Examining the Pedagogical and Institutional Phenomena that Influence the Facilitation of Critical Consciousness

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This study engaged grounded theory methodology to explore how critical pedagogy shaped and influenced the development of critical consciousness among preservice teacher candidates. The teacher participants revealed that facilitating critical consciousness was a complex process influenced by pedagogical and institutional mechanisms. The pedagogical mechanism of coercive power and the institutional mechanism of compressed time both limited opportunities for student agency and constrained the development of critical consciousness. Two professors were successful in countering the negative consequences of these institutional and pedagogical mechanisms by enacting a legitimate form of power and facilitating dialogical learning contexts. These efforts are highlighted in the paper as key attributes of consciousness raising learning experiences among the preservice teachers.

Cette étude, qui repose sur une méthodologie inspirée de la théorie à base empirique, explore la mesure dans laquelle la pédagogie critique a influencé le développement d'une conscience critique chez des enseignants en formation. Les enseignants participants ont révélé que la promotion de la conscience critique est un processus complexe qui est influencé par des mécanismes pédagogiques et institutionnels. Le mécanisme pédagogique du pouvoir coercitif et le mécanisme institutionnel du calendrier comprimé limitent tous les deux la marge de manœuvre des étudiants et contraignent le développement de la conscience critique. Deux professeurs ont réussi à contrer les conséquences négatives de ces mécanismes institutionnels et pédagogiques en exerçant une forme de pouvoir légitime et en facilitant des contextes d'apprentissage dialogique. L'article présente ces efforts comme étant les caractéristiques principales des expériences d'apprentissage ayant favorisé la prise de conscience chez les enseignants en formation.

In Ontario, Canada, a sizable number of professors in Faculties of Education claim to use a social justice framework as their pedagogical model (Solomon, Levine-Rasky, & Singer, 2003); however, what constitutes social justice pedagogy is often unclear. As Kelly (2012) has noted, "What educating for social justice means is not always, or even usually, self-evident" (p. 135). Despite this confusion, scholars generally concur that the term *social justice pedagogies* refers "to a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identity are produced within and among particular sets of social relations" (Giroux & Simon, 1988, p. 1552).

To contextualize this contested framework, I drew upon the work of Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012), who have explicated the principles of critical social justice pedagogy. According to their scholarship, the critical social justice paradigm emphasizes cultivating critical self-awareness of

one's social position within broader societal hierarchies of power and privilege. As they explained, the four main principles of critical social justice pedagogy are: (a) recognize how relations of unequal social power are constantly being negotiated at both the micro (individual) and macro (structural) levels; (b) understand our own positions within these relations of unequal power; (c) think critically about knowledge; (d) act on these precepts in service of a more just society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Within this conceptual framework, critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1988b; Kinechloe, 2005; McLaren, 2009) and critical social justice pedagogy (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) overlap; however, for purposes of this discussion, I situate *critical pedagogy* as a subcategory of *critical social justice pedagogies*, as defined by Sensoy and DiAngelo. At times, I use these terms interchangeably.

Among the various critical social justice pedagogies, critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1988a; Kinechloe, 2005; McLaren, 2009) is not only the most well-known, but also the most challenging (Chubbuck, 2010). Critical pedagogy, Chubbuck has explained, is demanding because it prompts teachers to both examine the complex intersection of multiple systems of oppression and privilege and work toward social change. Indeed, as Biesta (1998) has maintained, "Critical pedagogy shows an interest in questions of culture, both inside and outside the schools; in issues concerning identity and identity politics; and in multicultural education" (p. 499).

But over the past few decades, scholars have raised concerns that critical pedagogy may negatively influence students. Thus, although endorsing the conceptual frameworks promoted by seminal critical scholars and pedagogues (e.g., Giroux, Kinechloe, McLaren), I also attend to some of the problematic features of their views. One concern is the masculine, "logical," and emotionally detached voice these male critics summon. Some feminist scholars have asserted that when critical theorists privilege a traditional masculine voice, they are simply replicating Eurocentric, authoritative, and colonizing constructs (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). The problem, according to feminist theorists such as Lather (1998a), St. Pierre and Pillow, and Ellsworth (1989), is that such scholars present their "rational" views and epistemologies as universal truths, implicitly invalidating other positions. As emphasized by Lather, critical pedagogy is still very much a "boy thing," speaking from a traditional masculinist perspective that asserts itself as "The One with the Right" and "the one that knows" (p. 487).

Biesta (1998) took this criticism one step further, suggesting that the very project of a prescribed critical pedagogy is untenable. Biesta asserted that education cannot be conceived as a technique with predictable outcomes. Education is centered on human interaction, which is "boundless" and "inherently unpredictable" (Biesta, 1998, p. 503). For Biesta, education is about taking in information and generating awareness and knowledge, not about acting—that is, not about internalizing and enacting critical pedagogy scripts. Moreover, Biesta (1998) noted, the only way for critical pedagogy to proceed is through a "perpetual challenge of all claims to authority including the claims to authority of critical pedagogy itself" (p. 503).

For her part, Ellsworth (1989) problematized critical pedagogy's key aim of facilitating critical consciousness among university students. Drawing from a postmodern paradigm, she noted that it is impossible to legitimize and address all voices in equal measure. Student voices are partial and partisan, Ellsworth explained, and are likely to have hidden motives and needs that will not surface in public discussion. Student voices cannot be viewed through a rational lens, representing as they do partial, biased, imperfect, limited, fluid, and dynamic narratives that privilege the interests of one side over others. Critical pedagogues have not completely overlooked this idea. Contrary to Ellsworth, McLaren (2009) warned that postmodernism does not seem to offer more than a celebration of questionable differences among students. The consequent lack of ethical

criteria or evaluation frameworks precludes any striving for a set of outcome standards. McLaren added that other forces—such as neoliberalism and global capitalism—will likely intrude and dominate both the evaluation frameworks and outcome standards for living, learning, being, and knowing.

