalities such as racism and poverty to exist. These inequalities exist as a result of a successful capitalistic society.

Racism

The United States has always been a multicultural terrain, and racial divides have always been a part of history in that one race or culture has historically sought out to control other groups to ensure economic, political, and social gains (Fraser, 2010). Competition based on race, rather than collaborative construction, runs deep in the stronghold of society. According to Cornel West (2004), “if we want to understand [the] imperialistic nihilism that runs so deep in our country, we should start by looking at its history, and to do that we must start with race” (p. 40). Political, social, and economic decision-making can be linked to racial divides in both covert and overt methods, including structures.

Racism is “a form of oppression in which one racial group dominates over others,” and in the United States the “Whites are the dominant group and people of color are the minoritized group” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, pp. 100–101). Social construction of racism has been reinforced over time through science, policies, and court

rulings. Yes, inequalities of race have improved over time with the abolition of slavery, *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the Civil Rights Movement, but these actions do not equate to equality.

Though the days of Jim Crow laws have passed, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) finds “a new powerful ideology has emerged to defend the contemporary racial order: the ideology of color-blind racism” (p. 25). These covert practices came as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and White people finding it no longer acceptable to outwardly admit to racial injustices (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 108). So, although it may appear racism is obsolete, in fact it is still prevalent and manifests in multiple facets. In fact, according to bell hooks (2010), “the United States remains a society where racial segregation is the norm” (p. 95). This norm is evident by comparing structures and functions in White and Black communities. It can also be noticed in the multitude of social, political, and economic reports that graph numbers and percentages of life events by race in the United States.

The divide between White people and people of color continues to support the existence of systemic race inequalities. The life expectancy of Black people is less than that of Whites, there are more Blacks living in poverty than Whites, the median income levels of Blacks is less than Whites, and more Black men are incarcerated per capita compared to White men (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, pp. 105–106; Shapiro, 2006, p. 122). These inequalities in living conditions and outcomes for people of color speak to the continued existence of these structures. Race cannot be discussed in isolation, as it

intersects with poverty; therefore, this next section addresses the conflict between democratic principles and the currently existing economic gap.

Economic Divide

Democratic principles embrace the theory that all people contribute to ensure protection and safety for all people. Capitalism challenges that thought with consistent messaging of meritocracy and a finite definition of success. The impact of capitalism contesting democracy can be seen in the economic divide in groups of people. As the economy of the United States has shifted throughout the years, unemployment, poverty, and loss of land have drastically increased, creating a sharp economic divide in society (Shapiro, 2006).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), poverty occurs when “a family’s total income is less than the family’s threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty” and the calculation only uses “money income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps)” (para. 1).

According to the data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau on poverty, the median household income for White households is \$58,270, Black households is \$34,598, and Hispanic families is \$40,963 (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014, pp. 5, 12). As of 2014 about 14.5%, or 45.2 million people are living in poverty in the U.S. (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014, p. 12). Looking at these data by age, “1 in 5 children under the age of 6 were born into poverty in 2013” and children under the age of 18 “represented 23.5

percent of the total population and 32.3 percent of people in poverty” (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014, p. 14).

People living in poverty experience difficult hardships in life including limited food, adequate housing, unemployment, diminished access to health care, and limited options for early schooling opportunities (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Shapiro, 2006). This continued disparity of economics, known as classism, “rank[s] people according to economic status” and the very idea of ranking individuals is built on the foundation of capitalism (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 183). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) define classism as “the systematic oppression of poor and working people by those who control the resources (including jobs, wages, education, housing, food, services, medicine, and cultural definitions)” (p. 183).

Youth living in poverty must learn the ways of adulthood quickly. Many carry the burden of financially providing for the family and caring for the home at a young age. The impact of living in stressful situations creates a perspective of the world that is difficult to navigate and does not produce the Deweyan sense of hope democracy is intended to provide (Giroux, 2011; Shapiro, 2006). Society engrained in capitalism treats people as commodities, using the impoverished population as a security to continued economic gains for the wealthy.

Creating the Connections

Educational structures are in the crossfire of these cultural terrains. Walking through the schoolhouse doors are students and teachers living the consequences of systems of power, privilege, and oppression. The concern here is not that school

structures are present for mass population, but rather how the cultural context is acknowledged, addressed, and critiqued in the school setting. Capitalism and its impact is deeply embedded in the interworking of society; therefore, how conscious are the classroom teachers of its existence? Within the political terrain of education, schools are charged with addressing the issues of poverty and race through terms like closing the achievement gap; however, without a direct link the root of the problem is, how are educators to make sense of the intersecting complexities of the challenge? The next section of this chapter briefly explains the history of schooling. The purpose is to provide an understanding of how the early construction of schooling connects to current structures, giving a perspective for how deeply embedded systems of inequality are in the design of current school.

History of Schooling

Social construction of inequalities has impacted the development of education and schooling structures in the United States. Just as the historical lineage of the greater struggles of society has shaped our current times, the history of education has done the same for this iconic beacon of hope. It is filled with a contentious battlefield over whom to teach, what to teach, and how to measure success. These three bedrocks of conflict portray the difficult terrain of the educational system. Development of formal education has been connected to the struggles of the development of the United States.

Throughout time, large populations of students have been excluded from schooling and when these groups became included, content and educational experiences

were diluted, creating a false sense of compliance. Fight for access and equity are lockstep common themes throughout the history of schooling.

Creation of standards and textbooks serves as the platform to determine what should be taught in schools. Publishers of standards and textbooks are connected to ulterior motives in their development and rely on education locales to purchase the multitude of developed products marketed as being aligned to curriculum standards. Overall, these connections and the construction of education as it is known today has been used as a platform for political, social, and economic gain. The next two sections give context as to how the construction of school has impacted these platforms in the practice of creating finite definitions of truth and systems of inequality by the very nature in which school was founded.

Early Education and Ideology

At its origin, education was used as a force for assimilation. This can be seen in the early entanglement of education and religion and later with the common school movement starting in the 1820s (Fraser, 2010; Spring, 2005). Schools being supported by tax dollars, free and mandatory to attend began about 40 years before the Civil War (Fraser, 2010, p. 44). Prior to this time, education in the formal sense of having the opportunity to attend school dates to colonial times in U.S. history and is dominated by religiously-propelled, private movements, and shadowed by voluntary attendance. Early education movements during the colonial era followed a continuum and intertwining between family, church, community, and later, schools (Fraser, 2010, p. 2).

The most influential movement in education can be captured in the development of the common school movement. The common school movement, predominantly led by Horace Mann, professed three distinct features that became the foundation for its creation. The first feature declared common schools would educate all children in a common schoolhouse, the second established “schools as an instrument of government policy,” and the third advocated “the creation of state agencies to control local schools” (Spring, 2005, p. 74). Construction of the common school context aimed to control, contain, and socially assimilate youth to match the White, protestant views, manners, and overall ways of life (Fraser, 2010; Nasaw, 1979; Spring, 2005). This message was well known and couched in ideas that the common school would save children from life hardships as a result of their family lineage.

The intersection of these three features created the context for a new ideology regarding education—it could solve social problems. Social problems were already deeply embedded in inequitable systems of power in the 1820s as evidenced by slavery, relocation of Native Americans, people living in poverty, and status of women. Disconnected from these social context, Mann believed in the common school movement to such an extent that for him, the common school was “the ultimate reform” and “if it were successful, no other would be necessary”; therefore, education became the beacon of hope (Nasaw, 1979, p. 33). It is important to add that intertwined with this stance Mann strongly believed in, and professed, the notion that hard work equated to achieving success. This added entanglement promoted the concept of meritocracy with the common school movement (Nasaw, 1979, pp. 31–32).

This early ideological construction gave way to view schools as the great equalizer in society and dismissed surrounding social context as having an impact. Education and prosperity became linked as the common message that having an education ensures a life of prosperity and higher social status (Nasaw, 1979; Spring, 2005). Nasaw (1979) discusses the purpose and impact of schooling at this time:

Once the common schools had been defined as institutions of social control, as agencies through which the prosperous and propertied would socialize the poor and working people, it mattered not what color, ethnicity, religion, or geographical area the latter came from. Once political control had been established, the form and content of schooling could be adjusted to the specific characteristics of the lower-class population. (p. 82)

The ideology of school and its purpose penetrated throughout the social, political, and economic terrains of U.S. history. Since the common school movement, education has fundamentally been portrayed as the answer for changing society and creating a better future for individuals, groups, and the overall nation. It is important to gain further insight into the early evidences of inequalities within the educational structures before exploring the current constructs of education.

Early Education and Inequalities

Education, in some form, has always been part of society; however, the common school movement was a monumental shift as it forced people to work together in order to create a structure for children to learn a set of knowledge and skills. The result of this was those with the most social, political, and economic capital created the parameters, design, and content resulting in a structure designed to assimilate to that norm, rather than creating an equitable experience for students.

Early education and inequality are connected from the earliest developments.

One of the most obvious areas of inequality can be seen in the evidence of using school to marginalize minority cultures and races. Diversity was always prevalent in the nation:

The United States was a multicultural society long before it was a nation, and its different cultures had radically different educational traditions and patterns. But multiculturalism does not necessarily mean equality. Within the diverse cultures in colonial society, one culture had the power to impose its institutions on the others. (Fraser, 2010, p. 2)

Even with this truth at the inception of discovery, education was used as a weapon to conform those in the socially constructed minority groups. Threaded throughout history are acts, decrees, policies, and laws dating as far back as the early 1600s which those with the most political, religious, and/or economic capital would impose provisions to force those of different races, ethnicities, and religions to conform through educational practices (Fraser, 2010, p. 4). This was predominantly seen through the use of texts and daily rituals that espoused one viewpoint.

One of the principles of the common school movement included educating all students in the same place; however, it was not feasible to implement based upon the context of society. The south was in the depths of slavery, not allowing people of color to attend school, and the expansions out west included continuous segregation of the Native American population, and in fact could not establish a common school until a more populous community was formed with westward expansion (Nasaw, 1979). This principle became a way to leverage those who were able to attend school and marginalize those who did not have access to attend.

Racism and schooling is also evident in the formal establishment of a segregated school in Boston in 1821. Occurring at the beginning of the common school movement, this separate school included a separate oversight committee for the 300 students who attended (Fraser, 2010, p. 47). Separate schooling structures continued to gain momentum; however, it was realized separate schooling structures were not equal, completely contradicting Horace Mann's original idea.

The call for integrated schools gained momentum between 1840 and 1849 and was halted by the *Roberts* case ruling. The 1850 ruling deemed "separate but equal" facilities were acceptable. The *Roberts* case was referenced in the 1896 *Plessey v. Ferguson* case which permitted overall segregation. The *Plessey v. Ferguson* ruling was overturned in 1954 in the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling (Fraser, 2010, pp. 47–48). Boston ruled to integrate schools about 100 years earlier prior to this ruling (Fraser, 2010, p. 73).

Entanglement of politics and schooling created messaging that White students and students of color were to be separated, and it was not until the mid-1950s that this shift occurred. Separate did not include equal, resulting in poor education experiences for people of color and higher quality for the White population for over 100 years.

Early education structures included this segregated stance, as it mirrored the time in society. The Black community fought to have access to education. Even with access to attend school, racism existed and is evidenced by students of color attending poorly-structured buildings, lacking sufficient materials, and attending schools with less qualified staffed. Meanwhile, White students and those with economic capital attended

schools in new buildings with access to the arts, sciences, and technology. Highly skilled educators flooded the hallways and fought to teach in these spaces that provides students with an educational experience far superior to their minority counterparts (Kozol, 1991, 2005). Division by race is embedded in the very foundation of defining the national formal schooling movement.

The common school movement also challenged the funding sources for education to be decided. It was decided at that time the funding structures were dependent on property tax in the community, creating a great disparity in equitable education (Spring, 2005). Inequalities in education have been deeply embedded in the construction of formal schooling based on the common school movement era. The intersectionality of race, poverty, and equitable education are evident throughout history.

Making Connections

Schools became the iconic structure portrayed as the answer to all social problems in the developing United States. School structures were built on contentious platforms of inequalities. The idea of a common school was disconnected from the social, political, and economic truths of communities and views. Schools were used as a structure to continue reinforcing inequalities. Schools were built on a promise that could not be fulfilled and contributed to the greater divides between individuals and groups of people. This same framework can be seen today in different methods; however, the results and motives are similar. Current teachers are inundated with the same messages that Horace Mann espoused—school will solve social problems by giving children an equal footing in society.

Current Schooling: Social and Political Context

Education and schooling has been the battleground for sorting through cultural, economic, and political conflicts throughout the history of the United States. Public education is seen as both the most and least successful accomplishment of the United States. Educational access for all students has become a triumphant stance across the world. The system at large has been through multiple reforms swinging from one paradigm to another, forcing states, districts, and schools to navigate the tides of each turn and all of these reforms can be linked to the given context of society at the time. Additionally, the call for reform has produced a sense of fear and concern for the future of youth and the nation at large. Education has become the scapegoat of blame for the problems of society and outcomes in comparison to other nations. Once the layers of these reforms are peeled away alarming connections are found, setting the stage for a critical conversation regarding the purpose of education.

The next sections address the threads of accountability, school choice, and capitalism that create the current schooling context. It is important for teachers to understand the impact of these decisions at both the macro and micro level to recognize how it impacts their own personal decisions in the classroom. It is imperative for the covert messages to be unveiled so these decisions can be challenged at various levels.

Accountability as the Focus

A Nation at Risk was released in April of 1983 during President Ronald Reagan's term. This document prepared by the National Committee of Excellence in Education, under the direction of the Secretary of Education Terrell Bell, made significant claims all

under the large-scale umbrella message stating the U.S. public schools were failing. The report professed this failure had, and would continue to have, significant negative implications for the economic force the U.S. would play in worldwide economic competition (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 3).

A Nation at Risk changed the course of public education, as it was the shift in history that brought the term accountability to the forefront of educational conversation. The monumental passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 required testing and reporting for all students in grades 3 through 8 in both reading and math. Reporting of test scores was to be done by subgroups in the name of closing the achievement gap between groups of students (race, gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, ability, and English proficiency). In reaction to this, states independently moved additional accountability sanctions into other grades as well. This entanglement of testing, accountability, and success encroached to the lower grades with giving predictive tests to the youngest of students to determine early intervention for those who may not pass standardized tests in the third grade (Giroux, 2011; Knaack & Knaack, 2013; Ravitch, 2014, p. 11; Shapiro, 2006).

This accountability movement continues to increase with the implementation of President Barack Obama's Race to the Top educational push. Though introduced as a positive shift from the identified flaws of NCLB, Race to the Top actually increased pressures for accountability and added an unprecedented level of competition to the field of education. In the wave of economic crisis, states competed for millions of Race to the

Top federal dollars. Recipients of the award agreed to criteria set by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan:

To be eligible, states had to agree to adopt new common standards and tests (the Common Core State Standards); expand the number of charter schools; evaluate the effectiveness of teachers in significant part by the test score of students (and remove any statutory barriers to do so); and agree to “turn around” their lowest-performing schools by taking such dramatic steps as firing staff and closing the schools. (Ravitch, 2014, p. 14)

Race to the Top has increased the focus of test scores by connecting results to teacher performance and grading of schools. Testing has increased, teachers are teaching to the test more than ever in fear of losing their jobs, and test fraud has occurred in various states (Ravitch, 2014, p. 48). Since *A Nation at Risk*, the public continues to hear public schools are failing, are not meeting needs of students, and as a result, families need more schooling choices.

Accountability measures at this level specifically identify performance gaps between student groups and force schools and systems to implement plans to address the gaps. Educators are held accountable to ensure students are making progress to the finite definition of success. This level of accountability at the district, school, and classroom level creates a rise in assessments to prove students are making progress towards these set goals. It is important for educators to understand this level of impact, as it has great potential to influence the way in which students are viewed and instructed. Accountability has also influenced the idea of school choice throughout the nation.

School Choice as the New Reform

Educators are faced with the quickly growing movement of school choice. This movement is gaining momentum on the back of ideological messaging that public schools are failing. Platforms for school choice are so prominent that school choice has become the new proposal for educational reform. Though controversial debates have and continue to occur regarding issues of equality in the era of school choice, both sides are able to negate the other with multiple studies (Carlson, 2014, p. 269). Accountability results are more publicized, schools are graded on these results, and voices insisting public schools are failing are prominent on all ears, including current educators. School choice disconnected from current social structures of power portrays a dangerous message that has the potential to create an even more substantial divide between groups.

What does school choice look like today? School choice is evidenced by the rise of charter schools and voucher programs. These options are being connected to school reform, and school reform is directly connected to corporate gains, though this last component is not highly publicized (Ravitch 2014). States that signed on with Race to the Top had to remove any limitations for expanding charter schools, and other states have followed this similar movement in response to the wide spread messaging that choice of schooling is the solution (Knaak & Knaak, 2013, p. 46).

Why is the rise of charter schools a concern? Charter schools began in St. Paul, Minnesota as an idea for teachers to safely explore new ways of teaching and was never intended to be the platform of school choice; however, it is now the prominent option across the United States (Knaak & Knaak, 2013). Federal and state governments

continue to support charter school construction and profess that charter schools, as a whole, are a viable choice for students. Charter schools are being created quickly, forcing states to make decisions without longstanding evidence of best practices.

Following Jeb Bush's movement to implement the voucher system in Florida, vouchers have also become a viable opportunity for states to explore in the name of school choice (Ravitch, 2014). The voucher system supports families having access to public money to use for a private school option and currently more than 13 states have "enacted private school choice legislation" (Flemming, 2014, p. 55). Supported by prominent leaders, states have both moved forward and halted the use of vouchers. Public money for private use rubs against constitutional writings; however, it is being pushed forward as a way to allow families to choose schooling alternatives in the light of failing schools.

Parents and community members are inundated with dominant messages to investigate alternative options for students. Educators are being enticed to explore other teaching opportunities away from current public schools. Teachers are in a difficult position navigating the terrain of the debate. School choice, and the nuisances that come with such a design, do not publicize the level of student exclusion that exists with each choice. The following section on the topic of capitalism unpacks another lens impacting school choice and the current climate of education.

Capitalism as the Platform

Competition runs through the pulse of the nation. This capitalistic mindset is also the underpinning to the view of education in the nation, intensely beginning with the

inception of NCLB in 2001. Corporations began creating test preparation materials, afterschool tutoring programs surfaced, and consultants from private business were hired to assist schools and districts in making changes to make improvements. Utilizing funding to support test preparation and reading data, rather than moving that money to impact students in the classroom, amplified with Race to the Top (Ravitch, 2014).

Race to the Top has pitted schools, districts, and states against each other, as the underlying belief of this said reform is that competition breeds excellence. Competing for funding, school grade, and teachers fighting for current jobs—all resting on standardized testing results—has become the prominent messaging. Prestigious names and foundations sponsor the continued move towards privatizing education and framing it as school choice for families.

School choice is built on the fundamental belief that school competition will increase performance at individual schools (Flemming, 2014, p. 55). However, at the very core, these options, framed as choice, reify already deep-rooted systems of power as more covert methods are created to exclude individuals and groups from accessing choice (Knaak & Knaak, 2013, pp. 48, 52). This belief pays particular attention to groups of students; specifically, those from marginalized backgrounds and portray their scores as the demise of public schools. Teachers are in competition with each other, creating a less collaborative approach to education. The implications for this current climate are of great concern and will not be fully realized until the next political paradigm is created in policies.

Implications

Education remains a paramount structure and idea in society. Important changes such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and Public Law 94 142, Child Find, have forced schoolhouse doors to open for all students to attend. Now, education is embarking on another monumental change, the era of a high level of scrutiny and choice. Implications for these new structures are formulating and high levels of concern for the impact these changes will have on supporting systems of inequality are being discussed, yet those with the most political, economic, and social capital continue to support these changes. What impact are these changes having on schools and the student population?

The political context of education has set the stage for consequences for society at large. Discussions about race and poverty have become more marginalized with focus placed on outcomes for test scores and the achievement gap. Previous equitable funding structures have been changed to support and breed competition. Public messages about school choice have neglected to pair the conversation with facts about exclusion of students from school settings. This increase of school choice privatizes education and gives significant leverage to closing doors on certain groups of students with no repercussions (Knaak & Knaak, 2013, p. 52).

Results from the educational shifts show that schools are more segregated.

Jonathan Kozol (2005) cites a Harvard study to describe this reality:

The desegregation of black students, which increased continuously from the 1950s to the late 1980s, has now receded to levels not seen in three decades . . . During the 1990s, the proportion of black students in majority white schools has decreased . . . to a level lower than in any year since 1968 . . . Almost three

fourths of black and Latino students attend schools that are predominately minority. (p. 19)

Kozol (2005) continues to cite the Harvard project notes, explaining the connection between poverty and race:

Racial isolation and the concentrated poverty of children in public school go hand in hand . . . Only 15 percent of the intensely segregated white schools in the nation have student populations in which more than half are poor enough to be receiving free meals or reduced meals. (p. 20)

Privatizing education and masking segregation movements through actions of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) calls “naturalization” (pp. 37–38), the so-called reform efforts reinforce the already unequal divide of education. Knaak and Knaak (2013) acknowledge “most charter laws do not permit the school to refuse admissions [of students] based on race or academic achievement, but they do allow an admissions process and they do not control reason for dismissal” (p. 48).

Concerns regarding the success of education create a sense of fear and families are viewing test scores as the determining factor to decide on school enrollment. These test scores are contributing to the finite definition of success society has come to value. This competitive mindset continues to reify the message of individuality and using privilege and oppression as the structures to continue to promote those with most social capital and marginalize those with the least in society.

In the midst of these changes are current and future teachers. Educators are faced with similar choices of where to teach and, if applicable, enroll their own children. How is this change in educational structures impacting the way in which teachers view

students, families, and communities? How are colleges and universities preparing future educators for this terrain? What messages are future educators hearing and experiencing in their course work?

Future Teachers

Future teachers are coming through educational preparatory programs throughout the United States in a time when these extreme educational changes are occurring. As public schools continue to become more diverse, educators are faced with the challenge of navigating the complex differences and intersections of cultures, beliefs, and overall life orientations of students (Unruh & McCord, 2010). Questions continue to circulate around teacher-training programs to better understand the outcomes of the teaching workforce. These questions include, but are not limited to, gaining an understanding of who is entering the workforce, what content is being taught, and how diversity is addressed in coursework (Banks, 1993; Jennings, 2007; Sleeter, 2001).

The next two sections will explore the current educator population in comparison to the current student population. They will also give brief insight into coursework future educators are experiencing in teacher training programs. It is important to brush against these two areas, as they will serve as further topics to address more deeply in later chapters.

Educator Population and Student Enrollment

The majority of students participating in teacher education programs in the United States are White females and the majority of faculty teaching courses in teacher education programs are White females (Jennings, 2007). The U.S. Department of

Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics produces facts about student enrollment in public schools. During the 2014 school year, about 49.8 million students were projected to attend public schools. The breakdown of this population of students by race and ethnicity is reported to be White, 49.8%; Black, 15.4%; Hispanic, 25.8%; Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.2%; Indian/Alaska Native, 1.1%; and two or more races, 2.8%. According to this same dataset, the projected percentage of White students will decline as enrollment of students identifying as Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander increase (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

A majority of teachers represent one race and gender while the enrollment of students represents a wide range of races and cultures. Multiple questions arise with this disparity. What impact does this have on instructional practices and curriculum choices? Are teacher practices aligned with the culture in which students are raised? How are educators prepared for working with diverse populations? This next section will briefly discuss the context of these particular questions.

Teacher Education Programs

Teacher education programs concentrate on the generalities of teaching methods and delve into content specific areas such as math, reading, language, and social studies, as well as child development (Sanger, 2008). Emphasis in coursework has been given to teach future educators about subject-specific content because from earlier studies it has been found “knowing content is important, knowing the subject area is even more important and being able to gauge student understanding is more important” (Clift, 2009,

p. 75). Additionally, with the rise in accountability, coursework has shifted to include a deeper understanding of assessment and interpretation of assessment results.

Courses addressing structures of power are scarcely offered, and when they are, they are added as an optional course, rather than mandatory for graduation (Macedo, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). According to Donald Macedo (2006), “courses that deal with issues such as race relations, ethics, and ideology are almost absent from teacher-preparation curricula” (p. 12). Why? The current political trends make the justification of such a course load difficult to defend in relation to socially-constructed outcome measures.

Offered teacher preparatory classes and programs profess the dominant ideologies of accountability, standardization, and competition within their courses. What implications does this have for educators in a diverse school setting? How do they reconcile the dominant messaging with the diverse student population? Education is a political action; therefore, its very existence as an institution must perpetuate the ideals of those with the most power and privilege in society. To make a shift in this practice, critical education must become a predominant thread so that educators and students are provided the needed tools to challenge these systems of power.

Critical Education

In order for educators to connect to the current social, political, and economic contexts, it is imperative there is a deep understanding of the systemic structures of power, privilege, and oppression and the impact these structures have on educational experiences (Bettez, 2008; Hackman, 2005). Critical education embraces this deep

understanding and equips individuals with tools to challenge these systems with the goal of reconnecting to John Dewey's pragmatic democratic principles.

Critical education is an education focused on “developing a language for thinking critically about how culture deploys power and . . . enables students to focus on [the] suffering of others” (Giroux, 2011, p. 5). Why is this important? According to Giroux (2011),

Only through such a critical education can students learn how to become individual and social agents, rather than merely disengaged spectators, and become able to not only to think otherwise by also to act upon civic commitments that ‘necessitate a reordering of basic power arrangements’ fundamental to promoting the common good and producing meaningful democracy. (p. 13)

Through various instructional practices and experiences, critical education “attempts to take young people beyond the world they are familiar with and makes clear how . . . knowledge, values, desires, and social relations are always implicit in power” (Giroux, 2011, p. 6). As a result, students will have “the skills, knowledge, and authority they need to inquire and act upon what it means to live in a substantive democracy” (Giroux, 2011, p. 72). Henry Giroux's description of critical education debunks current trends as it gives privilege to student voice, multiple perspectives, and collaboration.

Within critical education all constructs of society are challenged and the overarching question becomes focused on analyzing who benefits the most from the current model and at whose expense. Teaching through a critical education lens teachers and students explore content, ideas, and systems from multiple perspectives. Space is given to challenge current ideology, such as the finite definition of success. Critical

education is needed to deconstruct the systems of power currently making decisions regarding educational structures. Critical education specifically points out the marginalized and silenced areas in mass messaging, and reinstates the democratic principles John Dewey envisioned for society.

Vision of the Dissertation

This first chapter of this dissertation has discussed the existing social inequalities and the conflict these systems have with the intended democratic ideals. Additionally, this first chapter began to explore how these same inequalities are seen in the educational context as a result of covert actions that support the existence of these inequalities. An additional introduction to teacher pre-service programs was discussed to introduce disparity between coursework and coursework and the social, political, and economic context.

The next chapter, Chapter II, will be a review of past research into already known concepts regarding teacher critical social awareness, themes of social justice education, and multicultural education. Through the lens of social construction of ideology, structures of power, privilege, and oppression will be thoroughly explored through the lens of critical theory. Chapter II will also address structures and focus of teacher preparatory programs.

In Chapter III, I will introduce the elementary school where the study took place. I will also discuss the research methodologies that will be used to conduct this study.

The focus of Chapter IV will be to discuss the results gathered through the interviews and schoolwide survey at the selected elementary school. Results will be

framed in a way that will offer insight into the research questions for this project.

Answers to the research questions will be found as trends in the data are analyzed and common themes are discerned.

The final chapter, Chapter V, will be reserved to reflect on the findings of the study and implications for the future. Space will be given to suggest how this work can be shared and expanded to impact education for future teachers in order to challenge systems of power.

CHAPTER II

POWER AND ITS USE IN EDUCATION TO CONSTRUCT TRUTHS

Chapter I introduced current contradiction between said democratic ideals and current practices in the United States. It is critical to understand the systems of power, privilege, and oppression, and how these systems create obvious and obscure structures of power impacting every facet of the social world, including the education system. The theme of Chapter II is kin to the children's book *Zoom* by Istavan Banyai. This picture book begins with a red-shaped, unidentifiable object. The turn of the page reveals that unidentifiable object is the top of a rooster. With each turn of the page the image is seen situated in a larger and larger context. The images back up farther and farther with each turn of the page, until the last pages situate the entire scene on earth, which then recedes to a white dot on a black page. The goal of Chapter II is to mirror a similar message—to zoom out far enough in order to critically investigate the larger systems of power impacting outcomes for groups of people and education experiences.

