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REVIEWING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY'S CRITICISMS AND PROVIDING A  
PRAGMATIC HEURISTIC

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A Thesis  
Presented To  
Eastern Washington University  
Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts in English, Rhetoric & Technical Communication

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By  
Dominick S. Giguere  
Spring 2016

THESIS OF Dominick S. Giguere APPROVED BY

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## MASTER'S THESIS

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## Abstract

This article reviews scholarly literature about problems in critical pedagogy, pragmatic examples of implementing critical pedagogy, professional learning communities, and critical pedagogy-based curricula in new media toward proposing part of a broad solution to some of critical pedagogy's criticisms in reaching out to educators: the use of a heuristic that critical pedagogues could use to determine the accessibility in tone of curricula that they could reference to colleagues whom may not know about or otherwise avoid critical pedagogy. Under this initiative, a heuristic is developed based on a review of literature defining and characterizing critical pedagogy. This heuristic is then applied in a study of three critical pedagogy-based unit plans. The results confirm the validity of the heuristic, but the results also cast doubt on the range of its use. A positive correlation about the rate of use of keywords with positive- and negative-notations cross-sectioned with unit grade level suggests that the usage rate of such keywords in critical curricula declines as curricula targets earlier grade levels. This positive correlation presents a case for why this research is valuable, and it also creates a compelling case for further research.

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## Background

Critical pedagogy is a broad and sweeping coalescence of interdisciplinary ideas about contemporary education. It synthesizes ideas in philosophy, education, cultural and literary studies, sociology, and other disciplines. Because of its eclecticism, critical pedagogy is not easily defined. However, Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell (2008) characterize critical pedagogy as:

an approach to education that is rooted in the experiences of marginalized peoples; that is centered in a critique of structural, economic, and racial oppression; that is focused on dialogue instead of a one-way transmission of knowledge; and that is structured to empower individuals and collectives as agents of social change. (p. 183)

There are many scholars and noted critical pedagogues, including Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Joe Kincheloe, bell hooks, Antonia Darder, Ira Shor, and others (Breuing, 2011, p. 3-5; Foley, Morris, Gounari, & Agostinone-Wilson, 2015, p. 113-15; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 183-84; Alegria, 2014, p. 101-05), but foremost is Paulo Freire. Peter McLaren (2000) observes that Freire is “[g]enerally considered the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy” (p. 1). While controlling themes within critical pedagogy can be traced to different schools of thought scattered amongst previous centuries (Breuing, 2011, p. 3-5; Foley et al., 2015, p. 113-15), Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, written in the mid- and late-1960s during his exile from Brazil, is considered a landmark amalgamation of many of the themes and ideas comprising critical pedagogy and is personified as the modern critical pedagogy movement’s birthing. In his pivotal work, published in Portuguese in 1968, English in 1970, and re-released in 2000 with a

30th Anniversary Edition, Freire presents a series of observations and analyses about structural education that underlie his proposals for education reform (Freire, 2000) and would catalyze discussions about education and the role of the educator for subsequent decades.

### **Introduction**

Despite the emergence of myriad critical pedagogues and the creation of knowledge through academic debates, critical pedagogy has a problem. Jacob Neumann (2013) observes that “[w]hile critical pedagogy has sustained tremendous growth inside scholarly texts, it remains essentially invisible and irrelevant within K-12 schools” (p. 143). Indeed, many scholars have written about the plights hindering critical pedagogy’s successful implementation into classrooms of all levels (Neumann, 2013; Fobes & Kaufman, 2007; Weiner, 2007; Foley et al., 2015; Graff, 2008; Yagelski, 2006; Breuing, 2011; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005). While some scholars have described educators’ resistance to critical pedagogy’s ideological implications (Neumann, 2013; Fobes & Kaufman, 2007; Weiner, 2007; Foley et al., 2015; Graff, 2008; Yagelski, 2006), others have detailed problems with defining critical pedagogy and its theories (Breuing, 2011; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005). Recent scholarship has examined the status of critical pedagogy scholars responding to these assessments. Mary Breuing (2011) describes how:

[n]umerous critical pedagogues, including Ken Osborne (1990), Henry Giroux (1997), and Stephen Sweet (1998), among others, argue that critical theory needs to move beyond educational ideology, examining how it can be meaningfully employed in classroom practice. (p. 2)

Corroborating this sensible push as well as further describing the difficulties critical pedagogy faces in its implementation, Jacob Neumann (2013) writes that “critical pedagogy is in crisis because it consistently fails to connect to large numbers of teachers ... it needs a new approach towards teachers” (p. 143). As for this new approach, Neumann (2013) writes that “[f]or critical pedagogy to begin to make meaningful ... criticalists must not talk at teachers, but rather with them about the specific challenges that they face and the contexts in which they work (p. 143).

This article is written in response to Breuing and Neumann, to examine how critical pedagogy “can be meaningfully employed in classroom practice” (Breuing, 2011, p. 2) while “changing teachers’ dispositions towards critical teaching” (Neumann, 2013, p. 143), in addition to assuaging some of the criticism critical pedagogy faces. Of the reviewed literature conceptualizing critical pedagogy’s plights, none of it considers the use of new media, such as the Internet, in being part of a broad solution. While there exists scholarly examples of pragmatic critical pedagogy in the form of curricula (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Alegria, 2014; Hardy, 1989; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Mueller, 2013), and scholarly discussion about critical pedagogical learning communities (Evans, 2015; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012; Watson, 2014), neither are conceived as being part of a broad solution to referenced problems in critical pedagogy.

This article reviews scholarly literature about problems in critical pedagogy (Neumann, 2013; Fobes & Kaufman, 2007; Weiner, 2007; Foley et al., 2015; Graff, 2008; Yagelski, 2006; Breuing, 2011; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005; Riveros et al., 2012), pragmatic examples of the implementation of critical pedagogy curricula

(Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Alegria, 2014; Hardy, 1989; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Mueller, 2013), professional learning communities (Evans, 2015; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012; Watson, 2014), and critical pedagogy in new media (Rorabaugh, 2012a; Rorabaugh, 2012b) toward proposing part of a broad solution: the use of a heuristic to evaluate critical pedagogy-based curricula available online. Using this literature as a basis, a heuristic is developed based on a review of literature defining and characterizing critical pedagogy. This heuristic is then applied in a study of three critical pedagogy-based unit plans. The results confirm the validity of the heuristic, but the results also cast doubt on the range of its use. A positive correlation about the rate of use of keywords with positive- and negative-connotations cross-sectioned with unit grade level suggests that the usage rate of such keywords in critical curricula declines as curricula targets earlier grade levels. This positive correlation creates a compelling case for further research.

### **Literature Review: Criticism of Critical Pedagogy**

#### **Reach and Tone**

Despite the push for meaningfully employing critical pedagogy in the classroom (Breuing, 2011), a search for literature that describes the contemporary state of critical pedagogy in education yields bleak assessments (Weiner, 2007; Neumann, 2013; Fobes & Kaufman, 2007). Eric Weiner (2007) notes that “critical pedagogy is almost completely absent from the debates on schooling as they take place in institutions of power” (p. 59). He expands that “[o]utside of individual teachers and researchers who are dispersed throughout various departments and colleges, critical pedagogy as an epistemological paradigm has failed to reach or attract a critical mass” (p. 59). Neumann

(2013) correlates this problem, writing that “most critical pedagogy suffers from the problem of totality and speaks merely to educators who already hold critical dispositions” (p. 129). In a grim assessment, Fobes & Kaufman (2007) begin their essay with an observation that summarily contextualizes critical pedagogy: “[a]lthough it is by no means part of the teaching canon” (p. 26). Knight and Pearl (2000) observe that “very few teachers...are even aware of its existence” (as cited in Neumann, 2013, p. 130). All of these scholars infer that it is increasingly difficult to “distinguish critical pedagogy from other forms of active learning” (Fobes & Kaufman, 2007, p. 26) (Weiner, 2007; Neumann, 2013).