Following McLaren (2009), current systems of oppression and discriminatory practices will remain abstruse and unyielding if individuals fail to consider broader neoliberal ideology and the attendant practices that have shaped, defined, and thus dehumanized the citizen (Armstrong, 2010; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Sears, 2003). Giroux (2004) maintained that the neoliberal attachment to hyper-individualism contracts the scope of citizenship to a perpetual cycle of productivity and consumption within the context of hyper-competition. Shaped by a neoliberal agenda, the education system in Ontario (and elsewhere) has narrowly defined what it means to be a citizen by emphasizing policy and practices that naturalize and normalize hyper-individualism (Armstrong, 2010; Giroux, 2012; McLaren, 2009; Sears, 2003). As teachers and students internalize this ideology—and its affiliations, meritocracy and hyper-competition—they may neglect to interrogate the structural inequities of race, class, and gender, among others (Castro, 2010). Along these lines, Biesta (1998) emphasized:

> Any analysis of the current state of education must pay attention to the effects of the "new capitalism"—which is a global and transnational capitalism—and of its "political bedfellow," neoliberalism ... new capitalism has invaded, distorted, and deformed every sphere of life, including the sphere of education, by making capital the "paragon of all social relationships.

In an effort to counter the forces of neoliberalism and instill a more robust understanding of democracy and the collective good, Giroux (1992) argued, educators must provide "the conditions that will allow students (and others) to reconceptualise themselves as citizens and develop a sense of what it means to fight for important social and political issues that affect their lives, bodies, and society" (p. 31). Critical pedagogy and facilitating critical consciousness serve just such purpose: making the "political more pedagogical" by prompting "agents to enunciate, act, and reflect on themselves, their relations to others, and the wider social order" (Giroux, 2004, p. 499).

The literature defines neoliberalism as both a hegemonic ideology (see, for example, Apple, 2001; Connell, 2010; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Giroux, 2012) and a set of market principles that justify austere economic policies (see, for example, Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Chomsky, 1999; Sears, 2003). As explained by Dardot and Laval, neoliberalism is about governing beings whose subjectivity is compatible with the activity they are required to perform (e.g., compete in the free market and assimilate as good entrepreneurial-spirited citizens who measure their value in terms of what they can produce on their own or in the workplace). Therefore, various techniques are used to manufacture the "entrepreneurial or neoliberal subject," who will internalize the role of the economic actor guided by self-interest (Dardot & Laval, 2014, p. 119). The core of neoliberal hegemony is a mode of hyper-individualism that insists all human behaviour be directed by individualistic, competitive, and self-centred goals (Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Chomsky, 1999; Connell, 2010; Dardot & Laval, 2014; for a discussion on selfishness as a virtue, see Rand, 1964).

The comprehensive, theoretically dense, and often perplexing goals of critical pedagogy are clearly and frequently stated in the academic and educational research (see, for example, the work of Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1992, 2012; Janks, 2010 McLaren, 2009; Shor & Pari, 1999). However, research illustrating how to vitalize the goals of critical pedagogy, especially the process of acquiring critical consciousness and developing a "language of critique" and a "language of

possibility," for preservice teachers in course-based learning is limited (see, for example, Cochran-Smith, Davies, & Fries, 2004; Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008, p. 433; Solomon, Singer, Campbell, & Allen, 2011). This research sought to address this knowledge gap by exploring the critical learning experiences of preservice teachers who studied under self-identified critical pedagogues.

Educator and philosopher Paulo Freire developed the term *critical consciousness* to help Brazilian peasants become aware of the political and social patterns creating and maintaining their oppression (Adams & Bell, 2016). For Freire, critical consciousness meant working in solidarity with others to question, analyze, and challenge oppressive conditions (Freire, 1973). The goals of critical consciousness are to develop awareness of the social and political factors that create inequity, to analyze the patterns that sustain oppression, and to take action to work collectively and democratically to reimagine and remake the world in the best interests of all. The pedagogical and institutional mechanisms that mediated the development of critical consciousness are explored in more detail in the results section of this article.

Data Sources

Data were collected at the beginning and end of the Faculty of Education school year (See Appendix B and C for semi-structured interview questions utilized in these interviews). Thirty-seven teacher candidates, out of a total population of 395 enrolled teacher candidates, volunteered to contribute 68 hours of interview data. No participants dropped out. Because the main research question explored how, if at all, teacher candidates developed a critical consciousness when being taught by a critical pedagogue, the collected data were used to document their levels of critical consciousness. The data also highlighted the institutional, structural barriers and pedagogical approaches that mediated the process.

The database included seven self-identified critical pedagogues who taught the participating 37 teacher candidates. As Breuing (2011) has shown, self-identified critical pedagogues appeal to and enact a range of critical theory. Thus, when interviewing the participating teacher educators, I was especially careful to document the "specific definitions attached to critical pedagogy," the meaning(s) attributed to social justice educators, the "theorists and specific theory" to which they referred as well as "the central aims and purposes" and intended practices for reaching them (Breuing, 2011, p. 8). The purpose of these interviews was to ensure that this group of teacher educators not only identified as critical pedagogues, but also intended to practice critical pedagogy within the context of teaching their course for the duration of the school year. (See Appendix A for semi-structured interview questions utilized during interviews with critically minded Faculty Professors.)