This chapter will ground constructed truths in systematic issues of inequality. First, concepts of power and inequality will be introduced, covering concepts of ideology, hegemony, and truth. Then, the same concepts will be applied to explore the use of these, specifically in education in the areas of external forces impacting schooling experiences and internal decision making at the school level impacting schooling experiences. The third and final section of this chapter will unpack how the use of power is impacting

classroom teachers. This section has two components, the first being a critical investigation of how teachers are viewed and the impact it has on their teaching and setting up of the classroom environment. The second part of this last section critically investigates how all of this is impacting teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities.

Social Consciousness: Power and Inequality

Our social world works as an interlocking machine of power dynamics resulting in grave inequalities for groups of people on the backs of those with the most social, economic, cultural, and political capital. The foundation of the social world moves in flux with influence from financial and political movements, all grounded in systems of power. Inequality and systems of inequality have always existed in significant formats throughout time resulting in historical and current outcomes for groups of people. Consequences of strong influences include the creation of a massive set of socially constructed truths about society in general, as well as groups of people (Johnson, 2006; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Discrimination in areas of race, poverty, education, gender, language, immigration, ability, religion, and sexuality are examples of critical social issues that exist because of interconnecting power structures. Power functions as the force between groups and pushes ideas, knowledge, and accepted “truth” forward. Power is not exclusive to any institution, group, or function because individuals never function in isolation, but rather in relation to each other (Foucault, 1980, 1995; Jardine, 2005). Johnson (2006) emphasizes the social world is relational and interlocking; therefore, “one

is always in the system” and influenced by power (p. 35). Continuous formulation of power structures consistently occurs in relationships (Brookfield, 2005; Foucault, 1980).

Stephen Brookfield (2005) explains power as an intertwined force in human relationships to such an extent that people naturally begin formulating power structures within any given space at any given time. Power is an action surrounding domination and control. This interplay occurs because “whenever a dominant group perceives that certain practices might prove useful to them” power structures form at any given moment (Brookfield, 2005, p. 126).

Power is not stagnant. Power is not connected to negative. Where there is power, there is resistance pushing and pulling the social world in a linking manner. Pushing against issues of equality when social, political, and economic structures dig in to keep them solid impacts an array of areas and groups of people (Brookfield, 2005).

Resistance, meaning a sense to oppose succumbing to the forces of power always exists at some level. Therefore, power, which includes resistance, is noted as “productive work which runs through the whole social body” (Foucault, as cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 138). It is that push and pull that maintain and challenge current structures.

Obvious and obscure structures of power exist. Government, military, and corporations are considered obvious structures. Language, knowledge, and the notion of truth are obscure structures and more difficult to identify and acknowledge (Lea, 2014). Lea (2014) explains, “it is almost impossible to begin to perceive these invisible systems unless you are explicitly helped to see how power and privilege work” (p. 7). Obscure structures of power are found in pervasively utilized mechanisms such as history telling,

textbooks, and media, resulting in the inescapable passing of ideological messaging and practices. Messaging in relation to the marginalized and oppressed groups center on negative characterizations. This is conducted by constructed elite status groups with greater capital in the social world. Continuous messaging of these characteristics creates pervasive practices, which are so deeply rooted that identifying their existence requires intentionality (Lea, 2014; Macedo, 2006; Schwalbe, 2008; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). This constant messaging creates sets of socially constructed truths that impact the stronghold of inequalities and hegemonic practices.

Systems of inequality are built on power structures with strong ideologies. Ideology is “the big, shared ideas of a society that are reinforced throughout all institutions” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 45). It “is the system of ideas and values that reflects and supports the established order and that manifests itself in our everyday actions, decisions, and practices, usually without our being aware of its presence” (Brookfield, 2005, pp. 67–68). Paulo Freire (1998) describes ideology as a “presence [that] is greater than we think. It is directly linked to that tendency within us to cloak over the truth of the facts” (pp. 112–113).

Ideology is within all institutions, agencies, within the fabric of every inch of society. Strength comes from all categorized groups, the oppressed and privileged, to function according to constructed social structures. Ideology is attached to “stories, myths, explanations, definitions, and rationalizations that are used to justify inequality between the dominant group and minoritized group” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 50). Capitalism and bureaucratic rationality engrains ideologies in rhetoric such as

meritocracy, individualism, and the American Dream (Brookfield, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Rhetoric such as this cloaks the larger social systems and creates intense focus on individuals.

Groups hold the power of ideology and utilize it to oppress the imposing, or socially designated opposite group. Ideology is ideas, and the use of the ideas to oppress others is hegemony. Stephen Brookfield (2005) describes hegemony as “the process by which one group convinces another that being subordinate is a desirable state of affairs” (p. 98). Lea (2014) adds “people in power have persuaded a large percentage of the population that certain ways of thinking, feeling, believing and acting that benefit oligarchies and plutocrats are normal, natural and common sense” (p. 79). Hegemony is an obscure power structure because it is “not imposed on [people] so much as it is learned by them” and reinforced by them (Brookfield, 2005, p. 96). The culture in which we live works from this basic principle; therefore, hegemony and the supporting practices are permeating through all aspects of life.

According to Antonio Gramsci “everything which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, belongs to [hegemony]: libraries, schools, associations and clubs of various kinds, even architecture and the layout and names of streets” (Gramsci, as cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 96). In other words, the process of hegemony is influenced by all aspects of life and is embedded into the very workings of how society interacts, connects, and reinforces the practices which promotes the oppression of those who do not rest under the socially-constructed dominant culture (Brookfield, 2005; Lea, 2014). Hegemony is a difficult concept to grasp and reveal

because the constructed truths of everyday life are constantly reinforced through a multitude of interlocking components (Brookfield, 2005; Lea, 2014).

Structures of power are underlying currents of hegemony as the push and pull to maintain power relations among groups of people occur on a regular basis (Brookfield, 2005; Foucault, 1980; Lea, 2014; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Lea (2014) explains this relationship maintains because “hegemony convinces those of us who benefit from dominant institutional and cultural arrangements *and* those of us who are oppressed by them that these arrangements are ‘natural’” (p. 20). Additionally, marginalized communities are not taught or given access to cultural tools to counteract and solve the crux of the oppressive systems creating massive divides of equity (Lea, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978).

Learning these constructed truths is grounded in socialization. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) explain socialization as “our systemic training into the norms of our culture . . . the process of learning the meanings and practices that enable us to make sense of and behavior appropriately in that culture” (p. 15). Socialization relies on repetitive use of oppressive language, categorizing and labeling throughout media venues to reinforce these norms. This results in an entire system of hegemonic actions of socialization.

Forces of power that maintain the socially-constructed systems of inequality are referred to as *Systems of Hegemony*. *Systems of Hegemony* utilize science, religion, and narrative stories to replicate the agenda of the dominant culture in society (Lea, 2014). Foucault (1995) explains that religious leaders would disseminate ideological narratives

of God's word to instill fear in groups of poor people rising to fight inequality. In conjunction with leveraging religious leaders to disseminate ideological narratives, extensive accounts of punishment were implemented to curtail rebellious efforts to these messages. Virginia Lea (2014) expands on the power of using narrative stories in large-scale texts:

People with power and privilege have become expert at using the narrative veil of language to persuade the wider population to embrace their version of reality, leaving out brutalities that include slavery, genocide, and indenturship by which inequities were established and have been maintained throughout history. (p. 9)

The *Systems of Hegemony* are deeply rooted in the fabric of society and continue to support the social, political, and economic capital that continues to privilege certain groups and oppress the most fragile groups.

The following excerpt from Albert Memmi's (1965) book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* explains why *Systems of Hegemony* are not only effective but relied upon in society:

the military power is never enough for one group of people to maintain dominance over another. Successful dominance also requires effective hegemonic practices through which a majority of people in each party internalizes and accepts their status: colonized/oppressed/enslaved people are convinced that they are inferior; members of the colonizer/oppressor/governor class are convinced that they are superior; and those in the middle ground are persuaded that the current arrangements benefit them. (as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 22)

Systems of Hegemony influence *Mechanisms of Power* (Lea, 2014). *Mechanisms of Power* shape "social, cultural, and psycho-emotional responses, and function as hegemonic undercurrents of the mainstream" (Lea, 2014, p. 28). Virginia Lea (2014)

utilized Foucault's "disciplinary technologies of power" to frame *Mechanisms of Power*. *Mechanisms of Power* "help to sustain the existing social hierarchy. These mechanisms include Classification/Categorisation, Standardisation, Surveillance, Individualisation, Exclusion, Regulation, Distribution, and Totalisation" (p. 28). In totality, these systems create powerfully divisive system of inequalities including "color-blindness, socioeconomic class/classism, gender/sexism/ homophobia, meritocracy, and dominant worldviews that present knowing hierarchy, privatization/corporatization/neoliberalism as normal, natural, and commonsense socio-economic arrangements" (Lea, 2014, p. 30).

Mechanisms of Power rely on constructed truths that *Systems of Hegemony* have produced. Truth, and the idea of it, is a critical element to power because power relies on society believing the constructed truths. Foucault (1980) explains the intertwined relationship between truth and power, stating,

Truth isn't outside power, or lacking power: contrary to myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a think of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has a regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

Mechanisms of Power utilize what Foucault refers to as normalizing, defined as "judgments and techniques used to classify individuals according to a standard or norm" (Jardine, 2005, p. 7). Crutchfield and Pettinicchio (2009) find where a "culture of

inequality [exists], many people believe that [it] is acceptable that substantial inequalities be allowed to persist” (p. 135). They continue, giving the following context:

During the post-Great Society years, and especially since the election of Ronald Reagan, the United States has experienced widespread, popular acceptance of culture of inequality values. The result has been dramatic cutbacks in welfare, under the guise of “welfare reform,” and the ascension of an educational philosophy that assumes that every child in every school has the capacity to learn unless they, their parents, or their teachers fail to put forth sufficient effort. As a result of this increase in the collective tastes for inequality, racial injustice is essentially reduced to a historical fact with little or no bearing on the contemporary life chances of people color. (pp. 136–137)

Normalizing is a hegemonic practice that feeds *Mechanisms of Power*.

Normalizing spans across and at the intersections of large social issues such as race, incarceration rates, pay differences between genders, immigration, civil rights, and protection for minority groups (Crutchfield & Pettinicchio, 2009; Johnson, 2006; Schwalbe, 2008; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Power, truth, and normalizing feed into the creation of structures that classify and categorize groups of people, or what Foucault refers to as classification/categorization (Foucault, 1980, 1995). The next section of this chapter will critically examine classification/categorization and will be used as a remaining common theme, threading through the discussion on education.

Categorization and the Implications

Creating, naming, and giving description to categories, in relation to groups of people, is a powerful tenant within the *Mechanisms of Power*. Foucault uses the term “dividing” to describe this action (Foucault, 1980, 1995; Jardine, 2005; Lea, 2014). Dividing, combined with social stratification, creates a significant oppressive social

system. Social stratification is “the process of assigning unequal value” to the categorized groups (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 41). Social stratification assigns greater value to certain groups, such as men, in comparison to women. A hierarchy is developed throughout this process which then influences widespread inequitable outcomes (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Dividing and allocating groups creates a sense of urgency to for “members of a more dominant or privileged group to convince everyone concerned that only they have the more prized attributes” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 50). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) created a table to display constructed social opposites, with value differentials (see Table 1).

Table 1

Constructed Social Opposites (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012)

Minoritized/Target Group	Dominant/Agent Group
People of Color	White
Poor Working Class	Middle Class Wealthy
Women Transgender Genderqueer	Men
Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Two Spirit	Heterosexuals
Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, and other non-Christian groups	Christians
People with Disabilities	Able-bodied
Immigrants (perceived) Indigenous peoples	Citizens (perceived)

Note. Source: Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2012, p. 42.

Those with the most political, social, and economic capital continue to support and create methods to classify and categorize people with the purpose of sorting people into the social hierarchy (Foucault, 1995; Lea, 2014). Examples include categories of race, economic status, gender, ability, language, sexual orientation and marital status. The powerfully problematic issue is that “elites have deliberately used race and social class as dividing practices to further their hegemonic, economic, and political (social control)” (Lea, 2014, p. 78).

The categorization of race, historically and present, has been used as a weapon of division. Race is a socially constructed concept utilized to categorize people based on identity of origin and color (Lea, 2014). Considering the social world moves in flux, categories for race identification has changed, and will continue to change, over time based on the dominant social structures. Virginia Lea (2014) explains,

The dominant social narratives currently include a changing number of categories, as evidenced by the Census. Agencies, governmental and private, wishing to gather for a wide range of purposes, which has useful in identifying inequitable socio-economic and education practices, may define the broad category of *people of color* in terms of such categories as black/African American (people with any measure of African descent); Asian (people as disparate as South Asians, including Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Hmong); Latino/a (Hispanic/Spanish speaking, Chicana/o); Native (Indigenous, Indian); and many other changing categories, accepted and/or rejected by people of color themselves. (p. 3)

Creating categories is a divisive social practice, as it provides a set of data to be utilized as a reproduction of the social norms. Race is coincided with income level, education level, Zip Code, incarceration rates, literacy rates, graduation at various levels, and other myriad of said correlation practices. Eduardo Bonilla Silva’s (2006)

framework of naturalization within his study of color blind racism adds to this idea of natural explaining groups in power use phrases such as groups of people “gravitate toward each other” or it is just “the way things are” to reproduce separation of races. Divisive practices, creating messages of naturalization, and normalization has instilled the social construction of race as a powerful trademark and weapon in the social world impacting politics and economics (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Brookfield, 2005; Foucault, 1980; Giroux, 2011; Johnson, 2006; Lea, 2014).

Categorical practice of race results in skin color being associated with large-scale media backing messages that create a perceived culture and practice of a socially-constructed, categorized group. The American Civil Union (ACLU, 2013a) reported,

Racial profiling continues to be a prevalent and egregious form of discrimination in the United States. This unjustifiable practice remains a stain on American democracy and an affront to the promise of racial equality. Since September 11, 2001, new forms of racial profiling have affected a growing number of color in the U.S., including members of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities. The Obama administration has inherited a shameful legacy of racial profiling codified in official FBI guidelines and a notorious registration program that treat Arabs and Muslims as suspects and denies them presumption of innocence and equal protection under the law.

Systems of Hegemony and Mechanisms of Power regarding race results in what Joyce King (1991) refers to as “dysconscious racism,” described as

a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the *absence* of consciousness (that is, no unconsciousness) but an *impaired* consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. (p. 135)

Lea (2014) gives historical context and reasoning to King's description, adding,

Over the last 500 years, representing or supported by interlocking political and legal forces of the state, and the economic power of the corporation, dominant European oligarchs have used the bifurcated concept of *race* to legitimize the exploitative economic systems of colonialism and slavery, through which they and their benefactors accumulated wealth and power. (p. 3)

Race is not the only in-depth, longstanding, overt, and covert history grounded in structures of power, creating hegemonic systems that have resulted in the continuation of divisive practices. Economic divide and the labeling of social status as a result of financial capital is also a divisive social target.

The United States has a significant divide in income amounts with “the upper 1 percent of the population [controlling] 40 percent of all wealth and nearly a quarter of the nation's income” (Giroux, 2012, p. 15). Additionally, the divide between the constructed nationality, race, and gender categorizations reveal a significant lack of equitable distribution. The result of the 2014 Census median household income, identified first by race and Hispanic origin and then by gender, is depicted in Table 2 and Table 3.

Median division of income is a result of social world construction, a system of inequitable access to a more substantial income for marginalized populations. This process, known as classism, creates a contentious social economic divide. Political neoliberal rhetoric utilizes the most economically fragile as the scapegoat for national debt and societal demise (Giroux, 2012). Though access to a safe and healthy living condition is a need, the ideological messaging of meritocracy creates a wave of negative

backlash to individuals and groups needing the assistance of governmental support for survival.

Table 2

Median Household Income by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1967 to 2014

Race and Hispanic Origin	Median Income
Asian	\$74,297
White, not Hispanic	\$60,256
Hispanic (any race)	\$42,491
Black	\$35,398

Note. Source: Adapted from DeNavas-Walt, C., & Proctor, B. D. (2015, September), p. 5. *Income and poverty in the United States: 2014. Current population reports.* Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf>

Table 3

Median Earnings of Full-time, Year-Round Workers 15 Years and Older by Gender, 2013–2014

Gender	Median Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers 15 Years and Older
Men	\$50,383
Women	\$39,621

Note. Source: Adapted from DeNavas-Walt, C., & Proctor, B. D. (2015, September), p. 6. *Income and poverty in the United States: 2014. Current population reports.* Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf>

Henry Giroux (2012) categorizes this as “a culture of cruelty and a politics of humiliation,” referring to “the institutionalization and widespread adoption of a set of policies, and symbolic practices that legitimize forms of organized violence against

human beings and lead inexorably to hardship, suffering and despair” (p. 14). Use of humiliation and cruelty by “politicians to slash food stamp benefits” and other social support is an open campaign for continued reproduction of ideologies that oppress economically disadvantaged groups (Giroux, 2012, p. 16).

This section of Chapter II has critically examined the use of power, ideology, and hegemony to create and maintain systems of inequality. Section two of this chapter will thread these concepts through a critical investigation of schooling.

Schooling Through a Critical Lens

The United States offers a free public education to all youth, regardless of categorized identifications. Public school is, by law, to allow any student in the state-decided age range to attend school, be provided transportation, and if qualified, obtain two meals at little or no cost. Just as marginalized groups have fought for the right to be free, vote, and have equality, marginalized groups have had to fight to be offered a free public education paid for by tax dollars (Spring, 2005). Education, as a structure, has and remains an iconic component to society. It is regarded as a “site of struggle,” meaning it is not sheltered from *Systems of Hegemony* and *Mechanism of Power* (Connell, 2012, p. 681). Socialization not only exists but is a function of the educational system. Access to education has been used as a way to reproduce systems of inequality across the globe. It, in itself, has become a set of binaries including privilege, turmoil, accolades, and demise.

Education has a complex multi-faceted purpose spanning economic, political, and social constructs. Sigal Ben-Porath (2013) sums up the complexities with which schools are charged, stating,

Schools are charged with responding to the diversity of affiliations, preferences, ideologies, languages, values, and memberships. They are expected to celebrate diversity of the student body, but also to minimize it by developing civic capacity and a host of shared dimensions including language, civic knowledge, academic competency, and patriotic sentiments. (p. 80)

As a result of these complexities the entire system of education and individual schools have evolved with societal changes and demands. In general, education has remained as “a general preparation for adulthood,” like a rite of passage (William, 2010, p. 109). It has served the purpose of providing religious doctrine, assimilating immigrants and migrants, preparing youth to carry the torch of democracy, preparing future workers, and teaching a specified set of social norms to youth and adults.

Education has been referred to as the great equalizer in society. It has been idealized as the place for societal problems to be solved. This rhetoric dates back to the earlier part of the 19th century. Spring (2005) notes that during this time

it was thought that the school would provide equality of opportunity by offering an equal education that would allow for equal competition among individual after they completed their education. The major hope was that the school would make it possible for children of poor families to compete on equal terms with children of rich families. The newer version of equality of opportunity, which emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, combined the hope of providing the opportunity for equal competition between children of the rich and of the poor with the desire to create an efficient society in which interest and abilities matched social position. (p. 287)

Federal and state policies, as well as funding structures, have been created and framed as the method to battle systemic disparities in the nation. However, when layers are peeled away, schools have external forces and self-imposed internal forces mirroring

Foucault's power structures and ideologies that play out in overt and covert hegemonic practices on a daily basis.

National education policies do not exist in the United States. Cross (2014) explains, "we have a hodgepodge of federal laws, executive branch policy decisions, regulations, and incentives that have accumulated like so many geological layers" (p. 167). Each of these disconnected laws, policies, and regulations slice and dice schools and students into a codifiable commodity. As a result, "what constitutes PK-12 education is determined by a series of interlocking, historical mechanisms of power" (Lea, Teuber, Jones, & Wolfgram, 2012, p. 97). The purpose of schooling has not been agreed upon or defined, leaving right and left sides of government debating between measures of accountability, curriculum, privatization of schools, and the role of teachers (Giroux, 2012; Ravitch, 2014).

Education is not shielded from political, social, and economic fluxation. It moves with the tides of political, economic, and social decision-making. Consequently, those in positions of power use language to "present public education as the fuel for 'democracy'—a notion that is problematic on two scores. First, in spite of large numbers of amazing and committed teachers" (Lea, 2014, p. 9), "school functions have been largely subordinated to economic trends and, at most, play a supportive, not decisive role in (capitalistic) economy" (Bastian, as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 9).

This results in schools reproducing and mirroring power, ideology, and hegemony. The education system and each individual school replicate categorization,

division, and social stratification, paralleling *Mechanisms of Power* outside of the school.

Reflecting overall societal functions

‘dividing practices’ are clearly central the organizational processes of education in our society. These divisions and objectifications are achieved either within the subject or between the subject and others. The use of testing, examining, profiling, and streaming in education, the use of entry criteria for different types of schooling, and the formation of different types of intelligence, ability, and scholastic identity in the processes of schooling are all examples of such dividing practices. In these ways using these techniques and forms of organization, and the creation of separate and different curricula and pedagogies, forms of teacher-student relationships, identities and subjectivities are formed, leaned and carried. Through the creation of remedial and advanced groups, and the separation of the educationally subnormal or those with special educational needs, abilities are stigmatized and normalized. (Bell, as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 75)

This section of Chapter II will unpack external and internal structures that impact the operations of schools starting with federal policies that have impacted the ways in which schools function. Throughout this section, it is important to be reminded that “David Purpel has argued, there are really no educational issues, only human, cultural, moral concerns played out in the arena of schools, and in terms of the hopes and desires we have for our children’s lives” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 16). Giroux (2012) supports this, stating, “educational reform matters, but cannot be viewed as an isolated issue. It must be linked to the broader crisis of power, literacy, economics, culture, and democracy” (p. 44). We must zoom out to see the larger context.

External Forces: Federal Policies and Historical Context

When referring to external forces, reference is being made to the forces outside of the individual school that impact the way the school operates and functions. These influencing forces are within the longstanding political, social, and economic power

structures of the greater society. Examples include federal and state policies, attendance zones, curriculum practices, assessment, competition, fiscal distribution, and *Systems of Hegemony and Mechanisms of Power*.

The role of the federal government in education has moved in lockstep with American politics and social movements. Policies and other enactments have been overtly publicized as having concern for the education of all students, specifically students from marginalized populations (Cross, 2014). This platform of creating and implementing policies with the overlaying message that the result will be to assist those in marginalized populations is a smokescreen, deterring focus from the critical social issues of classism, sexism, racism, and other oppressive structures (Giroux, 2011, 2012; Ravitch, 2014).

Models of progressive education were implemented after World War II. This model of education focused on “active learning, cooperative planning, the elimination of competition for grades, and the merging of subjects” (Cross, 2014, p. 8). Ravitch (1983) described this time as focus was given to “effective learning,” described as a focus on principles of living that mirrored democratic ideals rather than focus on the quantity of knowledge obtained (p. 44). The Progressive Education Era can be categorized as a time in education when schools were used to improve the lives of individuals in the schools (Cross, 2014).

In step with the social context of the 1960s, education embraced the “Open Education” movement, “with its emphasis on tearing down classroom walls” (Cross,

2014, p. 8). Students were encouraged to take coursework of interest, rather than a set standard of curriculum (Cross, 2014, p. 8). According to Shapiro (2006),

the 1960s and liberals (especially among the teaching profession and their allies in the university schools of education) are accused of undermining clear standards of achievement and behavior by encouraging realistic values. Whether in terms of affirming multiple forms of intelligence, the value of process over produce, history that emphasizes multiple perspectives, or the incommensurable value of different language and cultures, these liberals stand accused of pandering to the goal of making everyone ‘feel good’ about who they are and what they know, to detriment of legitimate standards of what might be considered ‘true’ and ‘good.’ (p. 14)

Neoliberals placed this blame on the liberals with the launch of Sputnik, putting a halt to the Progressive Era in education and creating specific attention to using schools to enhance the skills of math, science, and foreign languages (Cross, 2014). The end of the Progressive Education era marks the beginning of commodifying education and viewing the educational system as a conveyor belt of students to train in these areas (Cross, 2014; Giroux, 2012).

Schools were not only dealing with the debates from the left and right regarding methodologies and purpose of education; schools were also in the same context as one of the nation’s most progressive, and therefore turbulent times in United States history—the Civil Rights Movement and the passing of the Civil Rights Act. Public schools were significantly influenced by these external forces, specifically the active role the Supreme Court had in educational decisions. Starting in 1954, after *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas*, restrictions were put in place “mandating strict racial balance quotas, and approving busing to achieve such balance” (Reardon, Grewal, Kalogrides, &

Greenberg, 2012, p. 877). From 1964 through the 1970s “public education was characterized by pressures from groups on the left and right who sought programs or a special curriculum in subjects ranging from bilingual education, to women’s studies, to African American studies, to prayer in the classroom” (Cross, 2014, p. 9).

Multicultural curriculum developers and advocates were fighting for space to influence schools. Since its inception, the goal of multicultural education has been “to reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality” (Banks, 1993, p. 3). Multicultural education has and continues to work through four phases. Phase one was influenced by this time—the civil rights movement and focused on ethnic studies when “ethnic minority groups initiated individual and institutional actions to incorporate the concepts, information and theories from ethnic students into the school and teacher curricular” (Banks, 1993, p. 19).

Various social structures and perspectives were externally pushing and pulling on schools, creating a time frame during the late 1960s until the 1980s when schools focused on navigating the flux in social forces. Schools were working out the social inequalities within the walls of the classroom. Integration of schools brought social stratification and socialization to an extreme. *Mechanism of Power* were prevalent inside schools. Standardization, “homogenizing function through a scripted curriculum” was noted in storytelling and the use of text that reproduced current social divides continued to be used in the integrated classrooms (Cross, 2014; Lea, 2014, p. 29). Surveillance “functions to monitor, construct, and regulate subjects” and regulation “functions to set the limits of

acceptable behavior to control and maintain the existing system” were documented in ways groups of students, specifically minority students, were watched throughout the days and removed from settings (Lea, 2014, p. 29). Though schools were integrated, exclusion was used as a method to overtly expose constructed deficits of black students (Cross, 2014; Lea, 2014). This all resulted in utilizing distribution, “functions to control the agenda,” meaning students were grouped, separated, and labeled by performance that mirrored skin color grouping (Cross, 2014; Lea, 2014, p. 29).

Politically during the 1980s the United States was being stacked against the competitive global market and the ideological messages that the United States was behind in education was reproduced, creating a surge to increase “efforts to establish minimum-competency exams and by raising the number of units required for a high school diploma” (Cross, 2014, p. 9). This resulted in a federal focus to move away from the open classroom, cooperative learning practices to strong efforts on the basic skills. Messages of meritocracy increased as the focus became “the idea of more rigorous content and holding students accountable” (Cross, 2014, p. 9; Spring, 2005). Integration of schools gave momentum to rhetoric of meritocracy and individualism because at face value, the smokescreen of equal schooling opportunities was used (Spring, 2005).

A Nation at Risk was released during this time, creating ideologies around school, student performance, and differences in achievement based on the categorization of student characteristics such as race, ability, and gender. Final language from the National Commission on Excellence in 1983 read,

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world . . . The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. (as cited in Cross, 2014, p. 82)

This report created a battle against schools, rather than a rally behind schools. Blame for these results were placed on educators, parents, and students. Finite focus, disconnected from larger social context created the opportunity for the federal government to begin movement in the 1990s toward school choice and intense focus on accountability (Cross, 2014). It is important to note that during this same time the sanctions for racially balanced quotas that was established in 1954 were released, beginning the early 1990s, with the claim that the sanctioned decisions were not intended to be permanent (Readon et al., 2012). Reverting to neighborhood schools, bound by zip codes and local funding structures, schools were experiencing a shift in demographics, again placing finite focus on performance differences by race, disconnected from the covert methods of segregation that were taking place on a grand scale.

Ronald Reagan utilized the political presence and momentum of *A Nation at Risk* to fuel more national attention on education, indicating he would turn schools around with reforms that included discipline around drugs and alcohol; requesting states raise academic standards; and encouraging good teaching with the connection that “teachers must be paid and promoted on the basis of their competence and merit” (Cross, 2014, p. 83).

Reagan's reforms had a two-pronged significant impact; the first is the introduction of zero tolerance and the second surrounds accountability, as this was the first time in educational history accountability, student performance on assessments, and teacher pay were connected. It was also the beginning of reinstating segregation through covert methodologies, such as school district attendance zones. Student demographics were attached to both of these in ways that reinforced *Systems of Hegemony* and produced stronger *Mechanisms of Power*.