Much literature describes educators’ resistance to critical pedagogy’s ideological implications (Neumann, 2013; Fobes & Kaufman, 2007; Weiner, 2007; Foley et al., 2015; Graff, 2008; Yagelski, 2006). Robert Yagelski (2006) observes how “[m]ost teachers I have worked with do not readily embrace the notion that the education system they are part of and to which they have committed themselves in good faith is inherently flawed in the ways Freire describes (p. 542). Further representative of this disconnect is criticism of the “opaque language” often used in critical pedagogy (Foley et al., 2015, p. 121). Neumann (2013) correlates this observation, wondering “how much transformative potential does a critical pedagogy steeped in Marxist language and ideals, in revolution, and in political activism actually and practically hold if its language turns people away from it” (p. 135)? Knight and Pearl (2000) contend that the language found in critical texts can make critical pedagogy seem to be “expressed in a secret code...that has its own brand of exclusiveness” (as cited in Neumann, 2013, p. 132). This language can cause educators to withdraw from pursuing new pedagogies, especially at the K-12 level.

Neumann (2013) notes how “the critical pedagogy literature is packed with thick critiques of schooling and capitalist society that are often far removed from the everyday hurly-burly of K-12 classrooms” (p. 132). Further, this discrepancy in language is characterized between those who can access critical pedagogy and those subjected to its teaching methods, a discrepancy which is represented in the classroom. Gerald Graff (2008), former president of the Modern Language Association, writes that “[g]iven the inequality in power and experience between students and teachers (even teachers from disempowered groups), students are often justifiably afraid to challenge our political views even if we beg them to do so” (p. 18). This observation describes something very real in many critical classrooms.

Educators themselves can feel pressured conforming to the pedagogical views of their respective schools as well as those schools’ curricula. Neumann (2013) writes that “teachers continue to follow, and thus tacitly endorse, the common script not just in reaction to institutional pressures, but also from an emotional desire to fit into mainstream notions about teachers” (p. 140). Neumann (2013) expands about the pressure that standardized tests have, noting how “teachers face real and substantial pressures in the classroom that affect their very job security. Much, perhaps most of this pressure comes from mandated accountability demands that cannot be ignored and can make teachers feel subsumed by *the test*” (p. 137; emphasis added). Additionally, some educators are torn between implementing a curriculum of their own and following provided curricula. In examining this struggle, Augusto Riveros, Paul Newton, and David Burgess (2012) recall how “there seemed to be a contradiction between the apparent

democratic involvement of teachers in constructing a shared understanding of the school's goals and the fact that the goals are set by educational legislators" (p. 208).

### **Criticism and Concern for Critical Pedagogues' Knowledge**

Studies measuring and evaluating self-described critical pedagogue beliefs about critical pedagogy (Breuing, 2011; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005) find generalized problems with the ability of even self-identified critical pedagogues. Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa (2005) conducted a qualitative study of 17 physical educators that describe themselves as teaching from a critical pedagogy (p. 246). Their findings, which suggest that "only a handful of participants seemed to understand and practice CP [critical pedagogy] in ways congruent with those espoused by the main literature," have troubling implications (p. 257). In addition, Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa (2005) further note that "11 of these 17 so-called critical pedagogues had vague definitions of CP, its principles, and its purposes (and 3 of them had no definitions at all)" (p. 258). Breuing (2011) conducted a similar qualitative study measuring the same number of respondents, 17, but not selective about measuring only physical educators (p. 6). While Breuing (2011) formulates different conclusions, mainly about problematizing critical pedagogy's definition and the dearth of knowledge about female scholars (p. 16-21), than the conclusions Ruiz and Fernandez-Balboa (2005) formulate, Breuing's respondents typically demonstrate understanding of critical pedagogy and express understanding in creating a critical pedagogy classroom (p. 6-16). However, both studies describe problems with defining critical pedagogy (Breuing, 2011; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005).