Context and Methods

This study took place with a Faculty of Education in a mid-sized university located in Ontario, Canada. The faculty's mission statement articulates a commitment to weaving social justice theory and practice into each of its courses. I drew upon critical theory (Apple, 2001; Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991; Giroux, 1992; Gramsci, 1971; Marx, 1988) for data analysis and utilized Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory approach for data collection and theory building. Analysis led to the construction of three differentiated categories of critical consciousness: (a) micro level, (b) meso level, and (c) macro level. These data-sorting categories

emerged organically from the data; in other words, each level of critical consciousness and its defining boundaries were based on the preservice student participants' varied critical responses documented during the last set of interviews. (See Appendix B for beginning of the year interview questions and see Appendix C for end of year interview questions.) Like Lather (1988b), I acknowledge that categorizing data to understand phenomena has some limitations. Nonetheless, if we are to understand some of the generic properties of facilitating critical consciousness, we must organize and convey the most salient experiences. As Lather would emphasize, we need categories for understanding; however, we must remain mindful that isolating partial phenomena from the whole context can enact a reductionist logic and convey partial realities.

In addition to constructing baseline data and outcome-oriented categories of critical consciousness, the data provided evidence of two key mediating themes that appeared to influence the facilitation of critical consciousness. These process-oriented data highlighted some key temporal and contextual issues while providing the thick data necessary to move from description to interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). This paper focuses on this particular dimension of the results. The next section briefly discusses the preservice teachers' level of critical consciousness at the beginning and end of the school year. What follows is a detailed analysis of the mechanisms that mediated the facilitation of critical consciousness.

Results

Student Levels of Criticality at the Beginning of the Year

The data collected at the beginning of the year indicated student awareness of social justice teaching and a degree of understanding of structural inequities. (See Appendix B for Phase One Interview Questions.) Responses to the baseline research questions revealed preservice teacher participants' perceptions of what it might mean to be a good social justice educator.

The baseline data yielded the following themes: (a) Many of the preservice teachers were open, even eager, to adopt social justice teaching practices; (b) There were clear differences among the participants when it came to their understanding of what it meant to teach for social justice; and (c) Most preservice students drew from problematic ideologies of multiculturalism, colour blindness, an equality over equity lens, individualism, deficit-theory, and meritocracy, and were unable to discuss the relative structural issues that accompany classism, racism, and sexism. Following, I provide some illustrative examples of these themes.

Deanna, much like other participants, proclaimed "a strong interest in teaching social justice." Deanna was most passionate about gender and mental health issues. She was adamant that she was going to "treat both girls and boys equally by encouraging both to work hard at achieving their life goals." As with the other preservice teachers in the study, Deanna was enthusiastic about incorporating some form of social justice practice; however, she ascribed to an equality over equity lens.

Caleb, who was involved with an education program that brought preservice teacher candidates overseas to work in economically disadvantaged regions, confirmed that teaching for social justice was important to him. For Caleb, teaching for social justice meant working toward an inclusive "global community," regardless of race, religion, or gender. He cited the importance of "educating women" across the globe as a way of solving economic and political problems. However, he was not able to speak to the way structural issues shaped by gender ideology and broad structural forces had deep negative implications for women, in general, and non-white

women, in particular.

Kyla conveyed an initial awareness of her social position, but framed her future pedagogical practice by invoking an equality—rather than equity—framework:

> I know my positionality and I recognize that I am from a background that, uh, that many of these kids won't, um, won't have a lot in common with. So I really do my best to treat everyone equally while acknowledging our differences because it is not necessarily a bad thing that we are different.

In speaking of the need to treat everyone equally, Kyla evinced her capacity to consider social structures. She nonetheless adopted a limited pedagogical approach to social justice, stopping short of hierarchically considering and coordinating social patterns to gain insight into the structures and systems that bind them. Most preservice teachers did not fully understand that treating everyone the "same" does little to redress the inequitable access and distribution of social, political, and economic resources.

Two preservice students were ambivalent about their desire to teach for social justice. Harley, who identified as a visible minority, noted, "That's not something I would feel comfortable discussing, especially in a younger grade." Harley's reluctance had to do with not only an age-readiness issue, but also being a new teacher. Harley explained:

> [Students] might get the wrong idea from what I'm trying to say especially saying something like, "Well, these groups are minorities," or "These groups are at less of an advantage," or "These groups are at more of an advantage." That is not something I would feel comfortable discussing especially as a new teacher.

At the beginning of the program, she viewed teaching for social justice as a risk, something better left to experienced teachers with more job security, and perhaps to more cognitively mature students.

Asked about how race and racism shaped student experiences in Ontario classrooms, Analisa responded that, ideally, one would take a colour-blind approach, in which "race really doesn't matter." By adopting an approach in which race is not "seen," Analisa overlooked the cumulative and enduring ways in which race unequally shapes life chances and opportunities for children from different groups. Some have argued (e.g., Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000) that, in leaving structural inequalities in place, colour blindness has become the "new racism," positioning race as a taboo topic. Certainly, both beginning and experienced teachers need the analytical tools of productive critical consciousness to understand—and, by extension, help their students understand—how a colour-blind ideology in fact perpetuates racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

Analisa's approach to race and racism is not unique among preservice teacher candidates. The literature indicates that White preservice teacher candidates frequently use discourses of colour-blindness along with meritocracy and individualism to defend their views and avoid acknowledging White privilege (Florio-Ruane & DeTar, 2001). Educational researchers have found that it is difficult for "white preservice teachers to recognize the racism inherent in institutions such as schools when they had enjoyed invisible privileges and not been invited to question institutional racism themselves" (Flynn, Lensmire, & Lewis, 2009, p. 86; see also LeCompte & McCray, 2002). White teachers typically are unable to "see" themselves as "raced" or as having a culture (LeCompte & McCray, 2002). Speaking directly about teacher educators, researchers have pointed out that it is often difficult "for white people to talk about race and

whiteness" (Flynn et al., 2009, p. 86).