Economic context created an external force during this same time. National attention was pushed on schools and education, yet "funding for K-12 education revenue from the federal sources fell by about 30%" leaving states to manage the cut with state dollars as the country was in the most difficult economic recession since the Great Depression (Cross, 2014, pp. 88–89). This external force would continue to be a tactic by the federal government to move states to comply with federal policies, including the passing of the 1994 bill named Goals 2000 as well as the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) (McGuinn, 2013, p. 223). The intertwined component was a threat to withhold federal dollars if states did not comply with participation. This particular bill was the first to have the concept in which

adults in the system must be held accountable for performance, but performance must be based on academic content and performance standards developed and adopted at the state level. Curriculum must be developed that ensures that the standards are taught and teacher trained to each the material. Finally, new tests must be developed that are aligned to the standards, which in turn must be reflected in the curriculum, and adults (and students) must be held accountable for children learning the material. (Cross, 2014, p. 116)

Reagan's focus on discipline around drugs and alcohol introduced zero tolerance policies in that

the term 'zero tolerance' was first coined during the Reagan presidency and the war on drugs in the 1980s. Subsequent legislation enacted by Congress, the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986, brought the war on drugs to school with rules that mandated zero tolerance for any drugs or alcohol on public school grounds. (Fuentes, as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 181)

Policies such as these gave significant power to schools to remove students from the school setting and utilize an external force as a backing for decision-making. Not stopping on drugs,

During the Clinton administration, Congress took zero tolerance steps further, passing the 1994 Safe and Gun-Free Schools Act, which mandated a one-year expulsion for students who brought firearms to school and pump the federal Department of Education and Justice funding into antiviolence programs. (Fuentes, as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 181)

The result of this was

youth, especially African American and Latino males, were dished out zero tolerance suspensions way out of proportion to their numbers, a disparity which has been well document and found to go back 25 years by Indiana University profession of educational psychology, Russell Skiba. (Fuentes, as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 181)

Schools practiced intense exclusionary practices, falling back on the law for support, which only continued to strengthen *Mechanisms of Power* and portray these groups of students in negative ways. Schools were required to implement a zero-tolerance policy in relationship to any student who brought a gun to school. This required the student to be

expelled for a full calendar year. If this was not complied with, the consequence was loss of federal funding. The federal government used power to strengthen hegemonic messages and gain support from those with the most social, economic, and political capital (Lea, 2014). Though no national requirements exist, the federal government historically utilizes power in this way to force compliance.

President George W. Bush's work and passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 utilized this, and other previous movements, as a springboard to increase attention on education through the lenses of testing, adequate yearly progress, teachers, and funding (Cross, 2014). At the most basic level, NCLB "moved the focus of federal policy from school inputs (resources) to school outputs (achievement)" (McGuinn, 2013, p. 223). Terminologies such as "achievement gap" and "highly qualified" entered the field, creating a significant increase in the reproduction of socially-constructed ideologies that students who are White, abled, economically advantaged, and speak English as their first language are more skilled than their socially stratified counterparts in school (Cross, 2014).

Consequences of the focus on accountability include "disproportionate focus on tested content, demoralization of teachers . . . undue pressures on students" and "there is evidence that high-stakes testing makes it harder to keep teachers" (William, 2010, p. 118). An additional consequence of these accountability measures is a devaluing of pedagogical approaches that foster creative problem-solving and critical thinking because "standardized testing offers a key means of measuring the rational virtues and skill-based 'capacities'" rather than complex critical skills (Boler, 1999, p. 47).

NCLB created a transparent view of schools and districts, revealing significant differences in performance on standardized assessments between White students and those from marginalized populations. McGuinn (2013) explains the annual testing and reporting NCLB forced, created an intense focus to “build new systems for data gathering and dissemination” (p. 224). Additionally, state departments of education had to “expand their capacity to monitor local districts, provide technical assistance, and intervene when necessary,” creating a microcosm of monitoring and compliance rather than providing assistance around concepts of instructional practices and pedagogy (McGuinn, 2013, p. 224). Heightened surveillance began to occur from the federal level down to the individual student level (Cross, 2014; Lea, 2014). Transparency of test scores began to have implications for neighborhood development, zoning policies, and school attendance lines, creating an additional force for neighborhood segregation (McGuinn, 2013; Rothstein, 2013).

The most recent external force creating a significant intensified shift in education was during President Obama’s term and under the leadership of Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education. McGuinn (2013) notes, “historically almost all federal education funds have been distributed through categorical grant programs that allocated money to districts according to need-based formulas” (p. 226). Obama’s term in office took a different direction—states would need to compete for federal funds and recipients would be in a contract with the federal government to follow the set agreements as designed under the leadership of Arne Duncan. The federal education agenda supported \$4.35 billion for

Race to the Top (RttT), \$3 billion for School Improvement Grants (SIG), and \$650 million for Investing in Innovation (I3) funds (McGuinn, 2013). States and districts were

rewarded only for developing reform proposals aligned with five administrative priorities: developing common standards and assessments, improving teacher training, evaluation, and retention policies; developing better data systems; adopting preferred school turn around strategies; and building stakeholder support for reform. (McGuinn, 2013, p. 226)

Combining these three competitive grants forced state education departments and local school districts to create proposals meeting all of these requirements. The following section will specifically move through RttT, as this competitive grant impacted the most widespread implementation across the nation (McGuinn, 2013).

Race to the Top (RttT) was introduced to all states as an incentive package. The federal government used its power and proposed this as an invitation in the midst of economic decline, when states were struggling to meet financial needs to invest in education. States fiercely competed to participate in this federal government offer (Cross, 2014). If selected, RttT would provide states with a significant amount of financial support to implement the

use of student achievement data as a component of teacher evaluation systems . . . states and districts use certain models of school turnaround in schools determined to be consistently failing to meet objectives . . . to adopt new and higher common standards, create longitudinal data systems, and distribute the most highly qualified teachers across districts. (Cross, 2014, p. 158)

RttT focused significantly on student outcomes and teacher evaluations.

President Obama and Arne Duncan “changed the politics around teacher accountability

by repeatedly highlighting the dysfunction in our teacher evaluation and tenure systems” (McGuinn, 2013, p. 236). According to McGuinn (2013), “their use of the bully pulpit, combined with the high-profile debates in the state legislatures over tenure reform . . . brought much greater media coverage to the issue than ever before” (p. 236). Power from the federal government’s proposal of RttT was met with much resistance.

Teachers unions in particular have vocally opposed the new focus on teacher accountability, and in July 2010 delegates at the National Education Association (NEA) convention gave RttT a vote of no confidence and called for US secretary of education Arne Duncan’s resignation. A few weeks later, seven leading civil rights groups, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and that National Urban League called on Obama to change core elements of his education agenda—including the emphasis on charters, competitive grants, and school restructuring—saying they were detrimental to the interest of low-income minority students. (McGuinn, 2013, p. 227)

Arne Duncan’s challenge back to groups came in the framework that this method was ambitious and a new way of thinking about education. He used his power to support RttT and continued strong rhetoric that this was going to transform education for the betterment of all students (McGuinn, 2013).

In total, 46 states applied and competed for involvement and 19 were selected. Additional opportunities were provided for school districts in non-selected states and charter schools. In total, 13 school districts and three charter school organizations were selected to participate in RttT and received funding for this agreement as well. The federal government later provided additional opportunities for states to apply for a competitive RttT component that focused on early learning. States, districts, and charter schools entered into a contractual agreement with the federal government having the

power to revoke funds if the contract was not upheld by recipients. Contract monitoring and surveillance increased, and positions at the state education agencies were created with the sole purpose of monitoring deployment and reporting to the federal government (Cross, 2014).

Common Core State Standards were imposed on the states receiving RttT funding. Rhetoric regarding the need for a national curriculum circumvented the “clear neoliberal narrative: the principal purpose of school is to prepare students in global capitalistic economy that best serves and increasingly rich oligarchy and plutocracy” (Lea, 2014, p. 185). Treating schools, teachers, and students as a factory model to reproduce the already grave disparities, the Common Core State standards created a sanctioned methodology of teaching that legally permitted the federal government to control schools and the curriculum (Cross, 2014; Lea, 2014; Ravitch, 2014).

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards created a vacuum of economic capital gain for private business. Production of textbooks, online materials, and test preparation material came in full circulation to support curricula “scripted, and governed by multiple choice high-stakes tests” (Mansell, as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 185; Ravitch, 2014). Socially-constructed views of history to privilege the story of Whiteness were revitalized, as well as academic vocabulary in texts that assumed the entry point of upper to middle class White population. The exclusiveness of the material, as well as the matching test items, created testing results depicting schools are not performing to the constructed norm, specifically those students from marginalized populations (Darby & Saatcioglu, 2015; Lea, 2014; Ravitch, 2014).

This federal and state contractual agreement created significant, unrepairable consequences. Giroux (2012) states,

Arne Duncan's 'Race to the Top' agenda emphasizes expanding efficiency at the expenses of equity, prioritizes testing over critical pedagogical practices, endorses commercial rather than public values, accentuates competition as a form of social combat over cooperation and shared responsibilities and endorses individual rights over support for the collective good—all of which are values that come out of the neoliberal playbook in which the public is a term of opprobrium and unadulterated self-interest, coded as 'parental choice,' is the only recognizable motive for engaging in educational reform. (p. 41)

Now, as the United States is navigating the 2016 passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which puts less focus on federal involvement in the areas of assessment, accountability, and curriculum, giving power to the states to decide on these issues, a critical look back recognizes that though time has passed, the external forces impacting schools have remained the same. Shapiro (2006) finds

much of the debate around public education has been framed as a conflict between the liberal influences of the 1960s and 1970s with their concern for the psychological well-being of kids, and the defenders of academic standards-conservatives, who want to "return" schools to their true educational mission of ensuring young people have mastered fundamental skills and acquired "basic" knowledge. (p. 14)

With such intense focus on accountability and curriculum, focus on school integration has become a non-priority for mainstream education policies, resulting in the creation of increased segregation. It has become such a non-priority that "in 2007 the Supreme Court found that school integration policies in Louisville, Kentucky, and Seattle, Washington, were unconstitutional because they considered students' race in

assigning them to schools” (Rothstein, 2013, p. 175). According to Reardon et al. (2012), the implications of such actions, specifically “following the release from court ordered, white/black desegregation levels begin to rise within a few years of release and continue to grow steadily for at least 10 years” (p. 899). This study found that other numbers, such as percent free and reduced lunch remained the same, as well as total enrollment in schools. The Civil Rights Project (2012) at UCLA released a report with the following information:

Three new studies showing persistent and serious increases in segregation by race and poverty, with very dramatic results in the South and West, the nation’s two largest regions where students of color now comprise the majority of public school enrollment. Nationally, the average black or Latino student now attends school with a substantial majority of children in poverty, double the level in schools of whites and Asians. . . . (para. 1)

In spite of declining residential segregation for black families, and their large-scale movement to the suburbs in most parts of the country, school segregation for black students remains very high and is increasingly most severely in the South, which led the nation in school integration in the 1960s desegregation struggles took effect. (para. 4)

At this point, with court orders having been released, remedies to segregation in schools is not solely school solution-orientated. Rothstein (2013) puts forth the following proposal that

could include polices on school district and school attendance boundary setting and pupil assignment; inclusionary residential zoning; public housing and housing subsidy policies; transpiration policy; and aggressive regulation of bank, real estate, and fair employment practices. (p. 195)

These solutions would require policymakers and the American people to acknowledge and confront issues of racism, color-blind racism, and segregation (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Rothstein, 2013).

Foucault's *Mechanisms of Power* gives context to how external structures force compliance and conformity. States and schools must comply with federal requirements and reporting is mandated to prove compliance or face losing federal funding supports. Implementation of the standard curriculum and testing model create a structure of regulation of content and outcomes.

An additional external force threaded over this history is school choice. School choice is built on a platform that “privileges the private sector over the public sector and assumes that market arrangements will always produce better outcomes than government regulations” (Angus, 2015, p. 396). School choice has a longstanding history in the educational system with private and home schools, both requiring a high level of capital to access. School choice in the public sphere “is an approach to educational governance where parents are given greater discretion in selecting schools, free from the limited options made available by districts based on zoning assignments” (Darby & Saatcioglu, 2015, p. 63). In alignment with the previously discussed policies, school choice entered the public sphere framed as a solution for inequitable schooling structures. It has been marketed as a way to counteract community capital as a barrier to access to a quality educational experience.

Inequitable resource allocation has been prevalent in debates and policy at the federal, state, and local levels. The “variability of quality (as measured, crudely, by

spending) among state schools in the United States is high: schools in wealthy neighborhoods often spend as much as twice as much per student as schools in poor neighborhoods” (Brighthouse & Swift, 2013, p. 200). Smith (2013) explains,

under our current school funding system, property-poor districts, and the inner-city school districts in large metropolitan areas that must compete with other local government agencies for their shares of the general tax revenues, can end up with grossly insufficient revenue streams. (p. 259)

Investigating funding of schools, Smith (2013) also notes “the states are legally responsible for approximately 92 percent of schooling spending” and “the greatest inequitable variations are interstate in nature rather than intrastate” (p. 259).

Solutions to inequitable resource allocation include two divisive approaches—“neoliberals defend school choice for disadvantaged students on the grounds of equality and opportunity [and] liberals support resource redistribution for public education over free market solution by appealing to the same ideology” (Darby & Saatcioglu, 2015, p. 56). Stated roots for both solutions are grounded in equity; however, the methodology and implications differ. Providing choice through alternative schooling options is grounded in, and attracts the capitalistic mindset of competition, and therefore continues to gain momentum.

Today public school choice includes magnet schools, charter schools, and a voucher program. These three structures exist at various capacities across the nation and continue to gain momentum from both the public and private lens. Schools are in the same market competition as businesses, meaning “schools and other providers of services are expected to be responsive to market discipline and to adopt an enterprising approach

by anticipating and satisfying the expectations of education consumers” (Angus, 2015, p. 396).

School choice pushes responsibility from community to individual families. Research, education, and selection impact participation; therefore, “access to school choice . . . seems to be driven by who knows about the options, and . . . research suggests that more educated, middle-or upper-income white parents are more aware” (Henig, as cited in Hubbard & Kulkarni, 2009, p. 179). The result is “middle-class families—those with sufficient family capital . . . take advantage of the opportunities school choice policies offer” (Angus, 2015, p. 400). Darby and Saatcioglu (2015) focused research on factors impacting low-income African American students’ participation in magnet schools in the urban context. This study concluded the unit of responsibility is a significant factor in equitable participation; therefore, access of information to individual families is a key indicator for participation.

According to Angus (2015), “participating in school choice is participating in the construction and legitimation of the most powerful and dominant social imaginary in the current historical period” (p. 397). Advantaged parents with family capital believe school choice is an educational investment for their children, as well as an outlet to avert mixing their children with selected populations in communities (Angus, 2015).

Implications of school choice have created an even more catastrophic inequity in resources and segregation. Specifically noting the charter school movement, the co-director of the Civil Rights Project at UCLS stated, “the charter school movement has been a major political success, but it has been a civil rights failure” (Stulberg, 2014, p.

36), as it has amplified segregation. Though public money is being utilized to fund these school choice options, public access is not granted. Relied upon structures of transportation and nutrition are not required in magnet schools, charter schools, or with the use of a voucher to attend a private school.

Funding for charter and magnet schools are allocated by shifting the funds from the school the student was assigned to attend to the school the student is attending. This funding structure removes resources from already existing sites and invests them in alternatives. Additionally, based upon the already discussed context, families with more capital enroll in school choice programs, removing additional economic revenue from the previous school.

Implications for school choice to be associated with a solution to equity are insurmountably damaging. This propaganda movement creates another pathway to blame segregation and divide on individuals, hiding the systemic issues at work, and place into legal policies the creation of this structure. Diane Ravitch sees the entire movement as “a larger historical movement in American education to aggressively undermine public, democratic schooling” (Stulberg, 2014, p. 36).

National attention on schools and education creates a disillusioned truth that schools are the problem and more policies, regulations, accountability, and assessments will change the outcomes. Falsified realities portrayed as equitable access gives permission for rhetoric of meritocracy to permeate throughout the avenues of society. Additionally,

successful schools cannot function without public services that help children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds just as they cannot function adequately when a society refuses to pay teachers decent salaries, provide them with high-quality teacher education, and make financial and ideological investments in order to validate teaching as a one of the most dignified and civically cherished professions in the country. (Giroux, 2012, p. 23)

Though schools face external pressures and circumstances such as those Henry Giroux points out, schools have control over internal functioning, including decisions regarding student placement, material uses, instructional design, and other factors that are in the locus of control. The next section moves through these features and identifies how schools, when not applying critical decision-making, reproduces the very ideologies and hegemonic messages in the larger societal context rather than critically challenging them.

Internal Forces: School Decision Making

Schools are in a precarious place, the point of contention between the neoliberal ideals and values and educating for participation in a democratic society. Many states across the nation have enacted the assignment of a letter grade to a school. In North Carolina a letter A, B, C, D, or F is given to each school based on the measures. The formula used in North Carolina is based 80% on proficiency measures and 20% on growth as measured by the End-of-Grade or End-of-Course standardized tests (NCDPI, 2015). This particular formula, and others like it across the nation, privilege the schools with a student population having higher economic and social capital because the assessment and proficiency scores are set to highlight success in this way, while marginalizing other forms of success. Success, in the educational context, has a finite definition as it is celebrated as a result of standardized assessments, oppressing other

areas of education and experiences (Giroux, 2012; Lea, 2014; Messit, 2015; Ravitch, 2014; Shapiro, 2006). In the current system, “Language Arts, Math, and Science are much more highly valued than PE, Music, self knowledge, and the ability to create group harmony” (Lea, 2014, p. 27).

Global competition revolves around science and technology. Language Arts, or the ability read and write at high levels, is a predominant skill in a globally competitive market; therefore, the schools reinforcing these areas of concentration celebrate success in these areas at a significantly higher rate than other areas of education or worldly development. Practices such as these mirror “the neo-liberal, hyper accountable world of schooling” in that from this perspective, “skills and concepts are only worthy if they can be tested, and outcomes are only valuable if they can be measured and compared” (Lea, 2014, p. 25).

Schools make decisions based on neoliberal rhetoric and mirror what the federal government has done, putting actions in place in the name of assisting marginalized populations with little critical thought to the large-scale outcomes for students. Advertised as policies and practices that support safety and assistance, schools continue to make internal decisions replicating the current social world rather than creating systems that challenge it through critical dialogue, discourse, and structure.

The result of being in this contentious place is synonymous to being in a small boat in turbulent waters; the tide and weather are more powerful than the boat, making it move a certain direction, regardless of the will of the boat. One major outcome of this is the unknown installation of the hidden curriculum throughout every facet of educational

spaces. The hidden curriculum includes the inadvertent result of lessons, policies, and practices within a school building that replicate the larger messages of society promoting current ideologies of power, privilege, oppression, and overall inequalities, as well as messages of competition and capitalism versus those of a collaborative, inclusive democracy (Laden, 2013; Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999; Shapiro, 2006).

Actions of the hidden curriculum span between curriculum choices, behavior expectations, construction of the building, teaching diversity and inclusion, celebratory practices, and instructional practices in the classroom. The hidden curriculum is pervasive and has been “variously identified as the inculcation of values, political socialization, training in obedience and docility, the perpetuation of traditional class structure-functions that may be characterized generally as social control” (Vallance, as cited in Shapiro, Latham, & Ross, 2006, p. 79). Giroux (2012) finds

it is impossible to suggest that schools are somehow neutral institutions that can ignore the ways in which social, ethical, and political norms bear down on almost every aspect of schooling and classroom teaching. In fact, one can reasonably argue that most of what is learned in schools takes place through a hidden curriculum in which particular forms of knowledge, culture, values and desires are taught, but never talked about or made public. (p. 82)

In Chapter I the history of education was explained, giving context to the role of schools throughout time. One major theme threading through the role of school from a social perspective, specifically in urban communities, was socialization. Using schools as the place to teach youth the said morals, values, and ways of thinking and acting, as well as methods of living, has always been a function of schools, fluxing between overt

and covert usage (Spring, 2005). However, the hidden curriculum became a dominant force in education during the 19th century due the social context of society in that

the growing diversity of cultural and political structures-pushed educators to resume with renewed vigor the language of social control and homogenization that had dominated educational rhetoric from the earliest colonial period. The language of the hidden curriculum was never more explicit than in this period when the rationales for education began shifting focus from an emphasis on supplementary nurture to one of active molding and imposition of values. (Vallance, as cited in Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 87)

Considering the hidden curriculum is in every facet of the functioning of school, it is difficult to tease out which is the most influential. This next section of this chapter will unpack the hidden curriculum through various lenses, explaining the larger scale implications in alignment with issues of inequality and in relation to internal decision-making of schools.

Discipline. Schools create disciplinary systems for all students to adhere and include the rules and accompanying consequences. These systems incorporate social interactions, time frames on movement, dress code, and performance (Ferguson, 2001). Disciplinary systems include “power that serve to discipline and train human beings and, in doing so, turns them into the sorts of objects which society needs” (Jardine, 2005, p. 24). School disciplinary systems function “through the exercise of classification, surveillance, normalization, reward and punishment” (Jardine, 2005, p. 24). Created and stated as the truths of the building disciplinary systems are grounded in power, “blind and neutral to the difference of class, race, and gender among groups of children” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 41). Foucault (1980) describes,

Truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power . . . truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has a regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are chartered with saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

Disciplinary systems are created by the society of the school and are influenced by society at large. The result of these systems is a greater emphasis on black students, as well as Latino/Latina, being referred to school administration for disciplinary concerns at a disproportionate rate to White students (Harris, 2013). Harris (2013) cites a variety of studies, finding

that cultural discontinuity between black families and the institutionalized structure of schools, which value cultural norms and standards of 'mainstream' white middle-class society, results in school personnel's placing greater emphasis on black children's behavior. (p. 115)

Procedures and protocols, created through disciplinary systems, are rapidly creating a pathway from schools to prison, or what is referred to as the 'school-to-prison pipeline' (Foucault, 1980, 1995; Lea, 2014). Lea (2014) refers to the school-to-prison pipeline as "the policies and practices that push our nation's schoolchildren out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems" (Lea, 2014, p. 180). Student infractions are treated as a criminal offenses and student behavior becomes an issue handled by either the police or security forces" (Giroux, 2012, p. 3).

Use of intense regulation and surveillance results in “disciplinary structures of punishment replac[ing] education” and “a range of student behaviors are criminalized resulting in the implementation of harsh mandatory rules that push many students deeper into the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems” (Giroux, 2012, p. 3).

Utilizing the federal enactment of zero tolerance starting in 1994, which mirrors that of Jim Crow laws; schools have created a wider net to catch constructed notions of deviance and place it under the umbrella of zero tolerance (Lea, 2014). Use of zero tolerance policies are disconnected from the societal culture. The most socially, economically, and politically fragile in society suffer the consequence of the neoliberal ideals with the result being that

zero tolerance does little more than legitimate the mindless punishment of poor whites and students of color by criminalizing behavior as trivial as violating a dress code. Such students have been assaulted by police, handcuffed, taken away in policy cars, and in some cases imprisoned. (Giroux, 2012, p. 14)

Mirroring society, the use of police being called into elementary, middle, and high schools to impose disciplinary actions reproduces the already formulized relationships between groups as seen across the nation in the use of the police force on minority populations.

Ranking. Discipline policies are not unique to this discourse. Schools set up systems to track students, which mimics Foucault’s (1995) *Mechanism of Power* described as classification/categorization. According to Shapiro (2006), “school is one of the most powerful engines of socialization in our culture, one that prepares us for a world

that emphasizes the importance of superior status, recognition, and the celebrity, and the importance of doing whatever is necessary to attain them” (p. 40).

Here the hidden curriculum sets the tone for students learning student groupings and the implications of such groupings. The origin of the practice comes from demographic collection of student information and although collecting of student demographical information is not within the traditional public school locus of control, utilizing classifications to track students and provide different sets of educational experiences is the threshold of internal design and functioning. Schools do not utilize the terminology of tracking; however, they still practice “sort(ing) students into hierarchal categories” resulting in “advantaging some students at the expense of others” (Lea, 2014, p. 29).

Examples of this are the creation curriculum tracks constructed to privilege Advanced Placement and Honors courses with college credit and accolades, while providing Special Needs students, those learning English as a second language, and those deemed requiring remedial course work a marginalized watered-down curriculum experience (Lea, 2014). According to Lea (2014), “tracking replicates the capitalistic world in that it relegates students into different categories of ability, with differential status, arranged hierarchically. The ‘academic’ students are given value; the ‘special education’ students are seen as deficient” (p. 27). Value is connected to academic performance, and though the neoliberal ideologies flow through the federal policies, the significant accolades and power given to performance in this area are not.

Intelligence testing is utilized as a tracking method in schools and its use reinforces the social belief that intelligence can be measured, rather than seeing intelligence in and of itself as a socially constructed idea (Shapiro, 2006). From its inception, intelligence has, and continues to have, a vague definition and paradigms between influences of nature and nurture (Spring, 2005). The notion of the intelligence testing came to surface during World War I and was used “for the classification of army personnel” (Spring, 2005, p. 297). As the use of this test became more widespread and replicated in the schools, results confirmed “to Anglo-Americans that Native Americans and African were inferior races” (Spring, 2005, p. 298). This is because “from its very beginning, intelligence testing has always been resisted owning up to the truth, such tests have a long, well-documented record of racial, ethnic, and class bias” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 142). Today in schools, intelligence tests are utilized to categorize students and group them into special education classes, separate schools, and academically gifted programs which all represent significant areas of disproportionality in race and economic status (Shapiro, 2006).

A subsequent egregious use of classification and categorization is the use of a grading and class ranking which all spirals to Valedictorian status in traditional public schools. This action replicates the notion of success in the social world. Shapiro (2006) describes that “success is about show, and it’s always about the creation of invidious distinctions. In other words, it is a statement about having something that demonstrates a certain kind of social superiority” (p. 25). Individual display of grades, behavior status, and honor roll recognition continues the capitalistic rather than democratic principles. A

“genuine democracy is an ideal political, economic, and cultural system that encompasses equality for all” and these actions do not foster this ideal (Lea, Ahlquist, & Yang, as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 10).

Curriculum and instruction. In order for students to reach these platforms of constructed success in schools, a curriculum is deployed and measured. Previously the impact of standardized assessments and the implementation of the Common Core Standards were discussed and schools experienced the external force to the implementation of the Common Core Standards. However, material and instructional delivery is determined by schools; therefore, the selection of these are within the locus of control.

Material selection and integration of concepts to engage students in content has a significant impact on larger scale social outcomes. Within this lens of the hidden curriculum, schools tend to select texts or content that reproduce the dominant messages. Schools and educators who choose materials through a critical lens are using curriculum materials that include a variety of cultures and views to discuss or present material to students. Geneva Gay (2003) refers to this as relevance of curriculum. However, as a result of the current context of education, Gay finds “too much of what is taught has no immediate value to . . . students” and “it does not reflect who they are” (p. 33). John Taylor Gatto’s work in *Dumbing Us Down* (2002) found

in most school systems, school subjects are most severely divided into knowledge areas in the later grades-although over the last thirty years the increased emphasis on high-stakes testing has emphasized placing subjects into silos from the start of school (English, Math Science, etc.) . . . this fragmentation of knowledge caused high school student considerable confusion. It follows that a confused mind is

unable to easily develop a systematic critique of the system that caused the confusion. (as cited in Lea, 2014, p. 55)

Additionally, this methodology of teaching creates the reproduction of an add-on approach and conversation regarding diversity rather than integrated. Material selection with “fragmented and isolated units, courses, and bits of information about ethnic groups interspersed sporadically into the school curriculum and instructional programs” will continue to message to students and staff that an inclusive society is not the democratic goal (Gay, as cited in Sleeter & Grant, 1993, p. 185).

Using content that is relevant to student backgrounds, experiences, and cultures will increase students’ feeling connected to the content, classroom, and overall school experience. It gives purpose and connection, allowing for discussion to be centered on application of material, rather than memorization. This may be the rhetoric of policymakers in education; however, enacted policies, tied to accountability, school grading, and even teacher employment create barriers for this to occur.

Instructional practices include the methods teachers utilize to engage students with content and to elicit interaction and understanding of material. Hidden within the walls of the classroom are the implications of instructional practices being utilized that reproduce ideologies. Engaging in content in a critical fashion requires dialogue, collaboration, and problem-solving (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1973; Giroux, 2011, 2012). Classroom design and instructional practices fostering these areas are under attack, creating classrooms that are “places where there is a stultifying deadness in regard to teaching kids to question their world” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 39).