### **Overview**



Critical pedagogues have conceptualized these criticisms as reasons behind why critical pedagogy struggles to expand its influence beyond scholarship to classrooms (Neumann, 2013; Fobes & Kaufman, 2007; Weiner, 2007; Foley et al., 2015; Graff, 2008; Yagelski, 2006; Breuing, 2011; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005; Riveros et al., 2012). Educators observe a disconnect amongst the global narrative of oppression critical pedagogy espouses (Graff, 2008; Yagelski, 2006), the complexity of critical pedagogy and problems defining and explaining it (Breuing, 2011; Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005; Foley et al., 2015), and issues with the radicalness and complexity of its language (Neumann, 2013; Foley et al., 2015). These issues hinder the expansion of critical pedagogy in the classroom. However, there is much scholarship describing successful, pragmatic examples of critical pedagogy applied in the classroom (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Alegria, 2014; Hardy, 1989; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Mueller, 2013). How can this literature be conceived as part of a broad solution to the posed problems in critical pedagogy?

### **Literature Review: Pragmatic, Local Narratives**

A common theme in scholarly literature describing examples of successful implementation of critical pedagogy to the classroom (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Alegria, 2014; Hardy, 1989; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Mueller, 2013) is pragmatism. Critical pedagogy, most of all, should be aware that a critical theory that is not adaptable to the lives of those it seeks to help as well as to those in a position to implement respective theory risks becoming as oppressive as competing theories it seeks to supplant. Jacob Neumann (2013) correlates this observation, writing that “to de-emphasize local narratives can easily lead to de-emphasizing the practical and affective narratives that

teachers live and tell about their teaching practices, the narratives that are crucial to producing any meaningful critical change in schools (p. 130)” In this context, I define successful, pragmatic examples of critical pedagogy applied in the classroom (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Alegria, 2014; Hardy, 1989; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Mueller, 2013) as those also adapting to and meeting needs of the community and teacher. Further, emphasis must be placed on transferable knowledge from these articles. Units and lesson plans do not necessarily transfer between grade level, geographic region, or community, but the reasoning, rationale, and themes present in those curricula can. Equally important, reports about what is happening in educator classrooms can differ from what is happening in their classrooms, especially if the reporter is the educator.

### **Examples**

With these paradigms in mind, what transferable knowledge do the scholarly literature describing examples of successful implementation of critical pedagogy to the classroom (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Alegria, 2014; Hardy, 1989; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Mueller, 2013) describe? Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell (2008) describe their conscious decision to adapt to and meet the needs of the immediate community, writing that “[t]hough we didn’t always agree with traditional definitions and measures of academic literacy, we remained committed to facilitating academic skills and academic achievement in our classrooms” (p. 184). They further elaborate how they “understood the promotion of literacy development and academic achievement to be part of our mandate— from the profession, from the students, and from their families” (p. 184-85). Discussing the needs of the students, they describe how “students needed to achieve academically in our schools” because “our students existed in a world where they

would be expected to take and perform well on *standardized tests* that served as gatekeepers to postsecondary education and, as a consequence, professional membership (p. 184-85; emphasis added). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell's (2008) approach to meeting the needs of the community, their colleagues and administrators to the students, represents the pragmatic approach to emphasizing local narratives that Neumann (2013) references.

Adelina Alegria (2014) reports on success in implementing critical pedagogy into an English Language Learner secondary biology classroom in a way that incorporates the local narratives of her students. She proclaims the "importance of connecting academic content to her student's own personal life experiences to support the students to get to know themselves" (Alegria, 2014, p. 111). Later, Alegria (2014) further emphasizes how important she found to "construct curricula that drew upon the cultural resources that students bring with them to the school—their languages, their histories, their experiences" (p. 112).