Thus, the baseline data showed that although most student participants expressed genuine interest in teaching for social justice, they had low levels of criticality. Predominantly, preservice teacher participants discussed one category of critical analysis—classism, racism, gender inequity, diversity, or White privilege. However, when elaborating on that issue, most participants rehearsed problematic ideologies of multiculturalism, colour blindness, an equality-over-equity lens, individualism, deficit theory, and meritocracy.

Before discussing the process-oriented phenomena that positively contributed to conscious raising, I briefly review the levels of critical consciousness conveyed by the preservice teacher participants at the end of the year.

Students' Levels of Criticality at the End of the Year

This section illustrates where students were at the end of the program, situating them at one of three levels of critical consciousness: micro, meso, and macro. Like the theoretical analysis itself, these categories are neither absolute nor clear-cut. Rather, they are fluid, porous, and, at times, overlapping. As emphasized by Charmaz (2008), when data are co-constructed and influenced by the biased perspectives of the participants and the researcher, such categories likely reflect partial realities at best.

Macro critical consciousness. One out of 37 preservice teachers conveyed a macro level critical consciousness as she was able to problematize—to varying degrees—the hierarchical power relations and structural inequity associated with race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Nelly, was able to productively utilize a "language of critique" and a "language of possibility" with respect to inequitable school systems. As such, Nelly intended to facilitate educational contexts that prompted students to become both critically conscious and active in addressing student-relevant social inequities. She positioned herself as a change agent in the struggle to assist in the liberation of marginalized individuals and groups. Nelly attributed the development of her critical theoretical lens and respective teaching philosophy to the 2 years' worth of PhD courses she had taken.

Meso critical consciousness. Seven out of 37 preservice teachers conveyed a meso level critical consciousness. This group of preservice teachers signaled an intention to disrupt traditional student-teacher relationships and teaching practices that reproduce social inequity. Jadyn, for example, talked about her experiences and intention to build respectful and "real" relationships with students:

> [I] must be real with students, read to them from text, it does not matter to them. But when you empathize with students, you understand the students more, you can connect with them more, admitting your own flaws, how do you respect someone who says they know everything, [I will] say I am human and I don't know everything. I am not going to pretend that I am perfect either.

Jayden explained that her relationships with students would be built on vulnerability, honesty, and mutual respect. Her teaching pedagogy can be described as disruptive in that it attempts to equalize relations of power and undermine traditional teacher-student relationships that have been typically described as authoritarian.

To further illustrate how this group of teachers intended to disrupt teaching practices, we can look at the partial meaning Caleb attributed to the term social justice:

> Social justice is about knowing that you don't know and not making assumptions. In my Gendered History course, I had a really good Professor. It was always about challenging—not accepting things at face value—or even just hypothesizing. I take this into my [Teaching] practicum.

Caleb understood that the knowledge/power nexus was socially constructed and often functioned to constitute "regimes of truth" that did little to undermine outdated, patriarchal views of gender (Foucault, 1977; Holland, 2012; Johnson, 2007).

Caleb's understanding of his role as a critical teacher embraced uncertainty and then paved the way for his counterhegemonic function as a teacher:

> In history you don't have African Americans involved in history. I researched this and presented it and told students to challenge everything and not accept things for face value. Also it is helpful, from a social justice perspective. I [momentary pause], you, read all white authors, you have a skewed perception.

By thinking clearly and closely about Whiteness as a structural system of power, Caleb seemed to have genuinely adopted a critical teaching role and counterhegemonic teaching practice.

Although this group of teachers expressed a commitment to various conscious raising teaching practices and aspired to counter traditional teacher-student relationships, they seemed unaware of the value of prompting pupils to act on their own critical insights and concerns.

Micro critical consciousness. Aronowitz and Giroux's (1985) description of an "accommodating type of intellectual" serves to encapsulate the meaning associated with a micro level critical consciousness:

> Accommodating intellectuals generally stand firm within an ideological posture and set of material practices that support the dominant society and its ruling groups. Such intellectuals are generally not aware of this process in that they do not define themselves as self-conscious agents of the status quo, even though their politics further the interests of the dominant classes. This category of intellectuals also defines themselves in terms that suggest they are free-floating, removed from the vagaries of class conflicts and partisan politics. (p. 48)

Micro level participants, then, aligned with "accommodating" intellectual types as they seemed to "function primarily to mediate uncritically ideas and social practices that serve to reproduce the status quo" (p. 39). To illustrate, when asked "What does teaching for social justice mean to you?" Bobbie answered:

> Treating everyone equally. Taking into consideration diversity and differentiation of instruction and give students what they want. Some [students] are strong and some are weak. [Teachers] need to divide our time between students based on the need of the students.

Bobbie revealed a limited understanding of social justice, confusion between the concepts of equality and equity, and an emphasis on teaching tactics that leaned toward accommodating academically diverse students.

Kendall presented another example of how students self-positioned in the micro level category, describing teaching for social justice thusly:

> [Teachers] have to let students know, even if they are young, that they must see differences as assets.

> [Teachers] must accommodate different learning needs and styles, ethnicities, and abilities. I want to teach people that differences will be in classroom, but we must accept and not be ignorant. [Teachers] need to do research on issues that you are unaware, can be culture, religion, ableism, or mental disability.

Kendall's response highlights her belief that it is necessary for the teacher to be the social justice "teaching expert" and impart knowledge to the students. Like many other micro level participants, Kendall's end of program conceptualization of the role of teacher and the function of teaching was teacher centered, and she did not acknowledge the importance of student directed learning or agency, nor did she mention any strategies that countered traditional power dynamics between teachers and students.

Although most students did not develop a macro level critical consciousness, they capably described educational experiences that were productive and counterproductive to facilitating critical learning experiences centered on issues of social justice. Though many of the teacher candidates did not appear to have a deep understanding of the structural issues of oppression, some were aware of the need for deeper thinking, reflecting, and dialoguing. Drawing from the data collected from the students at the end of the school year, I now explore the pedagogical and institutional practices that mediated the facilitation of critical consciousness.