Shapiro (2006) finds “classroom instruction is more and more given over to ‘test prep.’ In this context, schools offer little that can be taken as a source personal meaning, as a stimulus to critical thought, or as a catalyst for imaginative interpretation of human experience” (p. 10). Furthermore, Shapiro (2006) adds, “study after study reveals that the longer kids stay in school, the drearier it becomes” (p. 11). External forces have created internal decision-making to “turn knowledge into chunks that is swallowed whole by students without being assimilated by them, in any meaningful way” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 109).

Instructional practices are put into place for students to work in isolation, in rows of desks, rather than in collaborative settings. Elizabeth Dodson Gray refers to this as the “culture of separated desks” and collaboration with another student is noted as cheating (as cited in Shapiro, 2006, p. 59). This setup reinforces the larger notion that school, and life, is about individual success and competition, not collaboration and sharing of ideas (Shapiro, 2006).

Discourse in the beginning of this chapter explained ideologies continued to be replicated and reproduced through systems of hegemony which include all forms of media. Schools are not protected from systems of hegemony; in fact, schools are a mass producer of these systems (Giroux, 2001, 2011, 2012; Macedo, 2006). Freire (2000) points out the implications of this, stating,

if students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing. (p. 19)

Teachers

Schools have become structured to implement policies, rather than pedagogy. As accountability measures rise, the role of the teacher continues to expand to include supporting academic, social, emotional, and health supports for a diverse population of students. Educators, at all levels of the educational system, are the link between content, delivery, and student experience. According to Hannah Arendt, the role of teacher encompasses more than teaching academic skills. One example of this extent is noticed when teachers are referred to as authority figures for students. Unlike previous generations, many adults today have been forced to relinquish this role due to the economic and social changes of the world; therefore, by default, educators now possess this responsibility (Levinson, as cited in Gordon, 2001). Authority is regarded essential because it is within this role that connections about the world are made, and tradition is handed down.

It is important to dive into the ways teachers are prepared for this career, in specific relationship to the changing landscape of the student population in the United States. This section provides the context for understanding the teacher demographics, the societal context impacting teacher employment, and teacher preparation programs.

Teacher Demographics

It is important to thread back through the current student population as well as the current teacher population in the public school setting. Table 4 was created using data from The National Center for Education Statistics and are close approximations from the most recently reported data.

This side-by-side report of percentage of teachers and students by race in public schools depicts the racial imbalance between the percentage of teachers compared to the racial breakdown of percentage of students attending public schools. Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* (2007) explains the eras of globalization and the impact these intense levels of movement and connectivity have on the demographics in the United States. In the near future, White will no longer be the majority race in the United States, creating more diverse school population than Table 4 currently entails (p. 11).

Table 4

Teacher and Student Demographics

Category	Percentage of Teachers	Percentage of Students
White	81.9%	49.3%
Black	6.8%	14.2 %
Hispanic	7.8%	26.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.8%	0.05%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.5%	0.009%
Two or More Races	1.0%	0.03%

Note. Source: Adapted from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372> and https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_209.10.asp

Along with changes in racial demographics, the overall fight for human rights continues and widens in its depth and breadth. Rallies supporting human rights continue to march through streets across the nation questioning and challenging topics about race, poverty, gender, sexuality, and abortion, as well as social topics. Schools, teachers, and students are not shielded from these movements, these shifts. With this in mind, how are

teachers prepared to navigate this terrain? Students from diverse backgrounds, diverse lived experiences, and diverse positionalities enter the classroom; what support is given to educators to understand and utilize this diversity from a strengths-based approach in the classroom rather than marginalizing it? This critical question will be addressed as discussion unfolds around teacher preparation programs. First, it is important to get a baseline for the teacher demographics in other areas other than race.

Prior to the 1970s women were the target of recruitment for teachers; however, once women infiltrated other professional fields it was found “that a woman ranked in the top 10% of her high school cohort [who] would become a teacher fell 50% between 1964-2000” (Corcoran, Evans, & Schwab, 2004, as cited in Hess, 2009, p. 451). Additionally, overall, “high-ability college graduates are less likely to teach in public schools and, if they do, are more likely to leave after a few years” (Podgrusky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004, as cited in Hess, 2009, p. 451). Koehler, Feldhaus, Fernandez, and Hundley (2013) cite, “approximately 30 to 50 percent of all beginning teachers leave the field within five years” (p. 46). The makeup of teachers for public schools as well as the number of aspiring teachers has drastically changed.

The age range of beginning teachers has also shifted. There is an increase in beginning teachers over the age of 35 teaching at the high school level. Additionally, the overall percentage of teachers beginning a teaching career by the age of 25 has declined (Hess, 2009, p. 451). The multiple changing terrains of aspiring teachers has impacted pathways of teacher preparation programs. The next section examines the current state of

teachers in reference to impact from some of the most recent neoliberal policy implementations.

Educators, at all levels, are being attacked by neoliberal ideologies replicating the same messages about traditional public schooling. The intense rhetoric from President Obama and Arne Duncan in the era of RttT contributed significantly to this attack.

McGuinn (2013) points out,

teacher effectiveness reforms constituted the single biggest category of possible points (28 percent) in the RttT competition, and to be eligible to apply, states could not have any law creating a ‘firewall’ that prohibited using such data in teacher evaluations. (p. 236)

This created an additional smokescreen on the larger social issues such as poverty and racism. RttT placed intense focus on the quality of the teachers, based on student performance on a standardized assessment, rather than issues of equity and equality (Ravitch, 2014). This is because “it is easier for many to turn society’s problems into ones that are about individual behavior rather than a flawed social system” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 141).

Teachers were once regarded as professionals who had the ability to foster critical thought and experiences in the classrooms. However, when the lens is pulled back, zooming out of the classroom walls and the school buildings to the larger impact, the political, economic, and social forces of power influence the current hegemonic messages regarding the quality of teachers, as well as their role.

In an age when schools are graded based on student performance on standardized assessments, the classroom teacher has become an intense level of scrutiny in the public

space. According to Giroux (2012), “as testing becomes an end in itself, it both deadens the possibility of critical thinking and removes teachers from the possibility of exercising critical thought and producing imaginative pedagogical engagements” (p. 4). Every minute is accounted for and teachers are required to utilize strategies and materials that are labeled as ‘best practice’ and/or ‘research-based.’ Lea (2014) explains these “so called ‘best practices’ are most often derived from somewhat superficial, quantitative, empirical research, which fails to explore questions of creativity and critical consciousness that cannot be reduced to numbers” (p. 25). As a result, many people in education do not consider information true unless it has the approval of research and science; therefore, educators’ choice in pedagogy and curriculum is significantly limited (Harding, 1998; Lea, 2014).

In a time when education was not driven by accountability measures

educators were viewed as a valuable resource in teaching students how to take responsibility for their future, develop an unrelenting fidelity to justice, and hone their ability to discriminate between rigorous arguments and heavily charged opinions. Such an education focused on enabling your people to develop the values, skills, and knowledge required for them to enter adult life as critical citizens of questioning ‘common sense,’ official knowledge, public opinion, and the dominant media. Developing conditions for students to be critical agents was viewed as central to the very process of teaching and learning and was part of the broader project of enabling students to both shape and expand democratic institutions. (Giroux, 2012, p. 1)

Educators as a model of critical education and thinking is becoming less prevalent and educators as passing down of ideological messages is becoming more prevalent, mirroring what Paulo Freire (1998) refers to as the “banking or transmission theory” (p.

4). In line with this, Shapiro (2006) finds teachers have been “turned into clerks who are expected to teach by robotically following instructions” (p. 113).

The social world relies on relationships and interactions with individuals and groups deemed as ‘other’; however, teachers giving space to practice these skills has become significantly marginalized. Students are being exposed to a schooling experience where they are referred to as a number or color on a progress chart. Educators are not encouraged to foster social-emotional or interpersonal attributes.

Instead of the diffuse and caring relationships [students] would be expected to encounter in healthy homes, they are drawn into relationships characterized by emotional flatness, continuous evaluation, and transiency. Students learn that their teachers have little room for their needs as complete people. They are simply learners whose job is the acquisition of behaviors, knowledge, and skills seen as important by the school. Furthermore, their success in school is closely tied to their willingness to comply with its expectations. Little tolerance is shown to students who fail to learn the school’s lesson, especially those lessons tied to institutional conformity (Jackson, 1968, in Smith, 1993, p. 9). (Lea, 2014, pp. 56–57)

Attrition

NCLB and RttT made teaching one of the most visible professions that receives a high level of public scrutiny. It is a profession that is desperately needed; yet, it is not held in high regard as a viable option as a career path due to low salary and lack of career advancement opportunities (Giroux, 2012; Ravitch, 2014). These factors continue to create an epidemic of teacher shortages across the nation in two ways—teacher attrition and low enrollment in teacher education programs.

Teacher attrition occurs when teachers leave the profession, move schools, or retire. When attrition occurs in masses, shortages in areas follow, creating understaffed

schools. Shortage varies in the different geographic regions; however, “schools in poverty areas . . . observe higher attrition rates among teachers” (Birkeland & Peske, as cited in Ludlow, 2013, p. 443). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2009) conducted a study and found “teacher attrition seems related to the demographic characteristics of the schools’ student populations . . . [or] due to the difficulties posed by the kinds of working conditions that often pertain in high-minority, low-income schools” (p. 11). Considering funding structures for schools are designed by the economic capital of the surrounding community, the conditions of buildings, staff working environments, and access to needed materials, educators find it difficult to meet the required standards for students, and therefore look for other opportunities (Kozol, 1991; McGuinn, 2013).

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2009) identified the most common reasons teachers leave the field are connected to working conditions, salaries, levels of preparedness, lack of mentoring during the early years in the profession, and life events. Additionally,

those new and bright recruits are especially prone to abandon teaching after a few short years. The hierarchical and authoritarian way in which they are treated and the lack of opportunities for any real input into their work environments are often cited as reasons for leaving teaching. (Shapiro, 2006, p. 113)

All of these, outside of life events, are within a sphere of control; however, they rely on the social context of economic funding structures and priorities within government decision-making.

These combined factors are impacting interest in the education profession. Universities and colleges have reported a decrease in enrollment for teacher education programs, leaving the pool of aspiring teachers in a grave state of need. Society views education as a critical job, yet does not match that need with fiscal compensation or demonstrating high value for the profession.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Currently there are two pathways to meet the requirements of meeting the criteria of becoming a qualified teacher in each state—traditional program and alternative certification programs. Great variance exists state to state in teacher preparation programs and certification requirements. Each state has decision making power to determine qualifications for teacher certifications and has “its own process for approving colleges and universities to offer teacher certification programs” (Ludlow, 2013, p. 441). The federal government has little involvement in standardizing teacher preparation. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) in 2002, the U.S. Department of Education did mandate all teachers were to be highly qualified, meaning “teachers must have: 1) a bachelor’s degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, “Terms to know,” para. 1).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), replacing NCLB, signed December 2015, addresses highly qualified teachers and teacher programs. Changes from NCLB permit teacher certification to be obtained outside of a university, expanding it to any organization that can provide preparation for teachers. This gives permission for

organizations, such as Teachers for America, to prepare educators, and recognize the educators as qualified to teach as early as a few weeks into the program. A significant language change in teacher qualifications between the NCLB and ESSA is in NCLB; “highly qualified” was used as criteria, and ESSA has changed that to “effective” teachers (Ravitch, 2015). This particular change now places power to each state to determine criteria for “effective.”

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has published the following six unit standards that shall be in each education program to receive accreditation: (a) candidate knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions; (b) assessment system and unit evaluation; (c) field experiences and clinical practice; (d) diversity; (e) faculty qualifications, performance, and development; and (f) unit governance and resources. Each of these standards have sub-descriptions and each program must submit a conceptual framework for how these standards, including the sub-descriptions are implemented (NCATE, 2014).

History of traditional teacher preparation programs can be traced to the 1900s with James Earl Russell of the Teacher’s College at Columbia University (Ludlow, 2013, p. 445). Since then there has been much scrutiny and debate over the content and experiences that should be included in teacher preparation programs. Ludlow (2013) summarizes these beginning with James Conant in 1963, who pointed “to a lack of content area focus and academic rigor” (p. 445). In 2005 Darling-Hammond and Bransford compiled a list of shortcomings of existing programs between 1950 and 1990.

This list includes “fragmented and superficial curriculum, inadequate time for learning, traditional views of schooling and uninspired teaching methods” (p. 445).

The 1986 report published by the Holmes Group, Inc. titled *Tomorrow's Teachers* created a more intense call for change in teacher preparation programs stating, “universities must share the blame for the perils, real and imagined, facing the public schools” (p. 5). Furthermore, it radically called for “institutions preparing educators should either adopt reforms that link their educational contributions closely with improved schooling for America’s young . . . or surrender their franchise” (p. 6). Criticism was also pointed out on the apprenticeships stating students were placed “in schools where the conditions of work are almost identical to those generations ago” and “some universities still allow their educational students to learn exclusively in monoculture schools when today’s educators must prepare themselves to educate the most highly diverse cultural on earth” (p. 6). Ludlow (2013) cites Ishler’s (1995) summary of the goals listed in this report:

to make the education of teachers intellectually more solid; to recognize differences in teachers’ knowledge, skill and commitment in their education, certification, and work; and to connect our institutions to schools, [also adding] to create standards of entry to the profession that are professionally relevant and intellectually defensible, and to make schools better places for teachers to work and learn. (p. 445)

Though there has been an undercurrent supporting the change of teacher preparation programs, the crux of training has remained stagnant over the years, even with changes in demographics, technology, and demands in the field. Four longstanding assumptions continue to shape teacher preparation programs. The first is preparation

programs assume the aspiring teachers will stay in the teaching profession for the duration of their career, rather than recognizing today's workforce changes careers throughout their lifetime. Secondly, it is assumed colleges and universities are best suited to prepare teachers rather than expanding to more focus on longer preparation in schools. The third assumption impacting teacher preparation programs is that the job of teacher has remained stagnant for almost 100 years. There is little emphasis on an aspiring teacher's skill set and more focus on a broad stroking of assumed skills needed. The final assumption is in relationship to the static job description of a teacher. Changes have occurred in areas of technology, communication, demographics, economics, and expectations of education; however, the job description of a teacher has remained the same. These iconic assumptions are driving the underpinnings of teacher preparation programs (Hess, 2009; Koehler et al., 2013).

Research continues to evolve on the most effective traditional teacher preparation programs. These studies indicate 4 years of undergraduate work and practicum experiences are not strong enough to prepare teachers (Hirsch, Koppich, & Knapp, 2001; Shields et al., 2003). Proponents for change to these programs call for an extended program as well as more extensive practicums (Ludlow, 2013). There is a push to have practicums in schools with a diverse student population, making the stance that future teachers need experience in diverse schools. Course content is not seen in that same regard, meaning traditional course offerings haven't increased learning experiences addressing cultural competencies and pedagogy.

During the U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige's tenure, he stated there "was little evidence that education school course work leads to improved student achievement" (Levine, 2006, p. 39, as cited in Ludlow, 2013, p. 445). This, along with publicized teacher shortages across the nation, created a national movement to open more pathways to obtain teacher certifications rather than the traditional approach (Ludlow, 2013).

Alternative certification programs are teacher preparation programs for individuals who already have a degree in another area and are changing careers to become a teacher. Alternative certification programs have been in existence for more than 30 years; however, formal data collection did not begin until 1983 (Ludlow, 2013, p. 446). The birth of alternative certification programs came to surface as teacher shortages became apparent, especially in hard-to-staff areas of the nation. These programs grew from eight states offering an alternative certification program in 1983 to every state having a variety of options by 2007 (Ludlow, 2013). Many of these programs recruit individuals targeting those with a degree in another field, were retired from the military, or were relocated to an isolated area that did not offer their particular job field and teachers were needed in that area (Hawk & Schmidt, 1989; Hess, 2009; Ludlow, 2013).

No national standard for these programs exist and the idea of alternative licensure programs became prevalent before recommended program experience was determined (Koehler et al., 2013). Two dominant delivery methods for obtaining an alternative certification in education include "agencies not affiliated with an institution of higher education and pared-down degrees delivered over the Internet by universities and

corporations specializing in ‘for-profit’ educational endeavors” (Baines, 2006, p. 326, as cited in Koehler et al., 2013, p. 46).

The National Center for Education Information conducted a study in 2005 and found “54% of teachers entering through an alternative pathway stated their probable inability to become certified without the alternative pathway, and as age increased, the likelihood of attending a traditional program decreased.” It was also found “52% of men reported in ability to attend a traditional program” (Ludlow, 2013, p. 450). Alternative certification programs “tend to appeal more to cultural minorities and individuals in the high-need disciplines of math and sciences” (Ludlow, 2013, p. 447). Though alternative pathways to teacher certification do target a population of interest, what program experience occurs in these approaches?

One of the only noticeable differences between the traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs is in the number of observation hours and time spent in schools during the coursework (Hess, 2009). Alternative licensure programs are a collapsed version of the traditional program with a focus on content knowledge and significantly less on observing teachers and engaging in teaching practices to receive feedback from master teachers. This contradicted the previously-stated need to engage in longer practicums.

Higher Education Course Experience

Colleges and universities have significantly more freedom for academic discourse and design compared to PreK-12 public schools. However, in his personal experience Shapiro (2006) finds

colleagues within the university who have the freedom that academic life affords to think more expansively and creatively, there is a disturbing readiness to adapt their research and their teaching to the current directions of educational reform, whatever its consequences in terms of reinforcing the most banal, and limited, conception of education. (p. 186)

He continues, stating, “classroom learning is dominated by ‘chalk and talk’ methods, whereas Socratic or dialogic learning is looked on as a diversion from genuine academic activity” (p. 186). Additionally,

there is the peripheral role of the arts in school, and the marginal status of service learning. And there is the brutal absence of things like media literacy, peace studies, or ethics. Almost anything that involves the body is maintained as marginal to ‘real’ learning and restricted to a specialized population. (p. 186)

During his tenure and implementation of RttT, Arne Duncan pushed for “colleges to focus on ‘practical’ methods in order to prepare teachers for an ‘outcome-based’ education system, which is code for pedagogical methods that are anti-intellectual as they are politically conservative” (Giroux, 2012, p. 75). Giroux’s (2012) concern with this push is

Duncan’s insistence on banishing theory from teacher education programs in favor of promoting narrowly defined skills and practices is a precursor to positioning teachers as a subaltern class that believes the only purpose of education is to train students to compete successfully in a global economy. The model of teaching being celebrated here is one in which teachers are constructed as clerks and technicians who have no need for public vision in which to imagine the democratic world and social responsibility that schools, teachers, or pedagogy might assume for the world and the future they have to offer young people. (p. 76)

Teacher preparation programs are supporting this ideology of passive education, assessment, and student outcomes in isolation from the social context (Giroux, 2012;

Shapiro, 2006). The result is teachers are not prepared to navigate a diverse, complex classroom experience and are trained to reproduce the *Systems of Hegemony* and *Systems of Power* rather than instill critical pedagogical practices within their classrooms.

Aspiring teachers will encounter classrooms filled with diverse students, staff, and communities. Programs need to address preparing future teachers with the knowledge, experience, and skills to navigate diversity and create environments that refute systems of power in the schools. Educator programs use Standard 4 of the NCATE to address diversity. This standard states,

The unit designs, implements and evaluates curriculum and provides experiences for candidates to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates can demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity. Experiences provided for candidates include working with diverse populations, including higher education and P-12 school faculty, candidates, and students in P-12 schools. (NCATE, 2014, "Standard 4," para. 1)

How successful and impactful are programs implementing Standard 4? Many programs add a course addressing multiculturalism or diversity to the already intact set of classes for students resulting in a disconnected experience, rather than integrated throughout the course work (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Educators perceived to have had little experience with multicultural courses or courses on social justice during pre-service coursework, however, report having experienced a concentrated focus on teaching methods (Arsal, 2015; Eisenberg, Madsen, Oliphant, Sieving, & Resnick, 2010; Valentin, 2006). Brown (2004) emphasized experiencing a standalone course on diversity may increase awareness; however, it will not influence instructional practices, curriculum

choices, assessment practices, or environmental changes in the classroom (as cited in Valentin, 2006, p. 198). Standard 4 does not call on programs to provide aspiring teachers with the skills to address issues of power, but just to have experiences with diversity while in the program. What impact do both of these prongs have on teachers once when they are engaged in teaching?

When given content knowledge and practice interrogating systems of power, privilege, and oppression, additional barriers to implementing these practices still exist. Wang, Odell, and Schwille (2008) found that even when teachers have been given the knowledge and skills to address issues of power in the classroom, it “is not always supported by their existing school cultures” (p. 133); therefore, if a new teacher lacks the support to create a classroom designed to address social issues, there is a chance the practices will not be implemented.

Connected to this, Philipott and Dagenais (2012) found in their study only “some new teachers are able to apply and extend their understandings of social justice from their preservice experience to their teaching practice regardless of the conditions of the teaching assignments” (p. 96). Though the study was not clear as to reasons for these occurrences, it is thought the “personal qualities and experiences . . . orient them toward taking action as educators committed to social justice” (p. 96).

Additionally, diversity within a school influences the willingness teachers have in addressing social issues. When working with practicing teachers, Haviland (2008) found teachers expressed more difficulty addressing issues of race when the school/class population was predominantly White versus a culturally diverse setting. Teachers

expressed an overall feeling of silence resided throughout the classrooms connected to feelings that racial issues either did not exist or did not need to be addressed, as they did not impact the building (p. 40).

During a study conducted by Eisenberg et al. (2010), teachers charged with teaching sexuality in health classes expressed a need for more understanding of the content, in this case sexuality, as many reported having little formal training in teaching the subject of sexuality in health class (p. 340). Teachers reporting having some training in sexuality realized the subject matter required different teaching methods than addressed in the traditional methods course (Eisenberg et al., 2010, p. 340). In this study, the group of teachers who reported feeling more confident in teaching sexuality in their assigned health class were those who received guidance during pre-service classes, student taught the subject, and received feedback from peers and professors (Eisenberg et al., 2010, pp. 340–341). Combining content of social issues, teaching practices, and feedback gives teachers the most confidence in addressing topics typically silenced by society.

This is not exclusive to the topic of sexuality in schools. During her study, Victoria Haviland (2008) found multiple occurrences of White supremacy in schools with the way the “White teacher gloss[es] over issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in ways that reinforce the status quo” (p. 41). Haviland (2008) reinforces this occurred “even when [teachers] have stated desire to do the opposite” (p. 41). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) uses the term “color blind racism” to support Haviland’s findings. Color blind racism has become an undercurrent in our system, making it more difficult for those

of places of privilege (Whites) to identify the existence of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Teachers' lack of confidence with the content, combined with little practice engaging in discussing issues of race, results in the reification of this system.

To give teachers knowledge and increase levels of confidence in addressing systemic social issues, all forms of power, privilege, and oppression must be addressed in teacher preparatory. Eisenberg et al. (2010) found in doing so improvement in "knowledge, perceived importance, self-efficacy, and comfort in teaching that content" was reported among teachers (p. 338).

Critically Conscious Teachers

To this juncture in Chapter II, the concept of power and education has been addressed. This particular section of the chapter will lay out the desired characteristics of a critically conscious teacher. These characteristics will be revisited again in Chapter IV with the analysis of the study.

Critically conscious teachers recognize systems of power and how they interface with the educational space and the overall educational structure. According to Bartolomé (2004), this is described as a development of "political and ideological clarity in order to increase the chances of academic success for all students" (p. 98). Teachers with this lens can identify the impeding barriers to what is deemed as a successful student and those who struggle for this deemed success in the education environment. For the purpose of this dissertation, characteristics derived from the work of Lilia Bartolomé (2004) will be unitized to define the characteristics of critically conscious teachers.

The entry point rests with the broad idea that critically conscious teachers have an “awareness of asymmetrical power relations” (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 102). This means that the teachers “attribute the academic and social success of their students to the school personnel’s ability to create and sustain a caring, just and level playing field . . . for learners who have historically not been treated well in educational institutions greater society” (p. 102). The following characteristics unpack this in more detail.

Table 5

Characteristics of Critically Conscious Teachers

Characteristic	Examples
Questioning Meritocratic Explanations of the Social Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize how social class is a structure of capitalist social relations, and thus a systemic inequity • reject the notion of success and achievement as subscribed in schools • understand that racism is a real obstacle in the lives of students of color • understand how racism works and confront it in a strategic manner
Rejecting Deficit Views of Minority Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acknowledge the positive aspects of various cultures • reject assimilation • be conscious of their own racist beliefs and tendencies to view the kids as less than • look at the relationships between racism and social class stratification so that class does not obscure the harmful effects of racism and vice versa
Interrogating Romanticized Views of Dominant Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refuse to blindly accept dominant White culture as superior or highly desirable to emulate • recognize the importance of maintaining cultural values and belief systems and incorporate them into mainstream school culture

Table 5

Cont.

Characteristic	Examples
Witness of Subordination and Cultural Border Crossers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • able and willing to develop empathy with the cultural ‘Other’ and to authentically view as equal the values of the ‘Other’ while conscious of the cultural group’s subordination social status in the greater society • embrace the cultural ‘Other’ and also divest from his/her cultural privilege
Educators as Dedicated Cultural Brokers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commitment to helping low SES, non-White, and linguistic-minority students, typically depicted as low status and deficient by the greater society, to better understand school culture in order to succeed socially and academically therein • help students more effectively navigate school and mainstream culture

Note. Source: Bartolomé, 2004, pp. 102–114.

Conclusion

Chapter II of this dissertation has provided depth to the terrain of how power is used in education at the federal, state, and school level to reproduce systems of inequality. Rather than utilizing education and the space of school as a tool to dismantle systems of power, teachers and students are subjected to a finite definition of success tied directly to measures in direct contradiction of critical thinking and problem-solving. Power is within every system and interaction throughout society. Utilizing power to create a society to push on the systems of inequality is the vision for those in critical education. This truth is not pervasive. The pervasive neoliberal ideologies flow through

policy and into practice in the schools. Reproduction of the *Systems of Ideology* and *Mechanisms of Power* are inescapable in the current education system.

The end of the chapter outlined the characteristics of critically conscious teachers. This will serve as the thread during Chapter IV to analyze the collected data and address the three research questions of this study. The next chapter introduces the elementary school where the study took place. Relevant details including the characteristics and demographics of the school are provided. Chapter III will also provide a description of the research applied to this research project.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.
– George Santayana

Conceptual Framework

The extent to which current classroom teachers are critically conscious of the influences of power, privilege, and oppression is the central component for this research study. Specifically, in this study, current classroom teachers at an elementary school who serve a diverse demographic of students were explored to answer the research questions. Influences of capitalism, sociocultural structures, educational policies, and teacher preparation, as well as professional development serve as the foundation framework. These influences are paired with the data gathered through an anonymous schoolwide survey to certified teachers and six teacher interviews to determine the evidence of critical conscious practices in the classroom (see Figure 1).

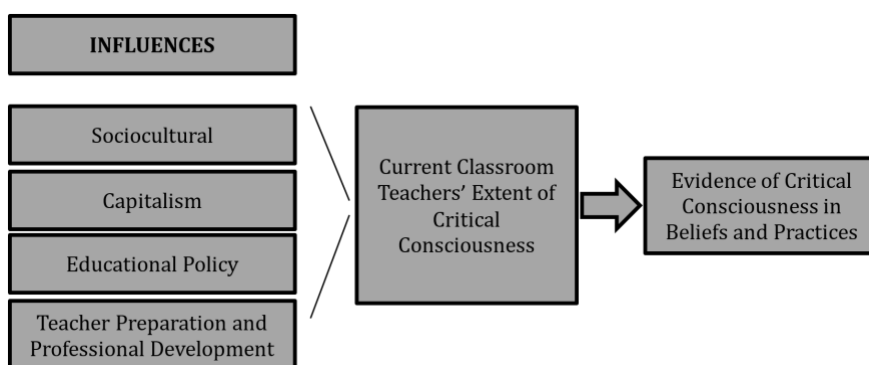


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Research Paradigm

The main goals of this study are three-fold. First, this study is designed to expose the extent to which current classroom teachers are aware of sociocultural systems of power. A second goal is to determine the degree of preparedness current classroom teachers possess to navigate social and political instances in the classroom and/or school setting. The third goal is to gain insight into the beliefs and practices of our current classroom teachers in specific relationship to utilizing the classroom space to engage in critical conversations and/or activities regarding social and economic systems of power.