While important, another feature worthy of examination in these examples is the curricula rationale. Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell (2008) reflect that they "were able to honor the existential experiences of our students and to work toward the development of academic literacies by complementing the canonical literature with popular cultural texts from music, film, mass media, and sports" (p. 186). However, to them it was more important that they "were able to situate all texts and curricula within a critical pedagogy that was explicitly aware of issues of power, oppression, and transformation, that honored the non-school cultural practices of the students, and that included the students in authentic dialogue" (p. 186-87). Similarly, Adelina Alegria

(2014) discusses how the curricula “placed the students in a situation where they were challenged to become aware of their roles in society, about their understanding of inequality—who is in power and why—and their own personal power to change their statuses or roles” (p. 114).

### **Overview**

Other scholars (Hardy, 1989; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Mueller, 2013) correlate the reasoning, rationale, and themes Alegria (2014) and Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) describe: a local, multicultural narrative drawing on the experiences of students and needs of the immediate community (Hardy, 1989, p. 226-31; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008, p. 27-33), often contrasted with the traditional white, patriarchal, militaristic hegemony that has structurally dominated society (Mueller, 2013, p. 173) to encourage students’ critical thought. This formula is more adaptable and less theoretically rigid in the tradition of Neumann (2013) while practically representing how critical pedagogy can be meaningfully employed in classroom practice (Breuing, 2011, p. 2) as a general direction for lesson planning.

### **Literature Review: Educators Are Learners**

As part of a broad solution to meaningfully employing critical pedagogy in the classroom (Breuing, 2011) and nurturing teachers’ critical dispositions (Neumann, 2013), the approach to reaching educators with critical pedagogy should be examined in the context of professional learning and in consideration of new media that substantially impact the lives of educators. In approaching educators as learners themselves, an assumption being that one reason most non-critical pedagogues are as such is because they have not been exposed to critical pedagogy (Knight & Pearl, 2000, as cited in

Neumann, 2013, p. 130), an important concept to recall is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. In characterizing this concept, Karim Shabani, Mohamad Khatib, and Saman Ebadi (2010) write that "[t]he idea is that individuals learn best when working together with others during joint collaboration, and it is through such collaborative endeavors with more skilled persons that learners learn and internalize new concepts, psychological tools, and skills" (p. 238). Further, "[t]he collaborative guidance provided by the peers or mentors for the teachers could also be provided on-line via internet" (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010, p. 243). Professional learning in a new medium, the Internet, is most likely a common occurrence for educators now and will only increasingly so in the future. Further, research suggests (Evans, 2015; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012; Watson, 2014; Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010) that professional learning best occurs in a community, correlating Vygotsky's research.

### **Professional Learning Communities for Educators**

Professional learning communities for educators have been well documented and researched (Evans, 2015; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012; Watson, 2014; Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). Laura Servage (2008) describes the professional learning community, writing that they are:

characterized by a number of core beliefs: (1) that staff professional development is critical to improved student learning; (2) that this professional development is most effective when it is collaborative and collegial; and (3) that this collaborative work should involve inquiry and problem-solving in authentic contexts of daily teaching practices." (p. 63)

Augusto Riveros, Paul Newton, and David Burgess (2012) write that “[t]he concept of professional learning communities relies on the assumption that something ought to be improved in the school and, further, that transformation of practices (and perhaps thinking) is required” (p. 207). In the context of making change efforts practical, account for teachers’ knowledge and beliefs, and fitting into teachers’ hectic lives (Neumann, 2013, p. 130), online professional communities align with critical pedagogy.