Pedagogical and Institutional Practices and the Facilitation of Critical Consciousness

Too many tasks, too little time. As this study unfolded, it became apparent that a number of institutional variables competed for student attention, limiting their capacity to develop a critical consciousness. During the last round of interviews, the preservice teacher participants were demonstrably overwhelmed by the number of tasks and assignments that required little processing or deep thought; "being overly busy" was impeding their ability to become analytical and reflective thinkers. Berg and Seeber (2016) critiqued the culture of compressed time embedded in university contexts, emphasizing:

> Time Management is not about jamming as much as possible into your schedule, but eliminating as much as possible from your schedule so that you have time to get the important stuff done to a high degree of quality and with as little stress as possible. (Rettig, pg. 80 as cited in Berg & Seeber, 2016, p. 29)

It is not unreasonable to claim that we all have constraints for productive work projects and sustained thinking; an overload of assignments is likely to hinder high-quality, meaningful work. Along these lines, participant Sara explained:

> We have too many reflections and maybe we could focus on one reflection after each placement with listed criteria for length. Lots of small group assignments and lots of reflections are due through the year but if students are doing so many, they are doing it to just get it done.

As Sara indicated, the program's focus on quantity over quality undermined student learning. How can students learn or think deeply about subject matter or their experiences if they are occupied and preoccupied with cranking out one assignment after another? Time-compressed educational contexts restrict the development of healthy social and intellectual relationships

among students and professors.

Like Sara, Bonnie viewed her time in the Faculty of Education as excessively structured. She also addressed the problem of quantity over quality. Asked about the courses she took, Bonnie explained: "Projects, overload, 11 classes in the first 2 weeks of March and we must hand in six projects, and then when back, a 30-page project." Bonnie also described the program's assessment pattern as "Quiz, test, project."

Another participant, Jacob, explained that social justice initiatives were the last thing on his mind, as he was barely able to keep up with what he viewed as the low-level learning tasks assigned in some classes: "Now that we are so busy, eat, sleep, repeat. So, at the end of the day no one is going to reflect and say where did I incorporate social justice?" Most classroom teachers, as Evans-Winters (2009) has noted, simply have not been "afforded the opportunity for time to analyze how social conditions, historical patterns, and personal biases impact the educational system and schooling process" (p. 143).

Many students addressed the consequences of being harried for their learning experiences, but also for their relationships with faculty members and administrators. Samantha highlighted some of the implications of a structure that emphasizes quantity: "This program has given me lots of anxiety, so I am probably a little more anxious than when I started." But why did Samantha's anxiety increase during her year? She explained:

> There are so many things due and a lot of the times you feel like they [professors and administrators] just don't care about you. Like when you raise issues, they are irrelevant a lot of the times [from a faculty perspective]. You go there [to meet with university administrators] and you feel like you are bothering them. This is a huge issue for me. And it feels like I am just a customer and they have hundreds of other customers so why would they do this just for me?

Samantha's experience drew attention to a number of barriers students face to developing productive critical consciousness in a Faculty of Education that functions in the shadow of neoliberalism.

When Samantha spoke about feeling like a "customer," she pointed directly to the influence of neoliberal ideology and free-market logic on postsecondary education (Canaan, 2013; Fraser & Lamble, 2015). A rising perception of students as customers has been occurring in postsecondary education for some time in Ontario (and elsewhere) and is consistent with the free-market logic of relationships between students and institutions (Cote & Allahar, 2007, 2011). When universities become thought of as "service providers," students become less likely to establish deep and meaningful learning relationships.

There is an emerging consensus in the critical sociological literature that when it comes to schools and schooling, certain conditions are necessary to students' deep engagement with learning. These conditions include high standards for academic learning, meaningful and engaging pedagogy and curriculum, personalized learning environments, and caring teachers (Klem & Connell, 2004). Teven and McCroskey (1997) found that students who believed their teachers were caring experienced deeper levels of engagement. If healthy, attentive, and positive relationships with teachers enhance social, cognitive, and language development in young children (Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997), it is reasonable to assume that similar relationships afford significant academic and social benefits to students of all ages.

Many participants shared how being "busy" with tasks and assignments undermined their opportunity to think deeply about important subjects. With the rise of neoliberalism, busyness

has become an uncontested cultural and moral virtue, while so-called idleness has become a vice—both inside and outside the academic sphere. As scholars have argued (Coulter, 2009; Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Harvey, 2005), the neoliberal idea that busyness is a virtue operates as kind of a reassurance, a hedge against laziness and dependency. Individuals who are busy working have no time to become dependent on the government or think about policies and procedures in a critical way. According to neoliberal logic, the values of productivity and efficiency establish time as the common factor. Productivity is about getting a number of tasks done in a set unit of time, while efficiency is getting tasks done quickly. The condensed structure of the Faculty of Education program produced several time-constraining and sustained distractions from deeply processing any of the assigned critical knowledge; for example, multiple assignments were often due at the same time.

The hurried cycle to produce and submit low-level technical assignments reflects Freire's (1973) "banking" concept of education, a model that educators have long criticized. Freire was deeply skeptical of pedagogical approaches that position students as empty containers into which the teacher "deposits" knowledge. Freire argued that such an approach promotes a form of thinking that makes students vulnerable to indoctrination. Drawing a relationship between the banking model of education and the development of a critical consciousness, Freire (1973) noted:

> The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop a critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is into the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (p. 54)

Accordingly, counterproductive busyness acts as a mechanism to limit student opportunities to think more deeply and critically about the relationships among academic success, social class, race, and gender. In the present study, while consistently rushing to complete and submit busy work, the participants did not seem to have the time or mental energy to methodically reflect on the purposes of education within the context of a self-proclaimed democratic society. Greene (1976) has underscored that, in the field of teacher education, "There must be efforts made to reflect critically on the numerous modes of masking what is happening in our society" (p. 10). These research results suggest that educational contexts in which students must struggle to complete perfunctory assignments serve as "modes of masking" broader societal issues of inequity.