Throughout this study, I will investigate the pervasiveness of systems of power; therefore, a critical theory paradigm best fits this research project. I will specifically look for themes connected to “historical and structural conditions of oppression” (Glesne, 2011, p. 9). Since one characteristic of critical theory is to “reveal and critique . . . distorting ideologies and the associated structures, mechanisms, and process that help keep them in place” (Prasad, as cited in Glesne, 2009, p. 9) the structure of this research project is aimed at exposing these structures.

In using critical theory as the frame for this project I foresee potential ethical dilemmas. Considering critical theory is shaped by a belief “that life is a virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values crystalized over time” (Lincoln & Guba, as cited in Glesne, 2009, p. 9) evidence of this influence will surface throughout the project. I will be interacting with people from various life experiences and our interactions will influence the way I read and interpret the data I have collected from their interview.

It is important to note that in addition to critical theory as the main model for this project, threads of the interpretivist paradigm also exist throughout the study. This study is founded on a belief that the world “is socially constructed, complex and ever changing” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). Current classroom teachers represent the group in the center of this study, individual interviews have the purpose of gaining understanding, and the overall project is inductive in nature (Glesne, 2011, p. 9). Because of the threads of both paradigms existing, the research approach for this project also includes a combination of approaches derived from both of these paradigms.

Research Approach

Mary Lichtman (2013) refers to a research approach as “a theoretical underpinning” of the research being conducted (p. 71). I approached this research study from a qualitative research approach, specifically a critical qualitative approach. According to Sharon B. Merriam (2002), “the key . . . qualitative research lives with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. The world, or reality, is not fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon . . .” (p. 3). A qualitative approach hinges on the belief that “there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time” (Merriam, 2002, pp. 2–3). Holloway and Brown (2012) describe qualitative research as an approach that “explores how people make sense of their perceived reality” (p. 16). The authors additionally state, “this approach cannot never ever be precise, because human beings do not always act or think logically or in predictable ways” (p. 16).

The reason for this approach is that I am particularly interested in how aware classroom teachers are as to how the system of education privileges some and marginalizes others. Merriam (2002) describes the critical qualitative approach as one that should be used if the interest of the researcher is to investigate how

members and classes of society are served and perpetuated at the expense of other. A critical qualitative approach addresses concepts of power, privilege and oppression and how these concepts intersect with understanding a group of people and their experiences in a context. (pp. 4–5)

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the systems of power influence classroom teachers and the awareness of these structures. Critical qualitative research

uncovers, examines, and critiques social, cultural, and psychological assumptions that structure and limit our ways of thinking and being in the world. The ultimate goal objective of this type of critique is to free ourselves from these constraints, to become empowered to change our social world. (Merriam, 2002, p. 9)

Research Method

This research follows a qualitative methodology approach with a survey to study the extent to which classroom teachers view the concepts of power, privilege, and oppression at one elementary school in the Southwestern part of North Carolina. This investigation included an anonymous online staff survey to gain insight into the perceptions and beliefs of staff members regarding topics of power, privilege, and oppression, and the role the school has in addressing these within the curriculum and classroom experience.

The survey used in this research was adapted from a study conducted by Marie Clarke and Sheelagh Drudy. Clarke and Drudy (2006) explored “the problems and challenges of teaching for diversity, social justice and global awareness in initial teacher education. It addresses the issues of the student teacher identity, the attitudes of students, and their approach to the classroom practice” (p. 371). Their study was “conducted with a single year student cohort on a post-graduate teacher education programme in Ireland” (p. 376). The original survey included 23 questions and for the purpose of this current study, some of the questions were modified and removed as they did not pertain to this particular study. Clarke and Drudy (2006) found a “high level of awareness and sensitivity on the part of [the] group in relation to diversity. The responses of the items identified indicated that the student teachers held values that were broadly inclusive in relation to general diversity” (p. 379). The findings from the original study, in specific regards to survey analysis, provided the needed information for the development of the web-based survey that was used in this study.

Additionally, six certified staff members were interviewed to gain further insight into these topics. These teachers volunteered to participate in the interview process. After both data sets were collected, additional data was needed to gain further insight into the extent of critical consciousness, as well as a deeper understanding of what supports staff needs to be more prepared to engage in critically conscious pedagogical practices in the classroom. The original six classroom teachers were contacted to ask for their participation in an additional virtual interview process. Three of the six teachers responded and participated in this second interview.

Including both interview and survey data allowed for a more expansive insight into the school, as well as to provide an opportunity to move deeper into the beliefs, insights, and practices of current classroom teachers. The next section of this chapter introduces the selected elementary school, the selection process used to select this school, and the strategies utilized to collect and analyze the data.

School Site

Research Selection Criteria

Lyon Elementary School was selected because it is a traditional elementary public school serving a diverse 1,025-student population (see Table 6). The intention of completing this study at an elementary school is to gauge the extent to which curricula and instructional methods are approached to create the space for exploring topics of social justice at the younger end of the traditional schooling continuum.

Lyon Elementary School, a public school serving grades Kindergarten through fifth grade, is in the southeastern part of the United States in a county outside of a major city, surrounded by rolling hills. The 2015 census report indicates there are about 196,762 people living in the county (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The median household income for 2015 is \$54,720 and about 10.8% of the population in this county lives in poverty. Table 7 indicates the identified race and Hispanic origin for the county for 2015.

Table 6

Lyon Elementary School and District Elementary School Population by Race

Race	Lyon Elementary School Population			District Elementary School Population		
	Male	Female	% of Total	Male	Female	% of Total
American Indian	2	2	0.4	21	37	0.4
Hawaiian Pacific	1	6	0.7	11	21	0.2
Asian	22	14	3.5	408	403	5.7
Hispanic	172	192	35.5	1304	1262	17.9
Black	81	88	16.5	1367	1325	18.8
White	215	196	40.1	3937	3579	52.5
Multi-racial	18	16	3.3	337	317	4.6

Table 7

County Racial Makeup

Race and Hispanic Origin	Percent
White, alone	76.5%
Black or African American alone	17.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native, alone	0.7%
Asian, alone	3.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, alone	0.1%
Two or More races	2.1%
Hispanic or Latino	10.1%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	68.1%

International Baccalaureate Program

Lyon Elementary School is an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. Historically, IB programs focused on secondary educational experiences; however, “many schools in the United States have developed pre-IB curriculum to prepare students for the rigors of IB courses, [to] ensure that students have the appropriate background” (Laurent-Brennan, 1998, p. 198). Elementary schools utilizing the framework of the IB program install The Primary Years Program (PYP) segment of the framework, which was created in 1997, about 30 years after the original IB program was developed in Switzerland (Chmelynski, 2002). One premise of the PYP IB program is to “[create] learning communities in which students can increase their understanding of language and culture, which can help them to become more globally engaged” (International Baccalaureate, 2015, p. 6). Specifically, the PYP IB program

offers a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning with an international curriculum that provides guidelines for what students should learn, a teaching methodology, and assessment strategies. This program focuses on developing the whole child—outside as well in the classroom—including children’s academic, social, physical, emotional, and cultural needs. It uses structured inquiry as a vehicle for learning and emphasizes the development of socially responsible behavior. (Chmelynski, 2002, p. 60)

School Demographics

Lyon Elementary School is a Title I focus school. Title I is a program that provides financial assistance to public school district and schools with high numbers or percentages of students in poverty. A Title I focus school means that Lyon Elementary has a high percentage of students living in poverty, as determined by the percentage of

students receiving free and reduced meals. The Title I status of Lyon Elementary is also described as having “large within-school gaps between the highest or lowest-achieving subgroup, or subgroups and the lowest achieving subgroup or subgroups; or a school that has a subgroup or subgroups with low achievement or, at the high school level, low graduation rates” (NCDPI, n.d.b, para. 3, bullet 1).

Staff. There are 61 classroom teachers at Lyon Elementary School and 98.4% are fully licensed teachers. Nine of the classroom teachers have obtained National Board Certificates and 34.4% have advanced degrees. More than half of the teachers (54.1%) have ten or more years of teaching experience. Sixteen percent of the staff has 0-3 years of teaching experience and 29.5% of the staff has 4-10 years of teaching experience. The teacher turnover rate is at 7.0%, which is lower than both the district and state (NC Report Card, 2016).

Lyon Elementary School has one principal and two assistant principals. The principal is a new principal, coming to Lyon Elementary School in the fall of 2016. Additionally, there are two counselors, and one social worker who is shared with other schools. Specials teachers include a media specialist, a physical education teacher, an art teacher, a music teacher, a Spanish teacher, a Chinese teacher, and an integrated lab specialist. The instructional support staff includes five exceptional children teachers, one academically intellectually gifted teacher, two speech pathologists, three English Learner teachers, two Lead teachers, one technology instructional facilitator, and one MTSS coach. The reported demographic data for the whole school were obtained from the central office of the school under study and is depicted in Table 8.

Table 8

Lyon Elementary School Demographic Data

Category			American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black	Hispanic/ Latino, White	White
	Male <i>n</i> (%)	Female <i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
All Certified Staff (not Administration)	3 (4)	71 (96)	1 (1)	4 (5)	2 (3)	1 (1)	66 (89)
All Non- Certified Staff	2 (4)	55 (96)	0 (0)	1 (2)	3 (5)	3 (5)	50 (88)
Administrative Staff	0 (0)	3 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (100)

Reported School Data

School data are publicly available by reviewing the school report card. Datasets include criminal acts, attendance, access to technology, class sizes, and a variety of academic achievement data. Lyon Elementary School reported no criminal acts were reported during the 2015-2016 school year. The school attendance data were reported at 96.3%, which is higher than both the district and state percentages (North Carolina School Report Cards, 2016).

Teacher performance. The North Carolina teacher evaluation system is built on six defined standards (NCDPI, 2013). The description of the standards and corresponding data for teachers depicted in Tables 9 and 10 display the percentage of teachers at Lyon Elementary School demonstrating teacher effectiveness at the identified experience level and expected growth, respectively (NCDPI, n.d.a, p. 11).

Standard 1: Teachers Demonstrate Leadership

- Teachers lead in their classrooms
- Teachers demonstrate leadership in the schools
- Teachers lead the teaching profession
- Teachers advocate for schools and students
- Teachers demonstrate high ethical standards (NCDPI, 2013, p. 3)

Standard 2: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for Diverse Population of Students

- Teachers provide an environment in which each child as a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults
- Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world
- Teachers treat students as individuals
- Teachers adapt their teacher for the benefit of students with special needs
- Teacher work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students (NCDPI, 2013, p. 3)

Standard 3: Teachers Know the Content They Teach

- Teachers align their instruction with the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*
- Teachers know the content appropriate to their teaching specialty
- Teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines
- Teachers make instruction relevant to students (NCDPI, 2013, p. 3)

Standard 4: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students

- Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students
- Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students
- Teacher use a variety of instructional methods
- Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction
- Teachers help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities
- Teachers communicate effectively
- Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned (NCDPI, 2013, p. 3)

Standard 5: Teachers Reflect on Their Practice

- Teachers analyze student learning
- Teacher link professional growth to their profession
- Teachers function effectively in a complex dynamic environment (NCDPI, 2013, p. 3)

Table 9

Percentage of Teachers at Lyon Elementary School Demonstrating Experience Levels for Standards 1-5

Standard	Experience Level				
	Not Demonstrated	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished
1	0.0	0.0	16.1	46.4	37.5
2	0.0	0.0	34.5	51.7	13.8
3	0.0	0.0	44.8	51.7	3.4
4	0.0	0.0	21.4	71.4	7.1
5	0.0	0.0	37.9	44.8	17.2

Standard 6: Teachers Contribute to the Academic Success of Students

- The work of the teacher results in acceptable, measurable progress for students based on established performance expectations using appropriate data to demonstrate growth

Table 10

Percentage of Teachers at Lyon Elementary School Demonstrating Expected Growth for Standard 6

Standard	Expected Growth		
	Does Not Meet Expected Growth	Meets Expected Growth	Exceeds Expected Growth
6	7.5	55	37.5

Academic report. Academic reporting is based on End-of-Grade (EOG) test results for grades 3-5 in the areas of Reading and Math, as well as Science for grade 5. The EOG has five levels of performance associated with each area tested. Table 11 shows the levels of performance in relation to performance at or above grade level and standards for college-and-career readiness. Table 12 displays Lyon Elementary School's performance on the EOG achievement levels compared to the district and the state (NC Report Card, 2016).

Table 11

EOG Levels of Performance

Achievement Level	Performing at or above Grade Level	Meets Standards for College-and-career Readiness
Level 1 Limited command of knowledge skills	✘	✘
Level 2 Partial command of knowledge and skills	✘	✘
Level 3 Sufficient Command of knowledge and skills	✓	✘
Level 4 Solid Command of knowledge and skills	✓	✓
Level 5 Superior Command of knowledge and skills	✓	✓

Table 12

Lyon Elementary EOG Levels of Performance Compared to the District and the State

Level	Reading	Math	Science
Level 1			
Lyon Elementary	26.4%	19.7%	9.8%
District	19.2%	21.1%	11.9%
State	21.6%	24.0%	14.0%
Level 2			
Lyon Elementary	19.7%	20.3%	12.9%
District	20.7%	20.9%	12.3%
State	21.5%	21.3%	12.3%
Level 3			
Lyon Elementary	10.8%	5.7%	6.1%
District	10.7%	7.6%	9.4%
State	11.2%	7.7%	9.6%
Level 4			
Lyon Elementary	32.3%	35.3%	52.8%
District	37.1%	30.5%	43.4%
State	34.5%	29.4%	42.1%
Level 5			
Lyon Elementary	10.8%	19.0%	18.4%
District	12.2%	20.0%	23.1%
State	11.3%	17.6%	21.0%

Data by subgroup on these proficiency indicators depict the gap notated in the school's Title I Focus status. Tables 13-15 indicate the percentage of the population in grades 3-5 that scored a College-and-Career Readiness (CCR) proficiency (level 4 or 5) and Grade Level Proficiency (GLP) (level 3, 4, or 5) in reading, math, and science by subgroups.

Table 13

Percentage of Students That Scored College-and-Career Readiness and Grade Level

Proficiency in Grade 3 on Reading and Math by Subgroups

Subgroup	College and Career Readiness (Level 4, 5)		Grade Level Proficiency (Level 3, 4, 5)	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
All Students	37.3	45.6	44.9	53.8
Gender				
Female	40.5	47.6	47.6	57.1
Male	33.8	43.2	41.9	50.0
Race				
Black	40.7	40.7	51.9	51.9
Hispanic	14.3	21.4	17.9	32.1
White	55.6	65.1	65.1	71.4
EDS	19.3	25.0	25.0	35.4
LEP	7.0	11.6	7.0	25.6
SWD	<5.0	15.4	<5.0	23.1

Table 14

Percentage of Students That Scored College-and-Career Readiness and Grade Level

Proficiency in Grade 4 on Reading and Math by Subgroups

Subgroup	College and Career Readiness (Level 4, 5)		Grade Level Proficiency (Level 3, 4, 5)	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
All Students	41.4	56.6	56.6 60.5	59.9 58.1
Gender				
Female	43.0	53.5	60.5	58.1
Male	39.4	60.6	51.5	62.1
Race				
Black	38.5	46.2	53.8	50.0
Hispanic	17.9	37.3	40.3	43.3
White	70.8	25.7	79.2	85.4
EDS	25.7	41.6	43.6	46.5
LEP	<5.0	11.1	<5.0	11.1
SWD	7.1	7.1	7.1	7.1
AIG	>95.0	>95.0	>95.0	>95.0

Table 15

Percentage of Students That Scored College-and-Career Readiness and Grade Level Proficiency in Grade 5 on Reading, Math, and Science by Subgroups

Subgroup	College and Career Readiness (Level 4, 5)			Grade Level Proficiency (Level 3, 4, 5)		
	Reading	Math	Science	Reading	Math	Science
All Students	50.3	60.7	71.2	60.1	66.3	77.3
Gender						
Female	56.4	66.7	70.5	66.7	69.2	78.2
Male	44.7	55.3	71.8	54.1	63.5	76.5
Race						
Black	51.7	41.4	69.0	62.1	51.7	82.8
Hispanic	29.8	42.1	49.1	38.6	50.9	52.6
White	63.9	78.7	88.5	75.4	80.3	>95.0
EDS	30.7	43.2	54.5	39.8	52.3	64.8
LEP	10.0	<5.0	10.0	10.0	<5.0	10.0
SWD	6.3	6.3	25.0	6.3	12.5	25.0
AIG	>95.0	>95.0	92.3	>95.0	>95.0	>95.0

Lyon Elementary School met growth status for academic performance and is graded as a C school. School grades are based on a formula where 80% of the score is calculated on performance and 20% of the score is based on academic growth (NCDPI, 2015).

Teacher Working Conditions Survey

Every two years the state deploys a Teacher Working Conditions Survey for “school based licensed educators to determine if they have the supports necessary for effective teaching” (North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions, n.d., para. 1). The

survey is categorized into nine categories with corresponding sub-questions. Nearly 95% (94.44%) of school-based licensed staff at Lyon Elementary School completed the survey in 2016. Table 16 outlines the percentage of staff agreeing with the corresponding statement in 2016.

Table 16

Percent of Staff at Lyon Elementary in Agreement with Elements of the Teacher

Working Conditions Survey

Category/Sub-questions	Percent
Time	
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	79.4%
Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	94.1%
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.	94.1%
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	89.7%
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	94.1%
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	91.0%
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.	95.6%
Facilities and Resources	
Teachers have sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials.	97.1%
Teachers have sufficient access to digital content and resources.	98.5%
Teachers have sufficient access to instructional technology, including computers, devices, printers, software and internet access.	98.5%

Table 16

Cont.

Category/Sub-questions	Percent
Facilities and Resources (cont.)	
Teachers have access to reliable communication technology including phones, faxes and email.	98.5%
Teachers have sufficient access to office equipment and supplies such as cop machines, paper, pens, etc.	98.5%
Teachers have sufficient access to a broad range of professional support personnel.	95.6%
The school environment is clean and well maintained.	95.6%
Teachers have adequate space to work productively.	97.1%
The physical environment of classrooms in this school supports teaching and learning.	98.5%
The reliability and speed of Internet connections in this school are sufficient to support instructional practices.	91.2%
Community Support and Involvement	
Parents/guardians are influential decision makers in this school.	97.1%
The school maintains clear, two-way communication with the community.	97.0%
The school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	95.6%
Teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.	97.1%
Parents/guardians know what is going on in this school.	98.5%
Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	94.1%
Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	92.5%
The community is supportive of this school.	97.1%

Table 16

Cont.

Category/Sub-questions	Percent
Managing Student Conduct	
Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.	97.1%
Students at this school follow rules of conduct.	94.1%
Policies and procedures about student conduct are clearly understood by the faculty.	97.1%
School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	89.7%
School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.	97.0%
Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	98.5%
The faculty work in a school environment that is safe.	98.5%
Teacher Leadership	
Teachers are recognized as educational experts.	98.5%
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	95.5%
Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.	95.6%
Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.	95.6%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.	92.6%
In this school, we take steps to solve problems.	94.1%
Teachers are effective leaders in this school.	95.6%
Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in this school.	92.6%
Members of the school improvement team are elected.	90.6%

Table 16

Cont.

Category/Sub-questions	Percent
School Leadership	
There is an atmosphere of trust and respect in this school.	92.6%
The teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	85.3%
The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	94.1%
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	98.5%
The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.	91.0%
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	95.6%
The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	94.1%
The faculty are recognized for accomplishments.	91.2%
The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address concerns about:	
a. Leadership Issues	97.0%
b. Facilities and resources	100.0%
c. The use of time in my school	92.6%
d. Professional development	91.2%
e. Teacher leadership	97.0%
f. Community support and involvement	92.6%
g. Managing student conduct	95.6%
h. Instructional practices and support	97.1%
i. New teacher support	97.0%
Professional Development	
Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.	95.5%
An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development.	92.6%
Professional development offerings are data driven.	86.6%

Table 16

Cont.

Category/Sub-questions	Percent
Professional Development (cont.)	
Professional learning opportunities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.	95.6%
Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers.	85.3%
Professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge.	91.2%
Teachers have sufficient training to fully utilize technology.	89.7%
Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice.	97.1%
In this school, follow up is provided from professional development	88.2%
Professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers.	83.6%
Professional development enhances teachers' ability to implement instructional strategies that meet diverse student learning needs.	89.7%
Professional development enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.	94.1%
Instructional Practices and Support	
State assessment data are available in time to impact practices.	68.2%
Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	97.0%
State assessments accurately gauge students' understanding of standards.	62.7%
Teachers believe almost every student has the potential to do well on assignments.	94.1%
Teachers believe what is taught will make a difference in students' lives.	98.5%
Teachers require students to work hard.	98.5%
Teachers collaborate to achieve consistency on how student work is assessed.	97.1%

Table 16

Cont.

Category/Sub-questions	Percent
Instructional Practices and Support (cont.)	
Teachers know that students learn in each of their classes.	97.1%
Teachers knowledge of the content covered and instructional methods used by other teachers at this school.	97.0%
Teachers use digital content and resources in their instruction.	98.5%
Overall	
Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.	95.6%
At this school, we utilize the results from 2014 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey as a tool for school improvement.	98.3%

Data from the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, as well as the school report card indicate staff at Lyon Elementary School are pleased with the working building, administration, supplies, and overall climate of the school. Additionally, with high attendance rates and no incidents of crime, Lyon Elementary School is safe for both staff and students.

Connection to the Research Site

My current job is the Director of Integrated Academic and Behavior Systems at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCPDI). Previous to becoming employed at NCDPI, I served as a Regional Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) Field Consultant. As a result of both my current and previous roles, I have an existing relationship with the selected school district. Additionally, before serving as the RtI Field Consultant I was both district administrator and school administrator at the selected

county for this study. Between eight and six years ago, I supported implementation of academic support structures at the selected school site. The administration and teachers have significantly changed since then; therefore, previous relationships with the school are no longer in place. During this research project, I disclosed that the data collection and overall research project were for the sole use of my role as a student investigator.

Procedures

This study followed a mixed-methods design to determine the extent to which current classroom teachers

- are aware of power, privilege, and oppression;
- are prepared to address issues of power, privilege, and oppression as they arise; and
- reflect their preparation based upon their beliefs and practices regarding power, privilege, and oppression.

Qualitative and web-based survey data were used to gain information to answer these questions in this current study.

Certified Teacher Survey

Certified teachers were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey to provide insight into the beliefs of staff on social equity topics. Through an email, certified staff members were provided a brief introduction to the survey by both the student researcher and principal of Lyon Elementary School. The email included the link to the survey, as well as the informed consent explaining the anonymous voluntary participation. The survey was open for three weeks and staff were permitted to answer

the questions at a time and location that was convenient for their schedules. The principal sent an additional email with the link to the survey to the staff reminding them of the survey during the period of time the survey was open for participation.

Participation. A total of 35 certified classroom teachers completed the survey, providing an overall 47% completion rate. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents identified as classroom teachers and 11% as support service providers, which at this school could include lead teachers, exceptional children's teachers, and ESL teachers. Respondents had a relatively balanced representation of how long they had been working at Lyon Elementary, with 34% being at Lyon Elementary for 1-3 years, 17% for 4-7 years, 20% for 8-12 years, 26% for 13-20 years, and 3% for 21 or more years. Ninety-seven percent of respondents received their education through a traditional preparation program, while 3% came into the field through a lateral entry program. One respondent (3%) identified as male; therefore, 97% of the respondents identified as female. Ninety-one percent of respondents identified as White, 3% as Black or African American, and 3% as Asian, which closely mirrors the demographics of the total certified staff members.

Construction and purpose. Five of the 22 questions on the survey were intended to gather demographic information and the remaining section of the survey asked for responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The scale ranged from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree* and questions were constructed to gain insight into the beliefs of certified staff regarding sociocultural topics, as well as the beliefs in exploring such topics in the classroom. Survey data were collected through Qualtrics, a secure online

survey tool, and exported into Excel for analysis. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix A.

Certified Teacher Interviews

For the first round of interviews an email, constructed by the student researcher, was sent by the school principal to certified staff members. The email included a brief introduction to the interview process, as well as the consent form. The principal sent a follow up email to the certified staff, as well as dates and times the student researcher would be on site and available for interviews to occur. The student researcher followed up with teachers who expressed interest in participating in the interview to set up the date, time, and location for the interview. Interviewees determined the location and time that worked best for their schedules.

For the second round of interviews, an email, constructed by the student researcher was sent to the school district contact to receive permission to contact the original six teachers regarding participating in a second interview. This email included the need for follow up questions as well as an explanation this second interview would occur through WebEx, a virtual platform. Once permission was granted, an email, constructed by the student researcher, was sent to each of the six original interviewees explaining the need for follow up questions. Three of the six teachers responded, agreeing to participate in a second, virtually recorded interview.

Interviewees. Six teachers at Lyon Elementary School volunteered to participate in an individual interview. Three of the teachers currently teach Kindergarten, one teaches second grade, another teaches fourth grade, and the sixth teacher is an

exceptional children's teacher and therefore works with students who have a disability in multiple grade levels. Five of the teachers received their degree through the traditional preparation program and one came into the profession through a fast track lateral entry pathway. Teaching experience ranged from four to 23 years of experience. Two of the interviewees stated it was their first year at Lyon Elementary School, and the range of others are between two and five years at Lyon Elementary.

Purpose, construction, and process. The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into the evidence of critical consciousness practices in classroom practices, beliefs regarding sociocultural influences in education, and the degree of preparedness for navigating social or political events in the school or classroom. Questions during the interview also provided space for teachers to provide insight into their beliefs about the current field of education and the students with whom they have worked over the years. Questions during the second interview were focused on capturing reactions to the results of the qualitative data. An additional goal provided an opportunity to gather further insight into the supports staff feels is needed to be prepared to navigate spaces of social justice and create opportunities for a critical consciousness classroom space.

Both interviews followed a semi-structured interview process. Each interview during the first interview phase occurred during one session ranging between 23 and 47 minutes. Each of these interviews transpired in the school setting, either in the teacher classrooms or office space at the school. Before the interview began, the interviewer provided the consent form, answered questions about the process of keeping participation and data confidential, and obtained the signed consent form before beginning the

interview. The interviewer took anecdotal notes in a written format to capture observations and additional notes during the interview. Additionally, the interview was audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Interviews were limited to six certified staff members to allow for the scope of the research to be completed. A copy of the semi-structured interview protocol is located in Appendix B.

The second interview occurred via WebEx, a virtual platform. The three interviews occurred during one span of time and ranged from 34 to 67 minutes in length. Before the interview began the researcher provided the interviewee with the information sheet outlining the purpose and format of this interview, as well as the results of the collected survey data which was to serve as the focal point of the second interview. WebEx audio was used for this data collection and video recording was not utilized. The interview took anecdotal notes in a written format to capture follow up questions and connections to the research questions. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. A copy of the second semi-structured interview protocol is located in Appendix A.

The web-based staff survey, the first six teacher interviews, and the three follow-up interviews were used for data analysis. The six teacher interviews were transcribed and pseudonyms were given for the teacher name, school, and county in which the school is located to protect the identity of the school and interviewees. The three follow-up interviewees were coded in the same format, utilizing the already given pseudonyms. The interview questions asked of teachers during the first semi-structured interview were:

1. Tell me about yourself in relationship to how long you have been teaching and the teaching experience you have had thus far.
2. What led you to choose teaching as a profession?
3. Tell me about the courses you took while obtaining your degree in teaching.
4. How would you describe the current field of education?
5. In your opinion, what is the purpose of school?
6. How would you describe students who struggle in school?
7. How would you describe students who are successful in school?
8. Based on your teaching experience, why do you think some students do well in school and some students do not do well in school?
9. Can you describe a time when you heard students or staff making comments, jokes, or repeating sayings that are demeaning to groups of people? How typical is that kind of behavior? How do you feel when those situations occur? How prepared do you feel to handle them?
10. What is privilege? How would you define it?
11. What is oppression? How would you define it?
12. How important is it for your teachers to address topics related to privilege and oppression?
13. What topics related to privilege and power should teachers address? In what ways?
14. How prepared do you feel to address topics of privilege and/or oppression?
15. In your own experience, in what ways do you address topics of privilege and oppression?
16. Given that I am interested in systems of privilege and oppression, specifically in the context of education, is there anything else you would like to share?

The interview questions asked of teachers during the first semi-structured interview were:

1. View the results of the online survey. Describe your initial reactions to the data from your school.
2. What results, if any, do you find surprising?
3. What results, if any, data do you find concerning?
4. Questions 19 and 20 point to utilizing space within the classroom to address issues, or topics, of social justice. During the one on one interviews, interviewees expressed their concern for not feeling prepared to do so. What supports do you think need to occur to support classroom teachers to address topics of social justice in school?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me in relationship to your reactions to these data?