Laura Servage (2008) notes that “[t]he language of professional learning community literature promotes two ideals: democratic schools, and schools as *Geimenschaft*, or relationally-bound communities” (p. 64). Augusto Riveros, Paul Newton, and David Burgess (2012) succinctly observe that “professional learning communities appeal to psychological notions like commitment and willingness (Tarnoczi, 2006), which suggests that interventions must operate at the level of the teachers’ dispositions or attitudes towards common values or shared understanding (p. 207). This observation is important because it correlates Neumann’s (2013) research about how critical pedagogy should consider a practical approach. Jacob Neumann (2013) writes that a “practical approach to change also draws from Cuban’s (1988) analysis of first-order and second-order change. First-order change is practical change. It is change that works within present systems. As Cuban illustrates, this type of change happens regularly in schools” (p. 142). Neumann continues on to describe second-order change, and how it is “much more rare. This type of change seeks to fundamentally disrupt foundational structures within an organization. Critical pedagogy too frequently advocates for second-order change ... instead of focusing on practical first-order changes that are much more likely to take hold” (p. 142). Neumann (2013) further writes that:

educational change should be approached with sustainability in mind (Fullan 2004). Criticalists must better value the daily struggles teachers face and better appreciate that ‘any teaching decision is necessarily a compromise among numerous desirable approaches and desirable ends’ (Kennedy 2006, p. 206). Because teachers often embrace dominant patterns and structures of schooling, it is not sustainable to consistently or primarily advocate for their wholesale revision. But by advocating for small-scale, practical, and sustainable change, those efforts might be better received by teachers. (p. 142)

These are reasons why the approaches of Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) as well as Alegria (2014) are especially valid; they are approaches that can be impactful because they meet the needs of teachers as well as the communities they teach in.

### **Critical Professional Learning Communities in New Media**

Appraising the difficulty of expanding critical pedagogy’s reach in a digital age while also addressing critical pedagogy’s issues with the extreme tone of its code, Kincheloe (2007) argues that:

If critical pedagogy is to matter as we move toward the second decade of the twenty-first century . . . then it must meet several contemporary challenges . . . In an era when open-access publishing on the Internet is a compelling issue in the politics of education, I contend that open-access writing and speaking about critical pedagogy are also profoundly important. Such a populist form of criticality does not in any manner undermine our intellectual rigor and theoretical sophistication; instead it challenges our pedagogical ability to express complex

ideas in a language that is understandable and germane to wide audiences. (as cited in Rorabaugh, 2012b, para. 6)

However, most literature about the topic of new media and critical pedagogy involves itself with expanding the umbrella of critical pedagogy to include fostering students' critical literacy of new media (Coronado, 2011; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Burnett & Merchant, 2011). This expansion of critical pedagogy is laudable, but it does not address proliferating educator professional learning of critical pedagogy in new media. Pete Rorabaugh (2012a) observes how "training teachers for higher ed classrooms (physical and virtual) or classrooms in general (from the position of critical pedagogy) has been, at best, an inconsistently approached objective" (para. 8). Rorabaugh (2012a) later recognizes the promise of critical educator professional learning communities in new media, however, writing that "[t]hrough electronic publishing, social media connectivity, and new media composition... training can now be satisfied by a host of individually or collectively driven activities" (para. 8). The widespread actualization of this idea as of 2016, however, seems to lag behind the exigence for it.

### **An Example That Works**

One example of an educator professional learning community aimed at proliferating critical pedagogy is Digital Pedagogy Lab. Digital Pedagogy Lab describes itself on its website as a non-profit that:

focuses on the implementation of critical digital pedagogy in education at all levels. Our open-access peer-reviewed journal champions the voices of often unheard teachers and learners. We also offer professional development



opportunities that prepare learners, educators, librarians, and administrators to teach, collaborate, and think with digital technology. (“About Us,” n.d.)

Indeed, Digital Pedagogy Lab provides ample resources for critical and non-critical educators alike, serving as an actualized example of a critical professional learning community in new media. It answers the exigency Kincheloe (2007) describes.