Agency opportunities. The development of critical consciousness seemed to be linked to a few significant agency opportunities in which the participants were engaged. Shor (1993) has defined an agency opportunity as a "dialogical educational" context that has the power to help develop a critical consciousness. Shor (1993) emphasized that, within dialogical learning contexts, "students are doing education and making it, not having education done to them or made for them" (p. 33). In alignment with this idea, this section of the results links concepts of structure, pedagogical action, and agency by examining the relationships among the Faculty of Education culture, the production of knowledge, and the critical learning experiences preservice teacher participants shared.

One institutional example of an agency opportunity that also represented a dialogical learning space was the student-led Social Justice Forum. The Forum took place in the fall, a few months after the program had started. Mary (a student participant in this study) was one of the forum's organizers. In that role, she constructed and carried out a paper survey of topics that the students

were interested in and coordinated speakers who spoke to the student-selected social justice topics. Mary spoke about the student-led Social Justice Forum as one of the most significant critical learning experiences:

> At the beginning of the semester we had teachers that believed our PLS [Professional Learning Series] was not useful. So what we did, those of us on the Teacher Society, is surveyed students to see what they wanted to learn about. The [Faculty of Education] should be incorporating these types of social justice workshops … There is so much knowledge and information that I believe that the Faculty should have one course surrounding just social justice. [The teacher candidates] wanted to learn about social justice so we did that.

The PLS organized by administrators and offered each Friday to students over the course of the program did not resonate as much as the Social Justice Forum. Structured as it was, the Social Justice Forum afforded a significant amount of student ownership and autonomy.

Some preservice teacher participants maintained that the Social Justice Forum was highly informative and that the speakers in the workshops captured their attention and fostered a deeper level of criticality. Discussing her most significant critical learning experiences at the Faculty of Education, Deanna explained:

> I am focused on the Social Justice Forum, those have been really beneficial. I would say that these [Social Justice Forum] should be mandatory. We should sit and attend all of the workshops. Overall, we should bring in people from our community who are working on the issues that are very important. Even feeling that [the Social Justice Forum] is important—it has to be there—it is part of life and learning. You will learn things about yourself too. If all of us sat in we would get something out of it.

Deanna's commitment and interest in the Social Justice Forum reflected a certain level of criticality: she understood how important it is to develop an awareness and understanding of oppression within one's own community. This goal runs alongside a commitment to developing the attitudes, knowledge, skills, resources, and coalitions needed to create the lasting change that Deanna seemed to hope for.

However, enthusiasm, interest, and involvement with the Social Justice Forum did not necessarily lead to deeper critical awareness for all student participants. Reflecting on her most critical learning experiences at the Faculty of Education, for instance, Jessica emphasized the following: "The Social Justice Forum day stands out the most. Wearing a Kirpan under your clothing, wearing a hijab in sports, peanut allergies. These discussions were very meaningful." Although she found the experience evocative, Jessica's views still align with a surface multicultural approach to issues of social justice. The critical insight she garnered from the forum did not provoke her to challenge the symbolic power (e.g., legitimizing and reproducing egalitarian social relations) inherent in the Faculty of Education (Althusser, 1969; Apple, 2001; Bourdieu, 1987; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1988a; Gramsci, 1971). In other words, the "world making power" of the educational institution, which functions to "legitimize a vision of the social world and its divisions" (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 13) was only slightly disrupted. These types of disruptions can deepen critical engagement and thus create small openings for participants to enact their own agency.

Opportunities to develop critical consciousness varied according to course. Preservice teacher participants enrolled in Frontlines explained that they were engaged in "dialogical learning" contexts (Shor, 1993). Frontlines was a service-learning course offered to preservice students in

the junior-intermediate and intermediate-senior programs. The course was run in partnership with the two local school boards. According to its promotional material, the aims and goals of Frontlines are to gain an understanding of at-risk youth, examine alternative forms of education, grasp forms of resilience and restorative practices, link with community agencies and experts to provide the student success model for learning communities, and deal with current team issues to learn to teach from a personal and social perspective.

Many participants referenced the pedagogical approach utilized by Professor S and Professor J, who co-taught the Frontlines course, as providing key critical learning experiences. When describing which experiences had had the greatest impact on developing her awareness and understanding of key social issues, Jadyn offered:

> I would say definitely the Frontlines course, during our actual class times. We had multiple guest speakers from multiple groups, all kinds of guest speakers, people from all kinds of perspectives. When you get the story from the real person, it is real; it is not just reading the text or reading a story. We had someone live in poverty and had been a single parent and understood what the reality of the situation; you get the real story. It is also hard. But it validates people when they get to share their views on things. They validate why things happen and how they happen, and how you can change these things from happening. Had tons of guest speakers, superintendents, poverty, LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Alliance], eating disorders, career sessions for high school kids not university bound.

Personal narratives are powerful tools for evincing how overlapping systems of oppression and privilege have real material consequences in the lives of everyday people. Jadyn illustrated how the personal and lived narratives shared by these guest speakers disrupted the dominant technocratic rationale embedded in education's transmission mode, as "private" personal histories and struggles were realized in the learning process. Such disruptions transform the education practice into a "humanizing practice" (Freire, 1973) that temporarily and partially works toward "building a new social order" (McLaren, 1994). Simon (1992) suggested, "Remembrance is the practice in which certain images and stories of a collective past are brought together with a person's feelings and comprehension of their embodied presence in time and space" (p. 149). Remembering and retelling past stories links the past to the present and can open up the door to a more democratic future.