I coded the transcribed data to look for patterns of themes. As described by Saldaña (2009), I placed short words and phrases in the margin of the data to summarize and capture meaning (p. 3). As a result of reading through the data multiple times, codes changed and were regrouped as new meaning was interpreted. The goal of this coding process was to find “repetitive patterns of actions and consistencies” within the data (Saldaña, 2009, p. 5).

Following the process of inductive analysis for this project I was able to move from “specific to general” findings (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). The original coding schema was very specific, however in order to make connections I broadened those specific themes to general themes. In doing this I was able to create structures, or domains, leading to overall discoverable themes (Hatch, 2002, p. 165). While creating these

domains I stayed aligned with critical theory, looking for connections to systemic issues of power and oppression.

Results from the survey data were paired with these themes and used to validate the categorical findings. The survey data provided broader insight, while the interview data provided a more in-depth unpacking of the extent of critical consciousness, as well as reveal the extent the classroom space is utilized to challenge socially constructed systems of power.

I matched the themes to correlate with the research questions and then provided each theme with a number. Emerged themes from the data analysis were, “We don’t know what it is,” “We will discuss poverty,” “Privilege is opportunity and money,” “We are not prepared,” “We don’t know what to do,” “School is the equalizer,” “Student motivation determines success,” “Families are to blame,” “It is not our responsibility,” and “Our job is to socialize and save the poor.” Data were organized to address each of the research questions.

Trustworthiness

The triangulation of data sources (interviews and Likert scale survey) assure the validity of the analysis and conclusions of the study. As with any study, my subjectivity will impact the way I interpret the data, determine themes, and establish conclusions based on the findings. Before, during, and after data collection I will spend time engaging in reflexivity to remain cognizant of the influences impacting data analysis. Being honest with my positionality, viewpoints, and experiences during the research study will assist with determining any areas of question regarding subjectivity during this

study. Additionally, I will continue to question how the interaction between my career, current job, and provided responses impact my interactions and interpretations.

Conclusion

Chapter III provided a layout of the methodology that guided this study. The conceptual framework, research paradigms, and approaches were explained, as well as the method for collecting data. Additionally, this chapter provided information about Lyon Elementary School, the selected school site for this study. The end of this chapter provided the emerged themes from the data analysis. The next chapter will present the findings of each of these themes.

CHAPTER IV
THE EXTENT OF AWARENESS, PREPAREDNESS, AND EVIDENCE OF PRACTICES

The very act of thinking invokes the limit of thought.

—Deborah P. Britzman

Previous chapters have addressed the contextual sociocultural, political, and economic powers that push and pull the educational system. Layered on top of this are additional impacts from the ever-changing higher educational pre-service practices designed to prepare future educators for the teaching profession, as well as educational policies that, at times, introduce mandates connected to a narrow focus on determining student, teacher, and school success. Students from various backgrounds, life experiences, and perceptions of the world come together in a classroom space, and it is the responsibility of the educators to navigate this space, not only for the academic component of education, but also the social component of the educational structure.

It is the intent of this study to explore the degree in which our classroom teachers are prepared, through preservice experiences as well as professional development, to address issues of power, privilege, and oppression as events occur within the classroom and school. In order to get to this question, this study is also focused on determining the extent to which our classroom teachers are critically conscious—meaning aware of systems of power—and how these systems impact the political, social, and economic inequalities in society. This lens into the extent of critical consciousness creates space to

address the third area of focus of this study, which is an interest in the extent to which the beliefs and practices of current classroom teachers regarding power, privilege, and oppression are reflected in classroom practices.

Chapter IV will discuss the themes that emerged in this study by using the previously explained methodology in Chapter III. This chapter will also address the final conclusions from this study. Though steps were taken to address my personal biases during this study, I acknowledge my own perceptions influenced the analysis of data. These themes should be notated as one study regarding the extent to which classroom teachers are critically conscious, rather than a wide brushstroke of truths regarding this topic. I organize the remainder of this chapter by the emerged themes connected to the three questions this study was designed to address.

Extent of Critical Consciousness

The first area of attention this study is aimed to explore focuses on how cognizant our current classroom teachers are of the overall social, economic, and political systems of power. To introduce this part of the study I first refer to Michael Schwalbe's (2008) description of being sociologically mindful, or "the practice of tuning-in to how the social world works" (p. 3). This

requires taking the bigger picture into account and trying to see how one part of the social world—the economy, for instance—is related to other parts—school, for instance. If we don't do this, we will fail to see important things about how our society works. (Schwalbe, 2008, p. 12)

The extent to which classroom teachers develop awareness and knowledge to understand the influences of the larger sociocultural, political, and economic system on

society is important in this study. Paulo Freire (2016) refers to this nonlinear path of development in stages, leading to the most advanced stage, “critical transitivity.” Freire (2016) describes critical transitivity as having

depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one’s “findings” and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old-by accepting that is valid and in both old and new. Critical transitivity is characteristic of authentically democratic regimes and corresponds to highly permeable, interrogative, restless and dialogical forms of life- in contrast to silence and inaction . . . (p. 15)

In the following section, I provide an analysis of the collected data set connected to the extent to which current classroom teachers are aware of systems of power and how they impact the classroom space.

Analysis

Conflicting data were found to discuss findings for understanding the extent, or degree, of critical consciousness current classroom teachers possess. These data are conflicting because the data collected by the anonymous web-based survey revealed one perspective, while the individual interviews revealed an alternate perspective.

Considering I was able to ask follow-up questions during the first interview and through a second interview process, it is evident the survey responses did not provide critical insight into understanding the degree of critical consciousness.

To begin this analysis, I gathered the survey data connected to this particular question of this study. The questions and results designed to provide insight into this area of the study are as displayed in Table 17.

Table 17

Results of Survey Questions Related to Teachers' Critical Consciousness

Survey Question	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Racism is one of the of the most important problems in the world today.	62.86%	20%	17%
The right to access basic social services should be guaranteed to all.	77.14%	9%	14%
I do not mind if immigrants move into my residential area.	60%	29%	12%
Social and economic inequalities undermine democracy	43%	40%	17%
Too much is being done for those in need at the expense of others.	35%	29%	38%
Women should actively participate in politics in the same way as men.	94%	6%	0%
People of all races should have equal access to basic rights and freedoms.	100%	0%	0%
Some people belonging in some races are just not suited to living in modern society.	0%	9%	46%
From the point of view of society, it is better that people from different cultures do not mix.	3%	11%	34%

Table 17

Cont.

Survey Question	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Many immigrants come to the United States to abuse our welfare system.	17%	26%	57%

These results provide an indication that current classroom teachers may have a basic understanding of aspects of systems of power, and therefore may be sociologically mindful or critically conscious, to an extent. Awareness of inequalities are present in this dataset, as well the systemic need for support structures in society. However, it was not until the individual interviews that it became noticeable classroom teachers struggle to understand that systems of power exist and are an underpinning to the social, political, and economic structures of the world. The following component of this section will address the themes that lead to this conclusion for this prong of the study. It must be mentioned that the quotes from the teacher interviews are representative of the system in which they work and have experienced. These individuals are a product of the very system in which they live and now work; therefore, the comments represent the impact of this reification.

We don't know what it is. The purpose of this question was to gain insight into the “awareness of asymmetrical power relations” of the classroom teachers (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 102). Interviewees were asked to explain in their own words what the terms

privilege and oppression meant to them. Participants connected both terms with concepts of finances, opportunities, family support, and luck. Throughout other segments of the interview process examples were provided that led to the emerging of this particular theme.

When asked to describe privilege, one interviewee responded, “affluent, same thing” (Jody, first interview). Danielle described it as both money and opportunity, stating, “well the first thing that comes to mind is money, you know privilege. Um, second would be, it does not have to be money, it can just be opportunity” (Danielle). Danielle continued to explain privilege in terms of one her students. “Like, my Kenzie (student), she is privileged with being smart, ya know, she is so blessed with that. I kinda say that privileged and blessed are the same, you know, lucky . . .” (Danielle). This example and the example that follows are representative of how these classroom teachers are predominantly reliant upon their own lived experiences and possibly may have not had the opportunity to explore social, political, and economic inequalities through the lens of power structures.

During the second interview, Kelly shared a similar perspective of connecting privilege to being lucky. She shared a recent conversation with her children in the car:

We saw some homeless people on the side of the road, and so it was conversation, like, “How did that happen? Will that happen to us?” And I was reading an article about . . . a lot of people feel like we are all self-made and that luck has nothing to do with it. I’m like, “No. We are so lucky. Not everyone is that lucky.” I think some people don’t want to admit how lucky we are.” (Kelly, second interview)

In this same line of thought connecting opportunity and privilege, Brandy stated, “so I think privilege is being given the opportunity to do what you want to do and I think that maybe it looks different depending on where you are coming from” (Brandy). Kelly stated a similar view during the first interview, quickly stating,

opportunity. Um, I feel like it all comes down to opportunity. You see it in your personal life too. I mean the kids that are privileged it is not just with wealth, it is with experience. . . . Experience, I think it all comes down to experience. (Kelly, first interview)

Another interviewee included time with parents and food in her explanation of privilege, stating,

having experiences that other people do not have capabilities to have. So, it might be money, but it is not always money. Sometimes it is time with parents, or um, I even perceive some of my kids having food as a privilege . . . (Melanie, first interview)

Priscilla began her explanation of the term privilege:

Ok, um, privilege is [long pause] having something that other don't have, um it could be financial privilege, it could be support from your family, that is a privilege, um, I just feel that not everybody gets, it is kind of like you have this over somebody else, not necessarily that you are better off, but just that, having things that other people don't have. (Priscilla)

It was at this point of the interview with Priscilla that recognition of systems of power and a critique of the structures that exist came to surface; however, she continued to give examples primarily connecting her view to finances, poverty, and access to opportunities to break the cycle of poverty

I really feel like it comes into play with finances, if you have financial support, I feel like you are able to move further along the ladder, easier than somebody who came from, um, down at the bottom, poverty stricken, I mean I feel like it is a hard cycle, poverty in of itself is a hard cycle to break and um, if you are born into a successful financial family I feel like it is just easier for that person, you are more privileged because you have the means to you know get a good education, go, go to school and um have things you need and feel that your needs are being taken care of. Some people don't have that and I feel like if you don't have the things where your needs are being met as a child you, you, you grow up feeling like you won't have as much as a privilege in life. I mean sometimes the cycle is broken, but um, I think it is a hard cycle to break. (Priscilla)

Though Priscilla began her response with a perspective of systems of power, her reliance on the financial aspect of life and how it connects to the poverty cycle is reflective of not being able to articulate the continuum of intersections of power influencing inequalities.

Interviewees described the term oppression in a more concise manner using terminology connected with lack of choices, materials, and financial stability. Melanie explained oppression as “not having. Not having” (Melanie, second interview). Another interview described oppression as

Probably when don't have the choice. Um, I think that if you are in a situation when you feel like, maybe that you don't even feel like, but you don't have a choice of whether or not you get to go to school or whether or not you get to eat or have clean clothes, I think that is oppression. When your choices are taken away from you. (Brandy)

One interviewee described the term oppression:

oppression is anybody who feels they can't get above water because of some sort of environmental factor whether it be finances, whether it be race, whether it be sex, um, it, if they feel they are being oppressed in some way . . . like your being pushed down because of something. (Priscilla)

Here is a second example from Priscilla of an explanation that provides evidence of having a stronger understanding of “awareness of asymmetrical power relations” (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 102) compared to the other participants. This particular response from Priscilla includes a wider lens of factors that influence inequities compared to her explanation of privilege in which she only mentioned financial stability.

Jody quickly stated, oppression as “being oppressed is being put down” (Jody, first interview). She continued with her explanation, stating the students in her classroom have no reason to be oppressed:

I don't—I wouldn't say we have oppression here, we have people, students of high needs, but we don't come into the classroom thinking that because you need a meal, or because you go to the Clothing Closet that you don't have the same opportunities. . . . there's no reason that because your parents don't speak the same language you can't do your work, so I don't see kids being held back, or held down, or not being able to be successful just because they don't have clean clothing. . . . So there's no reason to be oppressed or held back in this school because we're giving you the tools that you need to be successful. (Jody, first interview)

Jody's provided explanation is a direct reflection of a lack of awareness of systematic issues of power. It is curious that Jody's response included a spectrum of clothing, language, and food, and then referred to these as tools the school is providing in order to be successful. The misstep here for Jody is having an understanding of the deep-seeded barriers which exist that cause oppression and need solutions much greater than a Clothing Closet or a provided meal.

Some of the interviewees utilized personal family stories to further explain privilege and oppression. Danielle shared two scenarios to add to her view of privilege.

First, she explained an interaction with her daughter:

like my 4-year-old does not know how lucky she is, I want Princess Sophie's bedroom, how come by bedroom is not a princess, I am like, you are a princess, well that is not fair. I am like you are privileged. (Danielle)

The second explanation this kindergarten teacher gave connected to her experience growing up:

ya know I was a free and reduced lunch kid, I was an ESL kid, I grew up in a dry cleaning store in New Jersey, Parsippany and so, I remember going to school, high school, I don't have, it got better, you know, it got better in high school, but elementary, middle school, not having the right clothes, hand me downs, kids see that, and so you have that privilege where kids would see that physical part but I think overall privilege, now when I look back, I was privileged. My parents supported me through college, all three of us went to Penn State, all my siblings and I went to Penn State, all out of state costs, um, um, I want, I wanted to move to North Carolina, they were supportive. I wanted to marry someone who is not Asian, they were supportive. I am in a profession that does not make a lot of money and not accounting, I am not an accountant, but that support is there. So, so I would say privilege, is having that support, where opportunities can open up for you. (Danielle)

Similarly, Brandy shared,

Like I, we were just middle class growing up. I always got everything on my Christmas list and my parents did not, I mean we were not rich by any means, not even, we knew we weren't rich, but I never went without, but I remember kids that lived in the uh, the development where the country club was and the golf course, and remember when I was growing up, how much better off they were than us. I mean bigger house, more money, trips and things like that. (Brandy)

These particular examples are evidence of how the impact of lived experiences become a platform for creating socially constructed reasoning or justification for the way in which the world operates. Provided explanations do not point to a belief system of “accepting the status quo as ‘natural’” (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 100); however, the explanations give insight into a lack of awareness of ideological practices in society.

Critically conscious teachers are able to identify systems of power and how they appear in the social and political space. Even though the interviewees may not have been able to define the terms privilege and oppression, the provided explanations point to a generally limited understanding of systems of power, or an awareness of “asymmetric power dynamics” (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 102). This next theme regarding a strong level of comfort in discussing poverty emerged as interviewees continued to share about their views of privilege and oppression. Poverty was mentioned as a determining factor for student success in schools and that component will be more directly addressed later in this chapter.

We will discuss poverty. Before unpacking this theme, it should be noted that no interview or survey questions addressed poverty. Interestingly, classroom teachers overtly identified poverty as an indicator impacting the structures of student success, and overall success outside of the school buildings. Financial inequities were linked to opportunities students have before entering school, as well as while moving through the educational experience. Poverty and financial inequities were prominently brought to the surface throughout the first and second interviews.

When asked why some students struggle in school, Kelly answered with “opportunity gap” (first interview). She continued to expand on this, explaining,

At the kindergarten level, vocabulary is just developing. Basic vocabulary most students know, they don't because they don't go to the zoo so they don't know all the different animal names. They don't get to museums to state parks, I just really see that gap in my classroom. It has gotten more mixed, but it is such a defining line between which kids had these great cultural backgrounds, great, very they have such a wealth of experiences. Then there are the students who are put in front of the TV when they get home and that is what I see, such a difference in the opportunities that are available and that has gotten worse, I don't know if it has gotten worse or if it is just I am more aware of it now because sometimes I think you don't see it when you first start out and then the more you teach the more your eyes are more attuned to what you think they should know and experiences they should have. (Kelly, first interview)

Kelly continued, explaining an observation she had in connection with her own child:

I think about this school. I just watched my child be in the school play and it was 98% Caucasian. I think it was such a neat opportunity that she was able to participate in. She was able to do it because she has a mom and dad who could pick her up at 4:30. Um, someone that can pay the \$40 for her costuming. We are at a school that has all these opportunities, but there are still gaps. (Kelly, first interview)

During the second interview, Jody shared her reaction to the response of staff members regarding the statement, “social and economic inequalities undermine democracy”:

And they said—what's the one above, agree, I can't—is that [*Neither agree nor disagree.*] Oh boy, I would agree that it does. [*Why do you say that?*] Because, I mean, it's—well, people that are born with less or have less, unless we make more ways for them to become equal, then I don't think life is fair to them. They were born with less, they were raised with less money and less experiences. And

then, they're raised around that atmosphere of living in poverty or having less opportunities. Unless we make things equal, they don't see that they're able to go to college. (Jody, second interview)

When prompted to expand the conversation to social inequalities, the following dialogue occurred during the second interview:

[What other inequalities do you think there are besides, in your opinion, the financial inequalities?] Well, the finance is tied to a lot, like with the experiences. You know, we have kids that have no background knowledge of so much of what we assume is common. I mean they have access to religion and all, but when it comes to finances, they don't have food. So if they come into school hungry, we can fix that. But if they don't have experiences, it's hard for them to make connections. (Jody, second interview)

Jody's comment, "we have kids that have no background knowledge of so much of what we assume is common" (second interview) is a brief insight into what Bartolomé (2004) refers to as "interrogating romantic views of the dominant culture" (p. 107). However, this one statement is shadowed by the documented previous and following comments of the interview.

Jody also connected poverty to impacting how she addresses topics of social justice in the classroom space. She described the difficulties of this because of the vast economic differences in the student population, and therefore in her class. Jody explained that she would like to discuss social justice topics; however, she hesitates because

so you're trying to tell them just locally what's happening in our community, and that's not so much a social injustice, it's just the way their family is, they don't have the money to do whatever they need to do, to get that kid to school, clean . . . (Jody, second interview)

As mentioned, in the interviews respondents were not asked to address poverty; however, the interviewees openly addressed it as a significant influencer to student success. A critical view of this would have included mention, or examples, of how “social class is a structure of capitalist social relations and thus a systemic inequity” (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 103). The lack of mention of how larger systems impact social inequities creates a vigilant focus on individual choices, rather than systemic structures.

Continuing with this prong of the study, interviewees were also comfortable to discuss the impact families have on a child’s educational experience. The last theme of this segment of this study came through during both interviews, as well as through the analysis of the survey results.

Families are markers of influence. Teachers discussed the impact families have on how successful students are in school and, from their perspective, family also impacts student motivation at school. One teacher who first addressed parental support in relation to the overall negative state of education, stated, “um, I also think that education is in trouble because we do not have the parental support” (Melanie, first interview). This second-grade teacher explains that students who struggle

have a lack of parental support. And that is where I can only do so much here and then they go home and are told education is not important and that teacher doesn’t know what she is doing, and that kind of stuff. It is counteractive, we are not very cohesive with that. I know that those conversations have happened simply because the kids have told me. Is it true, I don’t know, but where are the kids getting that information? So that leads me to believe that it could be a possibility. (Melanie, first interview)

From her perspective, this teacher describes the “parental support . . . and that education is important to the family” as common factors for students who are successful in school.

Another teacher stated concern about “students what don’t have the best backgrounds” and for these students, “there is no one to push them, every day, motivate them” (Kelly, first interview) and her overall conclusion is that “our most successful students are the ones that do have someone there pushing them along” (Kelly, first interview). Kelly provides an example of her concern for one of her students in connection to having a lack of what she feels is parent support:

I was talking with my assistant and we were talking about how this one student, I think about him all the time and I worry because there is no one to do his homework with him and right now he can do it, he can’t read is baggy book at home. In the morning he reads to me. At what point is that raw ability going to start slipping down and there is no one there to push him? (Kelly, first interview)

Teachers expanded on their view of family in similar ways. Kelly described students with the best family backgrounds are those who live in “well, just a supportive family environment. Um, whatever that looks like. Whether it is a Grandma taking care of you . . .” (Kelly, first interview). She quickly added the following excerpt as an example:

this year we have had a higher Hispanic students and a lot with DSS and a lot of very, I mean we don’t know who is the home at any time. It is just that consistency. Have a consistent family or a consistent person caring for you. Consistent place to where you are going every night. You know you will have a meal every night, a warm bath. (Kelly, first interview)

During the second interview, Melanie shared a concern about one of her students and the impact a family decision had on her ability to academically work with the student:

I mean I had a child, he missed about three weeks of school because his dad had to go to Mexico and get the correct paperwork so that he could stay here in the United States and they didn't have anybody to leave the kids with here in the United States so they had to go with the parents because they didn't have anybody to stay with, so he was out of school for three weeks just so his dad could get his paperwork . . . I did try to send some work with him but it's just not the same as having a teacher right there in front of you and it was near the end of the year. (Melanie, second interview)

She continued, explaining, “. . . originally they had told us he would be gone just a week and a half, so then when it was three weeks, we were like, ‘We’ll see if he really shows up or not’” (Melanie, second interview).

This explanation is in direct conflict with Bartolomé’s (2004) explanation of educators being a “border crosser,” meaning

an individual who is able and willing to develop empathy with the cultural “Other” and to authentically view as equal the values of the “Other” while conscious of the cultural group’s subordinated status in the greater society. A border crosser is someone who will critically consider the positive cultural traits of the “Other” . . . (p. 109)

Melanie described this particular scenario from a deficit perspective, rather than speaking of the event in a way that acknowledges the difficulty and the gravity of systemic barriers this family is experiencing. Melanie did not provide an understanding of the political power dynamics influencing the need for this family to have to make this trip.

Melanie acknowledged families find school to be an important institution in society; however, it should be noted her viewpoint is narrow in the scope of the families being referenced. She explained,

I think for a lot of our kids school drive their family with a lot of things that they do. Even though they say they come to the United States for a better life a lot of them it is for the education . . . I'm trying to think, even the ones that aren't from Mexico, but just the kids in gen—like the—your average, white child that we have at our school, I think even that—the school is the main institution that they see and the—I mean our parents are pretty supportive and so that's going to be one the things that does drive a lot of things. They don't—most parents, very few, take their kids out to go on a vacation or something like that just because, like they're going to do the vacations on the spring break, summer break, Christmas break, those kinds of things because it's the main institution that they're there for, they're going to put that effort into it. (Melanie, second interview)

Jody discussed how family influences, including the level of poverty in which the family lives, impact students' motivation to continue their education into college. During the second interview, Jody responded to staff responses for question number ten on the survey. This question asked staff to respond to their level of agreement that social inequalities undermine democracy. Jody, as well as the majority of staff who responded to the survey, agreed with this statement. She explained, sharing,

they [people] were born with less, they were raised with less money and less experiences. And then, they're raised around that atmosphere of poverty or having less opportunities . . . They don't see that I should stay in high school. If they have siblings all dropping out at the age of 16, they're influenced to go that way. (Jody, second interview)

Jody continued later in the interview, connecting back to this same topic of family having a significant influence on students' schooling, especially students with whom she was currently working during the summer months.

And if they [her students] don't see people going to college, then why do they want to go to college? I mean I have a lot of kids I deal with in the summer right now that they tell me that their older siblings have dropped out at 16 and 17, and they think that's the track to take. And I'm like, guys, there's other, there are other things to do besides working at the age of 16. You're not going to go that far with just that no high school degree, let alone going to college. (Jody, second interview)

Critically conscious educators are aware of the societal structures that create barriers for students completing schooling through graduation. Jody, not only in this segment of the interview but also in other references, did not reference how the structures of traditional public schooling are not designed to remove barriers for students to be successful throughout the educational system. In her example here, she is hypervigilant of the individual student and family influence, rather than the larger systemic influences creating students not graduating from high school or going to college.

Interviewees were asked to discuss characteristics of students who are successful at school and those who struggle. The terms successful and struggle were not defined during the interview, allowing the interviewee to interpret the meaning of these words for their individual context. The purpose for keeping the definitions absent from the interview process was also to gather insight into how teachers defined 'success' and 'struggle' and applied the terms in their provided answers.

No teachers defined or explained the definition of success and struggle; however, most teachers pointed to motivation as a key indicator. One kindergarten teacher indicated the reason students are successful is, “um, I think they have that drive” (Kelly, first interview). Another interviewee explained students “may not do well because . . . they are not motivated to continue” and that “it depends on how driven that kid is” (Danielle). Danielle, who shared that motivation can come from a different angle, explained, “or it could be the opposite. My mom doesn’t know how to do it, my mom doesn’t help me, but I am going to prove I can do it” (Danielle).

Another interviewee who taught students from multiple grades concluded motivation was an indicator for student success because she has “had children who have come from terrible home lives and they are very successful in school, very self-motivated and had a lot of um, um, just work ethic and um, I know they were not being taught that at home” (Brandy). Danielle connected motivation to a driving force for later success, stating, “so, my TA (teacher assistant) and I have hope that she (a student) keeps that motivation going because she can do such great things, get out of that situation, but she has to be motivated” (Danielle).

Connecting success to motivation mirrors meritocracy, “a concept of society based on the idea that each individual’s social and occupational position is determined by individual merit, not political or economic influence” (Spring, 2005, p. 288). Educators who believe the rhetoric of meritocracy reify the finite focus on the individual student rather than recognizing systemic social, political, and economic barriers that are deeply engrained within society creating grave difficulties for the referenced individuals.

This first section of this chapter has brought forth an analysis of the collected data to gain an understanding of the degree to which teachers are conscious of systems of power and how the systems impact students and the overall school environment. Though a full analysis of the data will occur in the next chapter, this section provides the outline of the extent of critical consciousness current classroom display, specifically connected to Bartolomé's (2004) description of political and ideological clarity. Provided examples and explanations in this section point to a limited understanding of these and according to Bartolomé (2004), "this lack of political and ideological clarity often translates into teachers uncritically accepting the status quo as 'natural'" (p. 100). This can lead to actions by educators that "[perpetuate] deficit-based views of low-SES, non-White, and linguistic-minority students" (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 100).

The extent of critical consciousness is important to understand as the second segment of this chapter begins which addresses how prepared teachers are to navigate situations in which topics of inequities, oppression, and overall power arise in the school setting. The actions of preparing and supporting our educators to grow in critical consciousness is important to investigate as it may lead to potential root causes for the findings in this section.

Preparation through Higher Education and Professional Development

Survey results, combined with an analysis of the qualitative data, provided insights into how prepared classroom teachers were to identify structures of power and use critically conscious pedagogical approaches in the classroom. For the purpose of this study, the lens of preparation was limited to college coursework and professional

development. To begin, it is important to understand the number of years teachers have been at Lyon Elementary School. A limitation to this survey is that it was not designed to capture the total number of years individuals have been teaching; this particular question was asked during the one-on-one interviews.

Respondents of the survey represented a balanced distribution of certified teachers who had been teaching at Lyon Elementary School for less and more than eight years. Table 18 shows the percentage of teachers working at Lyon Elementary School for the ranges indicated.

Table 18

Number of Years Teaching at Lyon Elementary School

Number of Years Teaching	Percent
1–3 years	34.39%
4–7 years	17.14%
8–12 years	20.00%
13–20 years	25.71%
21+ years	2.86%

It was important to know the types of provided professional development opportunities that address topics of critical consciousness. When asked, 92% of respondents reported the school offers professional development opportunities to provide an understanding of the diverse backgrounds of the student population; however, during the interviews it was evident the professional development experiences were not impacting the degree to which teachers felt prepared to address issues of social, political,

and economic power structures. This section of data is divided into two themes, ‘We are not prepared’ and ‘We don’t know what to do.’

We Are Not Prepared

This theme emerged in two subthemes, teacher preparation experience and professional development. Considering these are two unique sets of time and purpose, data will be presented to address both subthemes.

Teacher preparation experience. When asked, 97.14% of respondents reported obtaining a teaching certification through a traditional educational program and 2.86% obtaining a teaching certification through a lateral entry program. Five of the six interviewed staff members explained their college preparatory work through the lens of a traditional college teacher program and one described it through a lateral entry experience.