Jadyn spoke further to the positive impact of the pedagogical approach taken by Professor S and Professor J throughout their course:

> The approach [by Professor S and Professor J] really goes past the classroom. The support [from instructors], comradery [from instructors and peers], personal mentors [speakers and instructors], showed us that you must be real with students. When you empathize with students, you understand the students more. You can connect with them more, very informative and enlightening.

Jadyn's desire to construct caring and empathetic relationships was grounded in the idea of mutual respect between herself and her future students. By being an empathetic teacher, she could begin to understand students in holistic and complex ways. Hooks (1994) emphasized the need for educators to consider their students' experiences both inside and outside of school. Professor S and Professor J offered Jadyn opportunities to increase her awareness of key social issues, developing a pedagogical method that Freire (1973) might call a humanizing practice. Antonia maintained:

Make Frontlines mandatory. Incorporate guest speakers that worked in Frontlines and use. The best part of Frontlines was hearing from so many people about so many issues and then hearing about all of the resources that are available that we are not aware of. We now have a touchstone when guiding students.

As these preservice teacher participants shared, Professor S and Professor J structured a variety of learning activities that prompted serious consideration of diverse social justice issues and perspectives, helping students develop a more sophisticated critical consciousness. Reflecting aspects of Shor's (1993) dialogical critical pedagogy, these professors took preservice teacher participants beyond mere discussion of the issues. The Frontlines course inspired their understanding of how individuals and groups interpret and experience the world, thereby encouraging them to reflect upon how racial, gender, and social class discrimination is socially constructed and mediated through social relations. The political enters the pedagogical and disrupts normative structures, such as the top-down power hierarchy and transmission mode of learning inherent in educational systems.

The Frontlines course explicitly and implicitly emphasized that education is not neutral. Professor S and Professor J showed that schools are sites for organizing knowledge and power; but, in so doing, they demonstrated that school can be a vehicle for change rather than a site for social reproduction. The pedagogical space constructed by Professor S and Professor J fostered a collaborative spirit, respect for voice and choice, dialogical relations, and a heightened sensitivity to the learning and personal needs of the students they teach—and on to the students their students will teach. Their practice recalls Simon's (1992) application of a pedagogy of possibility, which positions teaching as a form of cultural politics and, by extension, teachers as cultural workers. This form of critical teaching and learning is founded on an ethical and political stance and is committed to advancing the human dignity of marginalized individuals and groups. However, Simon also warned against imposing a prescriptive set of practices to achieve scripted outcomes, encouraging teachers to reflect on whether their teaching practices (e.g., hegemonic or counterhegemonic) aligned with the ongoing and developing social visions they have for their students.

Discussion

This study sought to utilize critical theory and constructivist grounded methodology to explore how critical pedagogy, as practised by a small group of teacher educators, influenced preservice teacher participants' development of critical consciousness. The study was also attentive to how students' levels of criticality were shaped and influenced by other learning contexts in the broader culture of a Faculty of Education. The results of this grounded theory study indicate that most of the preservice teacher participants demonstrated limited critical consciousness during interviews at both the beginning and end of the school year. This limited level of critical consciousness was characterized by a technocratic and surface understanding of social justice. Although some preservice teacher participants seemed to gain a broader critical awareness of issues associated with inequity, most preservice teacher participants betrayed only a partial understanding of the contributing systemic structural issues.

The findings suggest that critical social justice pedagogies be integrated much more deeply into the program. Despite publicly citing the importance of bringing deep awareness to issues of

inequity and diversity, faculties of education, such as the one under study, have had difficulty integrating pedagogies that promote such an outcome (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Sleeter, 2009; Solomon et al., 2003). Lund (1998), for example, found that "the focus on addressing issues of diversity and inequity within teacher education programs is not afforded a high priority in many Canadian universities" (p. 165). This study indicated that a central challenge to developing critical consciousness was the limited time available for self-reflection and critical dialogue. On this subject, Goodreau and Fredua-Kwarteng (2007) concluded:

> Most programs do not provide teacher candidates opportunities to question, recognize and understand their own worldviews and beliefs about race, culture, and ethnicity, so they are able to understand their diverse students. If this examination is ignored in their professional preparation, educators may never be called upon to consider how their own backgrounds may influence their ability to truly understand the perspective and needs of their students. A transformative approach begins with preservice teachers exploring and better understanding their own social identities. (p. 2)

Aligning with this rationale, Evans-Winters (2009) concluded:

> Most preservice teachers, function in a way that they simply do not understand the significance of how systems of oppression and systems of privilege function in our world, in our schools, in our classrooms to benefit some people while disadvantaging others. (p. 143)

The time-compressed institutional context precluded opportunities for the preservice teachers to reflect and scrutinize their own social location, which partially explains why they were unable to speak in depth to how intersecting systems of privilege and oppression shape student experiences and student achievement—including their own.

Another effective way of promoting critical consciousness among preservice teachers was through storytelling. Guest speakers who recounted their experiences with various forms of discrimination or oppression left a powerful impression, revealing that experiential knowledge of historically marginalized populations is legitimate, appropriate, and important to understand and analyze when teaching about oppression. Delgado (1989) illuminated the effectiveness of these methods, noting that "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (p. 2436). Critical pedagogues committed to facilitating critical consciousness may benefit from adopting some aspects of this story-sharing tradition.

Findings from this study also suggest that developing critical consciousness is challenging to teacher education professors operating in an educational context shaped by neoliberalism. How are professors to implement and carry out dialogical teaching and learning, in which rich and diverse views are shared and debated among students, when class sizes continue to increase? In light of increasing class size, how are professors to teach toward developing a lively critical consciousness when preservice teacher candidates feel distant and alienated from other students and from the professor?