Interviewees had trouble recalling coursework experienced to obtain an educational degree, as each of them had been teaching for a minimum of six years. Teacher preparation experiences were described as having an array of courses to address content and geared toward exploring the content through the lens of an elementary school-aged student. One interviewee explained,

I remember having to take some general, across the board course, like PE, Music. I had to play a piano and sing a song. I remember learning lessons like how do teach a kid to throw a ball and I suck at that. That was fun. We played with a big parachute on the lawn. (Danielle)

Another teacher with a degree to teach students with disabilities recalled, “we had to take art, music, PE, like we had to take those and learn how to teach those in case we had to

teach those in the classroom, in case those positions were ever eliminated” (Brandy). The interviewee with 23 years of experience explained,

See all I remember is a PE and I remember a Music, a science. It seems like I took classes almost as if I would be, um I would be teaching them. Like my science class, they treated us like we were elementary kids and we did experiments and I remember the music class, they played music and we played musical chairs and I mean it was more like I was in elementary school. I guess to see what that experience was like. (Melanie)

Following the commonality of having this course work experience, interviewees provided some examples of content courses. One mentioned, “we took foundations for reading and math” (Brandy) and another interviewee described,

Um, the education classes for math, I think that was tough because we learned how to not do things base ten, like base seven, base 8 and see all the patterns. And learn about different countries and how they did their patterns, or different centuries and how they did problem-solving. (Danielle)

Jody, the fourth-grade teacher, who was in her ninth year of teaching, entered the education field as a lateral entry pathway through what she called “the fast track program” which “was a two-year program” (Jody, first interview). Jody experienced six classes she described as

one class in reading, one class in math, and that was excellent, a class in science, a class in social studies and that was excellent, and then a class in grading tests, which I really didn’t know any of that stuff at all. So that was about six classes and then I was out. (Jody, first interview)

Two of the interviewees received certification to work with students starting from birth. Both of these teachers had a different experience in content compared to those

whose teaching certification was for the elementary level. Kelly, who obtained a degree in Birth to Kindergarten, noted coursework addressed contexts outside of pedagogy and instructional design:

My concentration was general education with a focus on students with special needs, that was my favorite. I got a taste of children with language difficulties, so interesting. Chapel Hill seemed to, in the Birth- K, did a lot more family background. Because students tend to go the early intervention or another route so I feel like I got a lot on that background, but then on some of the techniques I was not up to speed on. I was not taught how to perfectly do guided reading so these are things I had to get coming along the way. I think it gave me such a great background on how to understand a family which is so, so foundational of everything. (Kelly, first interview)

Priscilla, who was in her sixth year of teaching, received her certification in birth to third grade. She recalls a strong emphasis on many practicums recalling there was “um, lot of practicums at the beginning” (Priscilla). When asked about the content of course work she experienced, she recalled,

there some that were behaviorist theory, um, the Piaget went back a lot to the development of children, newborn, them doing a lot of stuff, theory, um there was, that was one or two courses, a lot of theorists. And then some of them were just the development of the child . . . There was a course in elementary math that I took that went through a lot of first, second, third grade math skills, um, there was another course, a lot of the course, at least one course per semester was a practicum as well. (Priscilla)

Experiences of the teachers who received certification focusing on Birth through the beginning of grade school years had coursework that included a critical lens into the social world. Those who did not obtain certification to include development before the traditional school age did not engage coursework that included a critical lens into the

social world, including coursework for those who obtained a master's degree. This brings a curious insight into where evidence of coursework that discuss the social world through a critical lens resides in the pre-service experience and why that decision is made for a certain population of preservice educators rather than all preservice educators.

The next place to look for how educators are supported in gaining a stronger degree of critical conscious is a look into the professional development experiences provided. The goal of the next section of this analysis is to determine how teachers are currently supported to identify and address systems of power in the school and classroom through professional development. Additionally, this next section will discuss how provided professional development supports the skills to navigate various situations that occur in the school setting that are a result from social, economic and political power dynamics.

Professional development. The teachers were not able to articulate the professional development topics or how the topics impacted their personal views, beliefs, or interactions with students or the school environment as a whole. When asked if the school offers professional development opportunities to provide understanding of the diverse backgrounds the student population, 40% of respondents selected "Strongly agree," 54% selected "Agree," 3% selected "Disagree," and an additional 3% selected "Neither agree nor disagree." I utilized the individual interviews to gain clarity on what the professional development entailed and how the individual interviewees interpreted the meanings of the professional development.

Interviewees informed me that Lyon Elementary School was engaged in a countywide professional development series on the topic of culturally responsiveness. During the interview, Melanie stated, “We are in the process, I will let you know, my school is in the process of doing um, it is called cultural response, um cultural responsiveness training” (Melanie, first interview). Jody described it as “Grove County is doing a huge cultural responsive training this year . . . Because I guess things have happened in the county in the past that all the counties doing this CRT Training” (Jody, first interview). During Brandy’s interview, when I asked if any professional development was provided around issues of race or cultural biases, Brandy responded, “Oh yes, oh yes, we do. We have one started this summer called Cultural Responsive training. I am one of the trainers . . .” (Brandy).

Some interviewees referred to the content as being “common sense.” Jody referred to the training, explaining her feelings, stating, “he [the professional development trainer] says all these things, and I’m thinking ‘Well, hello, who doesn’t know that? That’s common sense’” (Jody, first interview). Brandy, one of the trainers of this professional development, explained, “a lot of it seems like common sense, but um, definitely it is not apparently” (Brandy).

These introductory statements regarding the county-wide professional development are both curious and concerning based on the previous segment of this chapter. In the previous section, there are minimal examples of educators having an understanding of systems of power; yet, these remarks about the training being

commonsense material, yet titled Culturally Response Training, bring curious questions to both the content and understanding of the delivered content.

When asked to expand upon the topics that were addressed in this training, interviewees broadly referred to the goal of the professional development was to better understand where the child comes from and how that impacts a student in the school setting. Melanie specifically described the professional development that occurred the previous week:

Um, like the one for the last week, you got to know where your kids are coming from. So, um, what kind of background information do the kids share with you, um ya know, like with, like I was sharing with you while we were walking down the hallway, my husband is changing jobs and stuff like that. That would affect a child in the classroom, so um, so I need to somehow be in tuned with that child to know, what, what is going on, oh dad is changing jobs, ok. So I know the perspective the child is coming to school with. Um, so it, um, this last one was about figuring how to get to know your kids, really know them, not just their education but some of their home life too. (Melanie, first interview)

When asked if topics of power, privilege, and oppression were addressed in this professional development, Melanie explained, “. . . we have talked about some of this stuff, but it is like more of teachers being aware of where kids are coming from so than how do we teach the kids what is out there” (Melanie, first interview). She continued to explain, “and I do think what they are doing is more important they have got to teach me all the parts of what is out there before I can even address it as a teacher” (Melanie, first interview).

In this sense, it appears these three educators have an understanding that the purpose of being culturally responsive is to be aware of current life transitions of the

students they teach and with whom they interact in the school. When asked to expand on the commonsense pieces, Brandy was the one participant who was able to further explain this; during our interview, she retrieved a training notebook from a nearby shelf and used it as a guide to explain the topics of the training, explaining the topics of the training as:

Um, how you like what's happened to you causes you to see things differently. Um, definition of culture competence, inclusion and equity for instance. He [trainer] showed us this picture and we have shared it with the staff. There is a fence and a baseball game is going on and people standing there and one can see over it very well, one can see barely and one can't see at all and so then you have another picture where it shows those, that this first guy did not need any boxes to see over the fence and the second one just needed one and the third needed two to be able to see. So you know, giving kids the tools they need. (Brandy)

Brandy described another segment of the training addresses teaching students in diverse methods:

. . . you just can't, you can't teacher all kids the same way. And it is not being unfair to give this kid 2 boxes [pointing to a picture in notebook] and this kid none, when this kid was already been able to see. So kind of the differences, ya know. (Brandy)

Brandy also explained an activity within the content of the Culturally Responsive training:

And this to me was probably the most [turning pages in the notebook], this one, no this one was incredible. So we had to rank our school and what are doing in here that is a doorway what are we doing here that is a barrier to reaching kids. This one was very interesting you had to write down things, in your, for you personally and then what this is important and what about this and then little by little, one by one you had to take one away. Like what if you lost your job, what if your language was gone, what if you lost your possessions and your life value, um, it was very interesting to see what different people chose to take away first or to keep. (Brandy)

During the second interview, Melanie did expand on this the same activity to better explain what she meant during the first interview of the content being common-sense She stated

I remember one activity we did where they were like, okay, “Write down three of the things that you love the most in the world,” and then they said, “Okay, now you’ve lost that very top one, what would you do, how would you feel? And now you’ve lost the next one, how do you feel now?” And that goes back to some of the basic rights and freedoms, I mean if you—if you’re—one of your favorite things in the world is the ability to be able to speak your mind and then all of a sudden somebody takes that right away from you, it kind of makes people feel—makes some of us feel kind of uneasy knowing that some people’s rights were taken away . . . I was left with nothing . . . We marked off twice and both of mine fell—all three of mine fell into two different categories and it just happened to be the two that they told us to mark off. [*Oh, my goodness.*] And if felt really bad knowing that I didn’t have—well I, not that I, but that some people could—like this could really happen to them and that they don’t have some of the things I kind of take for granted, some of the things that I love the most, so. (Melanie, second interview)

The title of the professional development and these explanations appear quite contradictory in that the title would give assumption that this learning experience would be centered on developing educators into what Lilia Bartolomé (2004) refers to as “border crossers.” Educators who are border crossers are able to better understand that

some cultural groups, through no fault of their own, occupy positions of low social status and are marginalized and mistreated by members of higher status groups. This realization enable[s] the individuals to authentically empathize with the cultural “Other” and take some form of action to equalize asymmetrical relations of power and eradicate the stigmatized social identities imposed on subordinate students. (pp. 109–110)

The curiosity here rests again within the content that is being delivered or the understanding of the delivered content. The professional development is a county-wide

initiative; therefore, a cadre of educators were trained in the material and asked to redeliver it to their respective staff at each school. There are many layers to unpack to identify where gaps are occurring; however, there is evidence this professional development experience is not creating a movement to build more critically conscious educators.

Other teachers either did not mention professional development or mentioned the lack of professional development regarding navigating topics of power, privilege, and oppression. Kelly specifically pointed out, “I have umpteen million hours of reading instruction and that is my strong suite and I love my reading instruction. I have a bunch in math, I don’t have a lot in this and that is what’s hard” (Kelly, first interview).

Melanie described typical “professional development we do have is about how to get those high achieve kids to continue learning, how to get those low babies to continue to progress more so than, um, some of these topics that are uncomfortable” (Melanie, first interview).

This section of the chapter was aimed at gaining an understanding of the learning experiences educators have had to be aware of systems of power and how these systems impact the educational system and individual students. The next section will address the second research question in this study—how classroom teachers utilize critical pedagogical approaches to work through, unpack, or address circumstances that arise in the classroom as a result of influences of power, specifically between interactions with staff or students.

We Don't Know What to Do

This theme emerged during the individual interviews, specifically when asked to describe a time when the interviewees had heard students or staff making comments, jokes, or repeating sayings that are demeaning to groups of people. Each of the six teachers was able to identify at least one circumstance when this occurred and the approaches for navigating a social topic that is negatively charged. These approaches included talking to the student involved in the incident, not addressing the involved student, and utilizing a method of class discussion as a strategy.

Kelly, a kindergarten teacher, referred to an event in her classroom just prior to the November 2016 presidential election results, recalling,

Oh it was awful, but of the spectrum. I had a set of twins telling people that there is, all this kind of stuff, telling kids that are Hispanic you are going back to Mexico. Um, that was the hardest one. That was the worst day we had. (Kelly, first interview)

When asked how she navigated this situation in the classroom, she explained,

Well, right or wrong, I said no one is going to be forced, because the child cried, obviously they are worried about that right now. So you know I said, you are safe, we are all safe, no one is going to be forced to go anywhere. . . . One of IB, you know we are open minded and so right there we had a class discussion about are we being open-minded, are we being caring saying these things to someone. And so, we had to talk about how we are caring and we are open minded but at the end of the day we just felt like, I don't know, it was upsetting because that was the worst that we had this year. That is the only incident we had with anyone this whole year being truly unkind to someone. So we tried to fix it, you know that obviously someone is hearing that from someone else, from someone at home. (Kelly, first interview)

Melanie, the second-grade teacher, had a similar circumstance when “last year it was a student, I had a student who looked at another student and said you are a spic and you need to go back to Mexico” (Melanie, first interview). This interviewee explained how she addressed this situation:

I did not go the office, I went straight to the phone because I feel like the parent needs to be aware of what their child said. After I talked to the parent I did go to the administration so they would be aware of what happened. Because our school here, we have a very large Hispanic population, ya know, and for this white child to tell this Hispanic you are a spic and need and need to go back to Mexico, that is pretty stout. (Melanie, first interview)

During the second interview, I asked Melanie to expand how she felt as she navigated this incident in her classroom. She recalled, “I was shocked, I was like, ‘Okay, what do I do? What is the—what’s the right protocol here?’ And I called the parent, and I talked to him myself right then and there” (Melanie, second interview). She continued to describe her reason for discussing the situation with school administration, explaining, “and then I got in touch with my administration and said, ‘In case anything comes up this is what was said, this is what was done.’ Because I felt like I needed to cover myself unfortunately in case something did come back negatively to me” (Melanie, second interview).

So—and I say that just because like what I just said, like I went to my administration pretty quickly to let them know how I did respond so that if something negatively came back to me, because it seems like in our society today somebody’s always going to look for that negative, and I felt like I did what I should do at the time, I mean I didn’t—I just said to the child, “Look, that’s not something we need to say. That’s not the correct way to feel about things. If you were that child how would you feel?” And then I said, “Let’s call dad and see what his take is on this.” Just because I know in families they do have different feelings and takes on different things, and . . . I don’t even think I need the negative res—like this is not a good response, because I think common sense

would tell me not to agree with the child, or something like that. I can't even—but just to make sure that unfortunately so I'm still covered and that there's not a lawsuit brought against me for some kind of cultural racist something, what would the correct kind of response be. (Melanie, second interview)

These events centered on a similar topic, and both educators were not confident in navigating the situation in the classroom at the moment in time. Both of these educators were concerned about following what appears to be a non-established policy to be sure there were no repercussions on their profession. Melanie's example, taking a punitive approach, is not aligned with the characteristics of a critically conscious educator. The event was presented to dialogue, question, and overall utilize as an opportunity to challenge ideologies rather than silence and punish.

Another interviewee described an event that occurred out of the classroom during an extracurricular event:

And last year, I coach and Odyssey of the Minds team and so last year we went to, um, Spontaneous Fair, ya know where they help them learn out how do Spontaneous and we had a verbal problem, and I don't remember what the problem was. I remember there was a picture and anyway, we have this little Asian boy who is extremely intelligent, and he made some kind of comment about um, a black person, or a black, it was like extremely derogatory. I can't remember it specifically, but we have two little girls on our team that are black and their mom was there and she heard it. So, it was kind of like, ya know, my eyes got really wide. I wish I could remember what he said, I remember being like [facial expression with big eyes]. The mom was like did you hear what he said? I was like yes. (Brandy)

When asked how this event was discussed the interviewee recalled,

So I go to the other coach and ask what we should say. She was like, what can we say? Um, I was like I feel like it needs to be addressed, ya know obviously it upset this mother, ya know I don't think we can just let it go. So of course we had

a conversation, not with him directly because I really don't think that he, none of his prior actions or actions after that showed any type of prejudice or racism, but ya know, as a group we talked to the kids about maybe don't use [slight laugh] race as part of an answer, let's just stay away from that, any type of um, race or cultural, um comments, but ya know. It was just like, what. (Brandy)

In this example, Brandy, who is one of the trainers for the county-wide cultural responsiveness training, described a feeling of uneasiness when the topic of race is brought to the surface. Though she did not provide more specifics of this particular event, there appears to be a jump from using the term 'black' to mentioning 'prejudice' or 'racism.' One pillar of being critically conscious is understanding race exists and is socially constructed. Not utilizing terms that identify race is evidence of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2006) explanation of color-blind racism in practice.

One interviewee recalled an incident directed towards her by a student, explaining,

I have had, at my old school, I had a situation with um and African American student and a White student, this was a in a second-grade class, who they always butted heads, they clashed and I had separate them a lot and there was one scenario after school, they were just going at it. So I said one student go on one side of the room, the other student to go on the other side of the room. And the African American student used the word racist because I was separating two students and that was my first encounter with a student ever using that word and um, so it was very difficult for me. (Priscilla)

When asked how this event was discussed the interviewee recalled,

so I took it to my old principal and um, we talked about it and she said it was probably something that he heard, his, it wasn't his fault it was something, it was probably something he heard his step-father use watching TV as comedy because it is something that is very prevalent these days. Um, we called the mother,

together but she didn't answer, um it just kind of got brushed under the rug.
(Priscilla)

Priscilla's scenario and approach mirrors that of Melanie's in that the approach utilized to navigate the situation was from a punitive perspective, as well as creating assumptions and generalizations regarding why the student utilized the terminology towards her in that situation. Rather than engaging in dialogue and asking the student, the adults utilized a normalizing approach that is representative of societal ideologies. Rather than taking a punitive and assumption-based approach, critical educators would display characteristics of being a "border crosser" in which there would be awareness and actions that deal "with the real issues of asymmetrical power relations" causing the use of terminologies by students (Bartolomé, 2004, p. 109).

Interviewed staff members relied on outside-the-classroom supports to assist with personnel outside of the classroom for assistance and look for consequences for the student who makes a derogatory comment to another student or group of students.

During the second interview, participants were asked to provide insight into what supports they thought classroom teachers needed to feel more prepared to confidently navigate situations they described during the first interview. Kelly explained why, for her, discussing social, political, and economic topics are difficult:

We need to do this and they'll give examples in the video, but it's hard when you're on the spot in the classroom to apply that, and I think that's a difficult thing because we don't have any practice at doing that, because for so long, I even remember like the holidays, and that's just a minor example of it right there, but I remember when I first started teaching, it was, don't do holidays because you don't want to offend anyone, and then it kind of transitioned back. But, then you're kind of taught one thing, like, "No, don't do anything that will offend and

did this,” and then in a way, we’re kind of just used to that version, not talking about it enough, so now you’re at a point where we know we need to have these conversations that you are scared to start on and I’m not—I don’t feel like I’m—been trained to lead these conversations in my classroom (Kelly, second interview)

Kelly suggested,

If someone can come in here and actually lead one in front of us . . . So I feel like it’s good in a workshop, but I need like a real—I would love to be sitting in a comp classroom or to actually see, I said like a 5-minute snippet, like the whole 20-minute snippet of what happened in that classroom or what the prefix. Because sometimes it’s really hard when you get a good lecture and then like a 2-minute quiz and a video. I just need more. (Kelly, second interview)

Similarly, Melanie stated, “I think what needs—like I would feel more comfortable if somebody would give me scenarios, this is happening, this is how you would respond” (Melanie, second interview). She continued, suggesting, “so I think just different scenarios, bringing it up and saying, ‘This would be a correct response’” (Melanie, second interview).

Both educators were open to sharing how support could be provided to assist in supporting the understanding and navigation of topics of power, especially when scenarios occur in the classroom. It is not clear if the goal for these educators is to have an understanding of policies to follow, or engage with students in a way to critically challenge social, political, and economic ideologies.

This portion of the chapter has presented an analysis of the collected data specifically connected to the second question in this research study. The third and final

question of this study is designed to gain insight into the utilization of critical pedagogy in the classroom, not just specifically during an identified circumstance or event.

Practices of Teachers

Classroom teachers are the critical conduit to creating an engaging space for students to grapple with content and concepts. Additionally, teachers are challenged with navigating the social spaces of the classroom. Within this all is the underpinning of large-scale negative rhetoric regarding the state of public education and skill sets of classroom teachers (Ravitch, 2013). How do the beliefs classroom teachers have in regard to their role building critically conscious students impact their classroom practices? H. Svi Shapiro (2006) urges,

we must now demand that our schools attend to their responsibility of ensuring that those whom they teach develop the courage, thoughtfulness, and conscience to help bring about a more responsive world that is accountable to the needs of all people, not just of privileged minority . . . This means that educators must become catalysts for young people's capacity to question and challenge the world they are inheriting . . . More than this, it means encouraging their sense of possibility and agency: that is indeed possible for them to help shape a world that is more just, loving and generous. (p. 116)

This section of the chapter layers on the two other sections, meaning that data here align with the previous sections of this chapter, extent of awareness and preparation for both identifying and navigating classroom space to address issues of power. Four survey questions were designed to gain insight into how teachers viewed the intersection of school with addressing democratic principles and critically consciousness pedagogy (see Table 19).

Table 19

Survey Question Results Related to Practices of Teachers

Survey Question	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
School structures inhibit the human rights of students.	8.57%	17.14%	74.49%
Schools are potentially the main institutions of democracy.	37.15%	48.57%	14.29%
Within the school day there is no time for dealing with issues of social justice.	14.29%	28.57%	57.14%
Curriculum materials include diverse perspectives on topics.	37.14%	31.43%	31.43%

Additional to these data, individual teachers were asked to share their belief of the purpose of school, as well as share their thoughts on how the classroom space could be used to build critically conscious students. Collected data revealed classroom teachers' beliefs and practices mirror what individuals such as Henry Giroux and H. Svi Shapiro have warned against as major shifts in educational policy have tied the hands of classroom teachers to follow scripted curriculum and follow guides that do not leave space for developing critically conscious students.

School Equalizes and Socializes

At the beginning of my time with the interviewees, it appeared the common belief that the purpose of school was to assist with building the critical consciousness and overall social skills of students. However, as the interviews continued and teachers

shared examples, the message changed, meaning how teachers navigated situations with students did not foster this same message.

Teachers were asked to share insights into what they believed the purpose of school is—basically, why the school exists. Brandy shared, “I think the purpose of school should be to educate and help the students become productive citizens” (Brandy). Kelly shared, “um, I feel like it is to produce thinkers. I want my children, my students to be productive, to be good people” (Kelly, first interview). Another teacher shared that in her opinion the purpose of school is to teach students the importance of

just being caring towards others, being principled, having respect for other people, their peers, respect for adults, respect for authority, um, for each other, respect for cultural differences, um knowledgeable, being balanced, being able to take care of yourself and also helping someone else. (Priscilla)

Priscilla was the only classroom teacher to not mention academics first in her explanation of the purpose of school. The terminology of respect neither truly has a definition, nor did Priscilla expand upon it. Respect and helping someone out does not address the goals of critical education. Critical education is an education focused on “developing a language for thinking critically about how culture deploys power and . . . enables students to focus on [the] suffering of others” (Giroux, 2011, p. 5). Priscilla has mentioned words that do not particularly translate into critical education. It should be noted that Priscilla, as well as the other educators, are in the constraints of the current educational system, which does not embrace critical education; therefore, it may be difficult to see beyond the current system.

Two classroom teachers connected the purpose of school was to prepare for endeavors students will have after leaving school, with one stating, “um, well, the goal is to go to college and be career ready” (Priscilla). The second teacher, who teaches fourth grade, shared,

they’ll give you the mission is to develop lifelong learners, and 21st century learners, and make them college ready, career ready, and I do think that’s kind of our goal, to open up the doors to thinking, students looking for answers on their own, working on big ideas, but I think a lot of schooling helps with collaboration. If kids are working here in groups, and solving problems together, and thinking of big ideas, it makes them ready for the workforce. (Jody, first interview)

Jody did not provide context regarding the workforce, meaning there is not an explanation for what she sees as the workforce. If the system of education is not designed for all to be successful, then critical educators recognize the long-term outcomes of the mentioned workforce are also impacted. Jody’s mention of working in groups and working together does not divulge the most engrained aspects of the educational structures that do not allow for this to occur. Practices such as ranking students, grading, posting honor roll recipients, naming of a valedictorian, and celebrating winners of fundraising endeavors support the powerful hidden curriculum message that success and status is not only important, but more important than collaborating with others for the greater good of all involved (Shapiro, 2006).

Teachers shared common ideas of socializing students and equalizing outcomes for students, regardless of any other contributing factor, specifically poverty. Danielle shared, “I think in schools, we gotta equal that playing field, and be true leaders for all our kids so they can fight back and accept that oppression” (Danielle). Interesting in this

comment is the juxtaposition of fight back and accept, as they have distinctly different meanings. A limitation to this study is that no follow-up question was asked to allow her to explain in a more in-depth manner to gain a clearer insight into her beliefs around this comment which was embedded within a much larger explanation during the interview process.

Interviewees acknowledged that a component of their work was to teach students behavior in an appropriate manner. When referring to reasons education is in trouble, one teacher shared, from her perspective, that

The kids behaviors have gotten to um, where it is the kids do what they want to do and, um, we have no real repercussion here at school, other than try and teach manners and respect. But if they don't have to do that at home than it is really hard. I have had people say, who do my kids need to know this, I don't have time. It is ridiculous. So, the manners and respect part of it is just not something I guess. Parents want it, society wants it. So when is it going to be learned?
(Melanie, first interview)

When asked to describe how manners are addressed, Melanie described teaching manners and respect examples from this year's class:

Like yesterday we went through how do you talk to an adult. It is not just yea, it is not just nodding your head. It is yes ma'am, no ma'am. We just talk about it, do role modeling, you know. Stuff like that. We show them. (Melanie, first interview)

Danielle finds one purpose of school is to teach manners. She explained this in relationship to one particular student in her class: "I am teaching the kid manners at lunch when you are done with eating your lunch you don't take your fingers and slide across the sauce and lick your fingers" (Danielle). She did admit,

at first I thought he was starving. He was eating the apple until the core breaks apart. He is eating whatever pulp he can find on the banana peel. I was like oh my gosh he is so hungry. He is a growing boy. Maybe he is just not eating enough at home which is very possible. (Danielle)

Danielle continued to explain her theory that this particular student was displaying these behaviors because he was hungry was refuted when she spoke with the student's older sister:

But then she, he has an older sister and when she walked him to class one day I was like he is eating so fast, finishing so quickly and tipping his milk, letting every last drop fall on his face with his tongue hanging out. He is licking his plates. She is like oh, I do that too, we just do that at home. I was like, oh, ok maybe it is not that you are starving, maybe it is that no one said no to you when you started doing that at home. (Danielle)

Danielle concluded this example, stating her goal for the end of this year for this student:

Well, that is my goal, but the end of this year he is going to be a gentleman and he is not going to a bull in a china shop and knock people over when running down the hall, this girl sprawled in the hall saying he knocked into me. Huh, he has a seat next to me now. Now we have tables in our class. I asked the custodian for an extra individual desk. He sits right next to me and he is so excited. He is like, do I get a desk? He also has his own materials because he tries to grab things out of people's hands. Not know how to socialize and so, well I am not only going to teach you how to read, I am going to teach you how to have manners and grow up to be a gentleman. (Danielle)

Toward the end of the interview, Danielle shared her broad view of the purpose of school, stating, "I just want to them to be good people. They are coming in all innocent good people, let's keep it that way" (Danielle).

Explanations provided by Melanie and Danielle mirror the early rhetoric of education in that education is the great equalizer in society. Those who succumb to this

ideology do not display the critical lens of how the engrained social, political, and economic ideologies are the influencers, and education in its current structure amplifies the inequalities that are already deeply engrained. Additionally, both of these teachers' explanations mirror the other early ideology of education that education can solve social problems. In this belief system, there is a lack of awareness that schools, and the way they are constructed, mirror the social problems of the world.

Socialization and equalizing were prominent points of discussion; however, this study is intended to go deeper into the beliefs and practices of classroom teachers in regard to how critically conscious pedagogy is utilized throughout curriculum and instructional design. This next section presents an analysis of the beliefs classroom teachers have to intentionally address systems of power and their impact on inequities in society with students.

It Is Not Our Responsibility

When asked if issues of social justice should not be explored in the classroom 17% of staff responded "Strongly agree," 57% "Strongly disagree or disagree," and another 26% responded "Neither agree nor disagree." Additionally, staff was asked if there was no time for dealing with issues of social justice during the school day. Sixty-six percent of respondents answered "Strongly disagree or disagree," 3% of respondents answered "Strongly Agree or Agree," and another 26% of staff responded, "Neither disagree nor agree." These data suggest staff believed the issue of social justice should be explored in the classroom and time constraints of the school day is not a barrier for

exploring these topics. These findings were not surprising since Lyon Elementary School is an IB school.