When preservice teacher candidates view education as a commodity and perceive themselves as consumers of the so-called educational commodity, they may resist engaging in the deeper, complex, time-consuming, and often uncomfortable learning process inherent in developing a critical consciousness. Researchers are increasingly documenting examples of how neoliberalism has reshaped universities (Cote & Allahar, 2007). In Ontario, neoliberal policies have reduced government control in funding of operations, increasing universities' responsibility for generating

a larger share of the revenues. This measure explains, in part, the growing number of international students in Ontario universities. The marketization of education positions students in a transactional framework in which they come to see themselves as paying for services and demanding particular outcomes. Casey, Lozenski, and McManimon (2013) cited this model as one of neoliberalism's "insidious side effects" as it undermines the "work of critical educators" (p. 36). Teachers committed to critical pedagogies often face institutional constraints that narrow possibilities for transformative learning (Fraser & Lamble, 2015).

Students who develop a deeper level of critical consciousness through rich critical-pedagogical-focused course work are more likely to actualize the transformational aims of critical pedagogy themselves. Evans-Winters (2009) emphasized:

> Preservice teachers must undergo a transformation process before they view themselves as teachers and leaders in the classroom, school community, and larger society. .[and] view themselves as change agents in the struggle for social justice, and who intentionally adopt the profession of teaching to assist in the liberation of marginalized individuals and groups in a democratic society. (p. 141)

Most participants did not undergo the personal transformation that often occurs in developing a critical consciousness. Rather, most preservice teachers offered limited views of social inequity and, although some intended to counter traditional educational practices, student agency was not a key educational outcome. Nelly was the exception; she seemed to have experienced a degree of self-realization and positioned herself as a change agent ready to support marginalized students

This study demonstrated that practicing critical pedagogy and reaching its primary goals of facilitating critical consciousness and prompting agency are deeply challenging. Facilitating critical consciousness—let alone prompting agency—requires a significant time commitment and skilled facilitation to meaningfully dialogue and process complex concepts such as racism, classism, and gender inequity. Such commitment was evidenced (almost exclusively) in the Frontlines course. During end-of-year interviews, most preservice teacher participants described an excess of technical tasks and lack of time to engage in rich dialogue and meaningful learning tasks that would deepen their respective levels of criticality. The compressed sense of time and overload of surface-level assignments was not conducive to facilitating critical consciousness. As Giroux (1988b) has pointed out, emphasis on quantity over quality is "reminiscent of life in factories with its production schedules and hierarchal work relationships" (p. 40). For Giroux, this dynamic operates as a "brake" upon engagement and participation in democratic processes.

Faculty of Education administrators and professors devoted to social justice and to bolstering students' levels of criticality must appreciate that critical consciousness involves reflection on the complexities of multiple identities and multiple relations of power. Students need an adequate amount of time and mental energy to engage in this process.

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Appendix A: Script for Initial Interviews with Faculty Participants

Previously, you were informed that the purpose of the study was to explore how critical pedagogy influences the student critical thinking. The purpose of this interview is to document your critical teaching and learning philosophy. I will be asking you a few questions that about the foundational theories that guide your teaching and the teaching practices that support these theories.

Confidentiality: You may decide that you want to withdraw from the study or do not want your data used in this research. If this is the case, please contact the researcher _____with this request either in person, email _____, or alternatively, through phone correspondence at XXX.

Guiding Interview Questions for Faculty:

1.   Do you identify as a "critical pedagogue" and what does that mean to you?

2.   How do you define the term "critical pedagogy"?

3.   Which theories and theorists do you refer to for guidance?

4.   What are the key learning outcomes of your teaching practice?

5.   What specific teaching practices or strategies do you implement to reach the intended learning outcomes?

6.   Can you describe your thought process when designing or redesigning your course syllabus?

7.   What kinds of challenges are associated with your teaching approach or instructional practices?

8.   Is there anything else you would like to add that you think is a key factor in this study or interview process?

9.   Do you have any questions at this point?

Useful Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact the researcher, _____at _____.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Your time and insight is much appreciated.

Appendix B: Baseline for Assessing Critical Consciousness

Phase One Data Collection:

1. Within the world of teaching, what does the phrase, diverse students, mean to you? Please explain.

2. Do you ever think about how your teaching practice will impact the minority students in your classroom? If so, please explain how.

3. Do you have any interest in teaching for social justice? If so, please explain why and how you may do this?

4. How do you feel about the following statement: Generally speaking, women, poor children, and certain racialized groups and ethnicities have fewer chances to get a good education and get ahead in life? Please explain and justify your feelings and thoughts on this statement. (The components of this question are modifications from the work of Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2014)

5. Do you ever critically reflect on how your identity (e.g. race, gender, social class among other factors) will impact your relationship with future students? If so, how? Please explain.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Your time and insight is much appreciated.

Appendix C: Reflecting on Critical Learning Experiences While Being Taught by a Critical Educator at the End of School Year

Phase Two Data Analysis:

1. What are your core values, what beliefs drive you? Name three core values that define who you are.

2. As you think back to your learning experiences within the context of your critical pedagogy class with [instructor's name], what resonates most with you?

3. Describe how your knowledge/beliefs about diverse students has changed as a result of being in [instructor name's] critical pedagogy class?

4. Describe how your knowledge/beliefs about the role of teachers has changed as a result of being in [instructor name's] critical pedagogy class?

5. Describe some specific examples of your socially just teaching practice?

6. What specific readings, discussions, field experiences had the greatest impact on your social justice teaching practices?

7. What experiences BEFORE the program had the greatest impact on your knowledge, attitudes and skills related to teaching for social justice?

8. What experiences DURING the program had the greatest impact on your knowledge, attitudes and skills related to teaching for social justice?

9. What suggestions do you have for making the class stronger in its efforts to develop socially just teachers?

Thank you for participating in this study.

Your time and insight is much appreciated.