It was through both interview processes that conflicting data were discovered as the interviewees waived on the responsibility or space to discuss topics of social justice. Interviewees mentioned maturity and grade levels as a determining factor for exploration of topics of social justice. When asked to explain if topics of social justice should be discussed in the classroom, one teacher stated, “I think so, I think there are certain, I think it is appropriate at a certain age, because of what children can maturely understand or grasp” (Danielle). During the second interview, Jody, the fourth-grade teacher, reacted to the survey, stating,

the issues of social justice should not be explored in the classroom, they disagree and so do I. [*Okay.*] But it’s so hard to talk about it. [*Why is it so hard?*] Well, it’s because they’re so young, I mean they don’t get it that if I got a kid living over here in Laurel Park, which is an affluent area, they don’t get that we have kids in our school that are coming hungry to school, or that don’t have clean clothing, and maybe that’s why they have that odor . . . and so we try to talk more about empathy, understanding that others are not just like you, understanding that not everybody has the same background, not everybody has the same experience, and being open to that. But we certainly don’t talk about world issues. (Jody, second interview)

Another teacher concurred, responding,

I think in the upper grades it can be addressed . . . I definitely think in the upper, you know I want my child to hear every side of the opinion and make their own judgements. You know I don’t want them to not have those conversations. I want those conversations to happen when it is age appropriate in a safe environment. (Kelly, first interview)

Melanie shared a similar response during the second interview:

. . . I'm of the belief that in my second-grade classroom there's only so much of social justice that a second grader can understand. So I'm not saying it shouldn't be discussed in second grade but I think it's something that you have to be very careful about how in depth and what topics you discuss with them simply because they're not age appropriate yet to be able to understand it more (Melanie, second interview)

When asked to explain topics that should be explored, Melanie shared her view that

“Well, I think the older grades, fourth and fifth grade, they can talk about a lot more of it just because those kids are able to understand it more” (Melanie, second interview). I

asked Melanie to expand on the social justice topics she believed should be addressed in

the second grade and she responded, “I think that just keeping everything on a—like all people deserve rights, all people should be allowed to do certain things” (Melanie, second interview).

Danielle shared her views of content and method on how she addresses social justice topics in her particular classroom:

um, like in K-3 if those things were brought it up, it would be more like metaphors, they might understand a little bit about the lack of opportunities, or how lucky they are . . . I know we need to start young with how we treat other and understand it, but it is hard if they don't understand it, um, but I think it is something to be addressed community. Like we do those classroom rules and how we treat each other and respect each other and we do like, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and um, like, Chinese New Year. (Danielle)

Another interviewee stated school is not the place for discussion of topics of social justice, but rather these lessons should come from the home environment.

Um, I think a lot of it should come from the homes because there are different feelings about it, different levels people are and the parents know where they are on that big spectrum. And they can relate things to them and the family. Where here at school teachers need to be more general and let people know there are other things out there but to shove one thing down a child's throat is not appropriate not knowing where that child is coming from. (Melanie, first interview)

The literature on critical education does not delineate grade levels or define what is being referred to as the appropriate grade or age. The question then becomes if it is really about the grade level or the intense positivist approach to education. Considering the intense focus on standardized tests is evident, educators have difficulty creating spaces to engage in critical thinking. Intense focus on utilizing one measure to determine proficiency and growth has created an underlying belief that “knowledge . . . [is] only countable and measureable” (Giroux, 2011, p. 36). Therefore, if acquisition of knowledge cannot be measured through a numeric formation, there is a widespread belief that time in that approach should be discontinued, and opportunities to display acquisition of knowledge in a prescriptive manner need to be utilized. Overall current education practices place positive attention on individuality, competition, and winning ideologies. Henry Giroux (2011) states, “education has become dominated by such neoliberal ideology [which] emphasizes winning at all costs, even if it means ruthless competitiveness” (p. 9).

Later in the interview process, Jody, the fourth-grade lateral entry teacher, provided insight into interactions with her students regarding race. This particular example is the only example throughout this study in which race was directly addressed

in a way that did not silence the conversation, but served as the beginning to critical conversations challenging colorblind racism. Jody explained,

this group is very much diverse and they are very quick to say, “You can’t say that Ms. Kish. You can’t say you’re White.” I said, “Yes I can. I am White and you are Black and you are Hispanic, and that’s who you are and that’s a good thing. That’s your identity,” and that’s when we go back to this book. I said, “They were Jewish. They shouldn’t have to hide that. That’s who they were. Be happy with who you are and that’s okay, that’s not racism to say. We are what we are.”

Within the context of critical education, the dialogue would not end at this point, but serve as that entry point to bring the discussion to deeper, more inquiring conversation. This is one of the benefits of having a diverse classroom space—the subject matters of society are represented in the four walls of the classroom and can serve as the entry point to critical conversations.

This section of the chapter provided both the qualitative and survey data that were gathered to address the third question of the research study which focused on the beliefs and practices current classroom teachers display connected to intentionally discussing inequalities with students in their classroom. The conclusion of this chapter threads together these findings in order to address implications and recommendations from this study.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored data that have been collected to address the three stated research questions in this study. Results from this study have provided evidence that classroom teachers have a limited degree of understanding of systems of power, and how

these systems influence the structure of a school. Additionally, these results indicate that classroom teachers do not exhibit a sociologically mindful perspective. Related to this study, this means evidence points to a limited understanding of how the social, political, and economic power structures impact equitable outcomes for students. Furthermore, results from this study have provided evidence that classroom teachers are not prepared—or even comfortable—addressing issues of power as they organically arise in the classroom or through intentional preparation in curriculum design.

The one exception to this opening paragraph rests with staff members understanding that students and families living in poverty have substantial barriers in life, impacting student performance in school as well as later outcomes in life. Staff members openly discussed poverty and the socioeconomic divides in school in specific relationship to students living in poverty. Educators were able to articulate the impact that socioeconomic status has on student vocabulary development, experiences, and opportunities to participate in extracurricular school activities. The term ‘opportunity gap’ was utilized by a few of the interviewed staff members as it pertained to the impact of poverty and students having access to places such as museums, the zoo, as well as overall travel experiences to various terrains of the state. Staff shared a deficit perspective regarding students from poverty, specifically pointing to the notion of being behind, even upon entering kindergarten.

A misstep here is that staff did not discuss the benefits students living in a place of economic capital impacts school performance and life outcomes. This comparison, or distinction was not made during the interview process. This means that staff is not aware

how school structures are designed to best serve those with the most economic and social capital in society.

Though staff openly discussed the impact of poverty, staff did not articulate how systems of power create this divide in our social world. Additionally, staff did not provide examples of how the structure of school perpetuates this divide, creating an even larger space. Staff did not provide a level of understanding of how the structures of school are created to show this constructed gap, connected to not just poverty but to the overall systems of power. Staff was not able to recognize how attendance lines, assessment, curriculum, instructional practices, and the hidden curriculum contributes to the reproduction of creating strong barriers for the most marginalized groups of students to overcome. In fact, some staff believe schooling is the formal place to move students out of poverty.

This gap in understanding creates a strong space for the continued reification of systems of power in the classroom space, structure of school, and the undermining of creating space for critical pedagogical practices. This was noted in the way staff stifled conversations—or opportunities—to discuss systems of power, as well as the belief that the purpose of school was to socialize and equalize.

In addition to poverty, staff members pointed to parent involvement as strong influences for student success. Some of this elementary school staff articulated the negative impact of family decision making had on students' desire to be motivated in school, as well as the desire stay in school throughout high school. Parental involvement was mentioned as a negative aspect when connected to those in poverty, or coming from

a different country; this entanglement came across as interconnected in the interview process. The lack of understanding that parental involvement is a constructed idea and that classroom teachers can obtain if education is important to family is a result of systemic rhetoric entangling poverty, immigration, ethnicity, and race. The danger in this is that classroom teachers actively apply large-scale rhetoric and ideology to various families and utilize it as a place of marginalization.

Omitted from staff discussions were topics of race, gender, religion, or other intersectional factors as influential indicators impacting students and the overall structures of school. Only one staff member mentioned race when providing additional context to the explanation of privilege and oppression. All interviewed staff members pointed to lack of economic resources as the root cause of divisions between groups of people. Staff mentioned access to financial depth and stability impacted student health care and basic clothing. Omitting the intersectionality of social, economic, and political influences gives significant space for the lack of acknowledgement of how the history and current status of these intersectionalities impact how groups of people continued to be marginalized and privileged over a long period of time.

Addressing issues of social justice and using critical pedagogical practices in the classroom space also surfaced as a significant gap. At first response, staff agreed issues of social justice and overall inequities should be brought into the classroom. However, the contradiction became evident with the wide usage of terminology, indicating there is a certain, yet undefined age and grade these conversations were to take place in school.

Detectable discomfort was noted as staff indicated their students were too young to have educational experiences on topics of social justice.

Neglecting to utilize a very social space—such as the classroom—as a space to utilize critical pedagogical practices to address issues of power, to inform students of contradictions and areas of concern, and to practice critical questioning around power dynamics mirrors actions of silence in the larger social context. Staff does not consider the classroom space to be the setting for addressing issues of democracy; in fact, educators believed this space is reserved for family influences and molding. Purposefully not addressing issues of power in the classroom space, at any age, continues to permit the overt and covert power structures to exist without challenge with each new generation.

Possibly one of the most concerning findings in this study is that significant gaps of understanding and awareness are prevalent while staff is engaged in cultural responsive professional development. Staff described this professional development as directed to assist in gaining understanding of the students with whom they work and how their backgrounds impact their educational experience. It is evident staff is not able to transfer or apply what is occurring in professional development to the classroom experiences and individual incidents. A gap in this study is not having researched the curriculum utilized for this professional development; therefore, it must be mentioned that professional development may or may not be addressing systems of power in an overt manner.

This study has reinforced the need for a united purpose of education that gives space to critical pedagogy throughout the full continuum of education. It also begs for

educators to have a deep understanding that school spaces are not protected from the impacts of systems of power. Throughout history educational space has been utilized as a method to control, socialize, oppress, and reinforce the social, political, and economic inequities in society. This historical context, and its impact, is not brought to surface in teacher preparation or current professional development.

This study also reiterates the need to critically revisit the purpose of education in our society. Competing perspectives have created an overall system of chaos in education. The lack of a collective purpose is noticed throughout the continuum of educational design from the youngest of students through the federal government decision making process. Chapter V, the final chapter of this study, discusses implications and recommendations as a result of this study.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (Freire, 2000, p. 83)

Introduction

School as both a space and an experience has been a long-standing icon in society. Education has been utilized as a platform to reproduce ideological power structures that create the grave inequalities in society. Rhetoric regarding the success of education has amplified the utilization of capitalistic language, propaganda, and methodology to further divide groups of people based on factors of race and socio-economic statuses.

This research study was specifically designed to gain insight into current classroom teachers' understanding of structures of power and how these structures influence schools and societal outcomes. The final chapter of this study provides an outline of the limitations of this study, as well as implications this study can have on both preservice educational spaces and current supports for educators. The final conclusions provided in this chapter thread together components from this overall research and provides a final message to the field of education.

Limitations

Though the results of this study add to the field of research regarding this topic, there are several limitations that need to be considered. Limitations include the site of this study, the staff survey, interview participants, and my interpretations of the data.

This study was completed at one elementary school; therefore, results do not yield participation that is representative of the educational system. Lyon Elementary school staff provided insights that should be used as a platform for future research, as the findings provide a clear perspective into the critical consciousness of current classroom teachers. Additionally, it should be noted Lyon Elementary school is an International Baccalaureate school; therefore, the vision and mission of the school is grounded in the established IB principles. This is not representative of the broader educational configurations of school and should be taken into consideration when studying the results. This does not mean it should be dismissed; however, it should be used as a point of reference when additional research is conducted on this topic, and possibly serve as a point of comparison.

A second limitation is the staff survey. The intention of the survey was to gain insight into the views staff has regarding various aspects of social, political, and economic structures. It was also intended to gain insight into views staff has in relationship to the intersection of the educational space and issues of social justice and democratic principles. Intentions such as these are difficult to capture through the use of a Likert scale survey. A survey constructed to allow for comments and explanation

would have provided the opportunity to capture a more in-depth understanding of the beliefs of participants.

A third limitation to address is connected to the interviewed participants. As stated in Chapter III, an email was sent to certified staff members asking for volunteers to participate in an interview with me during a time and location that was convenient with their schedule. Participants who volunteered did not represent the comprehensive demographics of educators. Race and gender were narrowly represented in this study. Additionally, the participants did not represent teaching various grade levels, as 50% of the interviewees taught kindergarten at the time of this study.

The final limitation to address is my own interpretation of the data. I took intentional steps to reduce my own influences on the interpretation of the data; however, I am influenced by the construction of this study. Factors to consider within this limitation include the selection of the school site and the dynamics during the interview process. It must be noted again that my current professional position also influences the interpretation of the data as I am entangled in the political, social, and economic decision making for public schools in the state this study was conducted. Lyon Elementary school staff were made aware of my professional position and were informed it would not impact any decision making regarding support for the school district or school. It is recommended to take into consideration these addressed limitations when making generalizable references to topics within this study.

Conclusions

The results of this study reveal a significant gap in educator preparation. While in preservice, future educators are presented with subject specific content, assessment design, behavioral approaches, grading practices, and data analysis. Students have multiple opportunities to observe teachers in a variety of school settings and engage in teaching practices. This all comes from a place of reifying the current educational system rather than challenging the status of education.

Course work and experiences within the schools exclude identifying and grappling with systems of inequity. As a result, future educators are not encouraged to investigate the impact systems of power have on students, quality education, and the dynamic social intersections that occur in the school environment. Rather than challenging the system of education, pre-service work focuses on reproducing the current structures.

Using explanations from the interviews, it is evident educators have a limited understanding of socially constructed systems of power. Interviewees utilized terms such as luck, support, and opportunities, and did not encroach into discussing protections, rights, or how dominant groups have these at the expense of others in society. There was no evidence of awareness of the engrained systemic structures in society that create privilege and oppression.

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) explain privilege as

the rights, advantages and protections enjoyed by some *at the expense of* and beyond the rights, advantages, and protections available to others . . . privilege is not the product of luck, or happenstance, but the product of structural advantages.

One automatically receives privilege by being a member of a dominant groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, Christians, upper classes). (p. 58)

These authors explain oppression as “to hold down—to *press*—and deny a social group full access and potential in a given society” (Sensoy & DiAngelo 2012, p. 39).

They continue, describing oppression as

a set of policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, and explanations (discourses), which function to systematically exploit one social group to the benefit of another social group . . . oppression involves *institutional* control, ideological domination, and the imposition of the dominant group’s culture on the minoritized group. (Sensoy & DiAngelo 2012, p. 39)

Teachers in this study were candid about the lack of preparation they have received for addressing social or political comments, acts, or discussions. Teachers shared that when these incidents do arise they employ strategies of dismissing, ignoring, and avoiding rather than creating space to intentionally and critically work through the instance. Reactions such as these stem from a narrow scope of critical consciousness.

Interviewees discussed the impact poverty has on students; however, they did not mention other factors such as race, gender, religion, or sexuality. Roughly 65% of students receive free or reduced lunch at Lyon Elementary school. Percentage of poverty in a school is calculated by the percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals at a school. This information is kept confidential; therefore, staff members are not aware which students receive free or reduced meals. Interestingly, in this study teachers indicated having knowledge of the financial stability of a student’s home life and connected it with factors impeding student success. It is evident in this study teachers are

comfortable discussing poverty as it was mentioned numerous times as a divisive factor between students who struggle and those who are successful. It should be noted that interview questions did not specifically address poverty.

These teacher preparatory experiences mirror Henry Giroux's (2012) insights into the policies Arne Duncan advocated to occur for teacher preparatory course work. According to Giroux (2012), Duncan sought for an "emphasizing [of] the practical and experimental" wanting to "gut the critical nature of theory and pedagogy knowledge sought in colleges of education" (p. 75). Duncan believed "colleges . . . have focused too much on theory and not enough on clinical practice" (Giroux, 2012, p. 75). As a result of this belief, Duncan advocated for "colleges to focus on 'practical methods in order to prepare teachers for an 'outcome-based' education system" (Giroux, 2012, p. 75).

Giroux (2012) finds the result of this shift has significant consequences:

By espousing empirically based standards as a fix for educational problems, advocates of these measures do more than oversimplify complex issues. More crucially, this technocratic agenda also removes the classroom from the larger social, political, and economic forces, while offering anti-intellectual and ethically debased technical and punitive solutions to school and classroom problems. (pp. 75–76)

Giroux (2012) finds a misstep in Duncan's advocacy is that

Banishing theory from teacher education programs in favor of promoting narrowly defined skills and practices is a precursor to positioning teachers as subaltern class that believes the only purpose of education is to train student to compete successfully in a global economy. The model for teaching being celebrated here is one in which teachers are constructed as clerks and technicians who have no need for a public vision in which to imagine the democracy role and social responsibility that schools, teachers, or pedagogy might assume for the world and the future they offer to young people. (p. 76)

Additional to teacher preparation courses, this study has implications for current schools and school districts. Even with professional development, staff do not feel prepared or comfortable discussing topics of social justice and do not utilize critical pedagogical practices in the classroom space. Placing sociological mindfulness development within the current school settings as a priority within professional development, coaching, and teacher development is attainable from district and school leadership.

According to Hannah Arendt, “we should recognize the function of the school is to teach children *about* the world” (as cited in Gordon, 2001, p. 51). In order to do this, there is a deep need to support educators in understanding about the world, especially as the classroom space becomes more global. Educators receive support for understanding certain subjects, grading practices, and classroom discipline practices; however, these are a reification of the current oppressive and divisive system. Educators do not receive support, practice, or an understanding of how to navigate the social space. Additionally neglected from this support is the impact structures of power have on economic, political, and social spheres of society. It is impossible to meet the call of Hannah Arendt when the adults lack an understanding about the world.

School leaders can utilize results from this study, in the context of the noted limitations, as a beginning juncture of understanding the need to support staff. This study calls for educators to participate in the intentional naming, identifying, and deconstructing systems of power inside the classroom and school space. More research should be undertaken to better understand the needs educators have in this context. The

next section provides recommendations based on the conclusions gleaned from this research.

Recommendations

It is evident support structures in both educator preparation and professional development are needed to impact the extent of educators' critical consciousness. This is essential to the practice of education, especially considering the classroom continues to become globally representative of various ethnicities, races, and religions, as well as social, political, and economic views. The following are recommendations as a result of this study.

1. **Education Pre-Service Course Work**—Add a series of courses that address topics within the broad scopes of sociology, capitalism, and democracy. These courses should address and unpack how systemic structures of power impact the educational space, as well as the social, economic, and political spheres of society. The goal of this series is to bring further development of becoming sociologically mindful. These courses do not need to be in isolation, but rather in conjunction with learning about the practice of education.
2. **Professional Learning Opportunities**—Add a series of professional learning experiences while administrators, teachers, and educational policy makers are working in the field of education. These professional learning opportunities should occur frequently and include a strong focus that directly connects to the community the school setting serves. These learning opportunities should

place focus on curriculum decisions, instructional practices, and assisting staff with creating experiences in which students are exposed to a range of views, have voice to challenge, and are empowered to critically analyze topics.

Professional learning opportunities should be included as part of professional learning communities, rather than in isolation from other topics in education.

Administrators should be supported to create a safe space to allow for educators to critically challenge the current educational system.

3. Expand Educational Staffing—This particular recommendation is not directed to reduce class sizes, but rather expand the lens of educational staffing.

Experts in curriculum selection and instructional practices that include democratic practices should be added to district and school staff to support staff in the implementation of instructional practices and design that foster a critical educational experience. These staff members will be able to coach teachers and administrators to expand conversations and decision points to the social, political, and economic pressures that may be influencing policy and practice.

This agenda must happen in order to move teachers in a direction toward becoming sociological mindful and critically conscious. Constant conversations must occur in order to begin to change the perspective of educators. This agenda will assist with moving educators, at all levels, away from placing individual blame on students or families, to seeing the larger scope of interconnected systems of power.

Future Research

This one study does not suffice for a larger conversation regarding the extent to which classroom teachers are aware of systems of power and how they utilize critical pedagogical practices in the classroom. Future research needs to be conducted, noting that college course work is not the only space to bring these topics to the surface for future educators. The continuous changing face of education including a multitude of educational spaces provides an ideal opportunity to search for settings in which teachers and students are grappling with content through a critical pedagogical lens.

Chapter II discussed the implications school choice has on the reification of systems of inequity. However, it must be noted that the broad brushstroke of that discussion does not encapsulate individual charter school movements that create intentional space for educational discovery and critically pragmatic design. It is important that future research specifically studies these schools to analyze the infrastructure and overall impact including selection of administrative staff, educators, curriculum design, instructional practices, and how broadening the definition of success influences students' understanding of the social world.

Future research should also include a wider range of educational configurations to gain a better understanding of the beliefs and practices classroom teachers have in regard to systems of power. This should include studying other building levels, such as middle and high school, as well as innovative educational spaces such as early college programming, virtual classrooms, lab schools, and those within restart models. A recommendation for future research is to also include schools in various communities to

glean insight into any differences that may exist between areas such as rural, urban, and suburban.

An additional area of future research is to include participants who have taken course work, or studied, systems of power and utilize that selection criteria to determine if there are differences in their beliefs and critical pedagogical practices in the educational space. Though this would change current structure of this study, this expansion could add a dimension to continue to influence higher education practices.

Hope and Optimism

Determining the purpose of education has been a divisive topic throughout history and vast exclusionary practices have undergirded the overall structure and design of the educational system. According to Shapiro (2006), the conflict of school “has always been about much more than what and how we should teach in our schools. It quite obviously touches serious tensions in our culture that have do with the promise of democracy” (p. 15). This conflict is noted in the overt exclusionary practices to access education based on race, religion, sex, ability, and language. Additionally, covert exclusionary practices have, and continue to be, in the formation of curriculum design, instructional practices, attendance lines, implementation of the hidden curriculum, and the rhetoric of school choice.

These covert practices continue to be introduced at a rapid rate due to the application of capitalistic ideology on the public-school space. This continues to reinforce the sustaining and creation of communities based on economic similarities, which reproduces the same outcomes generation after generation. Education has been

discussed as the great equalizer; however, this study has reinforced the systems of inequalities that impact the large-scale outcomes for students, educators, and the overall school setting.

Federal and state educational policies continue to significantly impact the field of education through accountability measures, reporting structures, funding, and school choice. As state plans are submitted to adhere to the policies outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), it will be important to keep a pulse on how educational practices shift over time. Although ESSA provides state flexibility for accountability, more focus continues to be placed on standardized assessment outcomes, even as states introduce other measures of progress. The finite look at subgroups will become more overt as each subgroup in a school will receive a letter grade connected to the standardized outcome data. This practice has strong potential to strengthen the already engrained beliefs and practices of classroom teachers, and the larger sphere of education.

With all of this being stated, there is hope. There is hope to use the educational space as a place to utilize critical pedagogical practices with students to challenge systems of power. This place of hope comes from the ever-growing age of technology and creative educational spaces that continue to grow. Generations of students continue to be exposed to social, political, and economic inequities at a rapid rate. Rather than viewing this as a deficit, I encourage educators to use it as an opportunity to bring the outward facing events to the forefront to deconstruct from various perspectives. This creates what Paulo Freire (2000) describes as a “problem-posing education,” meaning an educational experience in which

people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p. 83)

Despite the strong, longstanding social, political, and economic influences, I believe schools and the educational experience can overcome the pathway of the mainstream rhetoric and push for changes that create equitable outcomes. I believe schools can turn the tide and influence inequitable structures that oppress the already marginalized. I believe this because movements designed to shift this trajectory continue to appear across the world. I believe schools will become one of these powerful movements.

This is the call of education—education grounded in critical pedagogy and democracy. Dr. Svi Shapiro (2006) heads the call for a reformed educational model that is aimed at creating a democratic society. He states,

instead of the misdirected reforms that have preoccupied policymakers, we need, instead, changes that can reconnect our children's education to the imperatives and demands of our social world. We need, desperately, young people who are able to challenge the wastefulness of the earth's precious resources and our ongoing destruction of planetary life; who are able to question the extent of poverty and injustice in the world; who respond critically to the degrading and violent nature of so much human behavior; and who are encouraged to consider who or what are the primary beneficiaries, and who are the losers, in our global economic system . . . Schools need to be places that can manifest relationships that do not emulate the usual hierarchical, competitive, and individualistic forms—places where young people learn of the value of caring and cooperative relationships based in mutual respect and equality. (p. 184)

This hope and optimism rests on the work of society to continue to challenge, question, and directly push back on systems of power that are impacting educational

policies. The barriers are strong; however, people in society are strong and vibrant. Families, communities, and the larger scope of society must question the vast differences in educational experiences that are bound by zip codes. If the educational space is viewed as the space in which youth grapple with content and various topics, then it is time to reinvent this experience, rather than continue to construct it in a way that resembles a factory model. Educational spaces have become an open space for capitalistic entrepreneurship and it is the responsibility of society to call halt to such practices and push for democratic practices to build strength of society.

The final area of hope and optimism I will address points back to the very reason I started my doctoral work. On September 1, 1939, the Nazi army invaded Poland and within weeks the Polish army was defeated. In less than one month, Poland was systematically dismantled. Included in this dismantling was my Grandmother, Felicia. Taken from her home village, away from her family, she was one of hundreds of thousands transported out of Poland into Germany to labor and death camps. Five years of her life were spent within the confines of this hell. Outside of the camp were free citizens who had privilege. She could not free herself; others had to save her. She had to survive the systemic oppression and succumb to the norms of the work camp.

The oppressed cannot become free of oppression without the voice, activism, and movement of those with privilege. My hope is that this research and this journey of my doctoral experience will provide a place of strength and courage for many. My hope is that this research serves as another space in time to move the needle of oppressive

ideologies. The saying that education is the key has much weight to it. It is one of many keys that exist as opportunities to push on inequalities and inequities.

We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must—at that moment—become the center of the universe. (Wiesel, 1986, para. 7)

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY

Directions:

This survey is designed to collect information about educators' views on various social, political, and economic systems in society. This survey is designed to collect your views, not that of the school.

All responses to this survey are anonymous. Participation in this survey is voluntary and you may discontinue involvement at any time without consequence.

1. How many years have you been working in at this school?
1-3; 4-7; 8-12; 13-20; 21+
2. What best describes your role at the school?
teacher, support services, no response
3. Which best describes how you obtained your teaching certification?
traditional education program; lateral entry; no response
4. Which best describes you?
male, female, transgender, do not identify as female, male or transgender
5. Which racial or ethnic description best describes you?
Ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino; Not Hispanic or Latino
Race: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American;
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; White

Please respond to each statement using the provided 5-point scale.

6. Racism is one of the most important problems in the world today.
7. The right to access basic social services should be guaranteed to all.
8. I do not mind if immigrants move into my residential area.
9. I am not really interested in having friends from outside my race.
10. Social and economic inequalities undermine democracy.
11. Too much is being done for those in need at the expense of others.

12. Women should actively participate in politics the same way as men.
13. People of all races should have equal access to basic rights and freedoms.
14. School structures inhibit the human rights of students.
15. Schools are potentially the main institutions of democracy.
16. Some people belonging to some races are just not suited to living in modern society.
17. From the point of view of society, it is better that people from different cultures do not mix.
18. Many immigrants come to the United States to abuse our welfare system.
19. Issues of social justice should not be explored in the classroom.
20. Within the school day there is no time for dealing with issues of social justice.
21. Curriculum materials include diverse perspectives on topics.
22. My school offers professional development opportunities designed to provide understanding of the diverse backgrounds of the student population.

(adapted from Clarke & Drudy, 2006, p. 378)

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher Interview Questions (First Interview)

1. Tell me about yourself in relationship to how long you have been teaching and the teaching experience you have had thus far.
2. What led you to choose teaching as a profession?
3. Tell me about the courses you took while obtaining your degree in teaching.
4. How would you describe the current field of education?
5. In your opinion, what is the purpose of school?
6. How would you describe students who struggle in school?
7. How would you describe students who are successful in school?
8. Based on your teaching experience, why do you think some students do well in school and some students do not do well in school?
9. Can you describe a time when you heard students or staff making comments, jokes, or repeating sayings that are demeaning to groups of people? How typical is that kind of behavior? How do you feel when those situations occur? How prepared do you feel to handle them?
10. What is privilege? How would you define it?
11. What is oppression? How would you define it?
12. How important is it for your teachers to address topics related to privilege and oppression?
13. What topics related to privilege and power should teachers address? In what ways?
14. How prepared do you feel to address topics of privilege and/or oppression?
15. In your own experience, in what ways do you address topics of privilege and oppression?

16. Given that I am interested in systems of privilege and oppression, specifically in the context of education, is there anything else you would like to share?

Survey Data Questions (Second Interview)

I will email the participants a copy of the survey data before the interview.

1. View the results of the online survey. Describe your initial reactions to the data from your school.
2. What results, if any, do you find surprising?
3. What results, if any, data do you find concerning?
4. Questions 19 and 20 point to utilizing space within the classroom to address issues, or topics, of social justice. During the one on one interviews, interviewees expressed their concern for not feeling prepared to do so. What supports do you think need to occur to support classroom teachers to address topics of social justice in school?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me in relationship to your reactions to this data?