Digital Pedagogy Lab is, however, but one resource attempting to alleviate what is a systemic problem. In the context of Neumann (2013)’s call for making change efforts practical, accounting for teachers’ knowledge and beliefs, and fitting into teachers’ hectic lives (p. 130), as well as Breuing’s (2011) emphasis on how critical pedagogy can be “meaningfully employed in classroom practice” (p. 2), one resource alone cannot succeed.

### **A Heuristic**

I propose a heuristic for critical pedagogues to use to help answer the problem Neumann (2013) and Breuing (2011) describe. I do not have an answer to the problem, but I believe a heuristic could help as part of a broad solution. I will develop a heuristic and model its use in a study.

### **Exigence**

The disconnect between critical pedagogy literature and the realities of teacher lives has been well documented (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Alegria, 2014; Neumann, 2013; Yagelski, 2006). Based on his observation that “[t]eachers...have so many other things to worry about that thinking about teaching is often at number seven or eight on their ‘to-do lists’” (p. 131), Neumann (2013) declares that “change efforts must be practical, must take into account teachers’ knowledge and beliefs, and must fit into

teachers' already crowded work lives" ( p. 130). In combination with requirements that educators cannot curtail, such as standardized tests (Neumann, 2013; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), critical pedagogy cannot begin to meaningfully affect change in the classroom if it keeps with its heavy-handed, theoretical approach (Neumann, 2013; Yagelski, 2006). Educators have little time (Neumann, 2013), underdeveloped critical dispositions (Neumann, 2013; Yagelski, 2006) and hegemonic community pressures (Neumann, 2013; Yagelski, 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Alegria, 2014; Mueller, 2013). The pragmatic approach of Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) as well as Alegria (2014) that meet the needs of teachers as well as the communities they teach in should be applied to broader efforts to change the critical dispositions of educators so that they "buy-in" to critical pedagogy (Neumann, 2013, p. 129).

### **A Goal of Critical Pedagogy**

A clear theme in history is that people are oppressed. Even in the United States of America, the tone of recent nationalist political discourse suggests a movement mirroring historical trends that describe oppression. Critical pedagogues believe that teaching from a critical perspective will educate students to act as agents of social change; challenging societal constructions that critical pedagogues believe are oppressive and lead to the marginalization of peoples. Because of this belief, critical pedagogues are committed to teaching from a critical perspective and to educating teachers about critical pedagogy in an attempt to further critical pedagogy's reach.

A major goal of critical pedagogy is to reach non-critical educators and convert them to teach from a critical perspective. However, critical pedagogy is comprised of ideas that are sometimes absolute and often vehement. These ideas and the language

surrounding those ideas, as the literature has described, cause non-critical educators to disengage from critical pedagogy.

With this heuristic, I want to reach non-critical educators who are neither exposed nor opposed to critical pedagogy. I am hoping to develop a heuristic that can aid introducing those educators to critical pedagogy in a way that has a high likelihood of success, which, research has shown, comes in as small of a step as nudging their critical dispositions.

### **Theoretical Purpose**

If many educators are not even aware of critical pedagogy's existence or bristle at the totality of its ideologue language as the literature suggests (Neumann, 2013; Knight & Pearl, 2000; Weiner, 2007; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Yagelski, 2006), then the theoretical purpose of this heuristic should be in its use helping ease educators into the critical pedagogical lexicon and the theories under its umbrella with practical artifacts that educators may find useful in the classroom.

### **Practical Purpose**

Practical artifacts that educators may find useful in the classroom, but are also absent from Digital Pedagogy Lab, are curricula. Educators must use the world around them to teach the world around them; every teacher I know has adapted online content into lesson plans, borrowing ideas or even teaching whole lessons from the Internet. With the vast amount of curricula available digitally, the practical purpose of this heuristic should be to speedily identify the tone of critical pedagogy-based curricula available online.

### **What about Professional Learning Communities?**

Reviewing literature about professional learning communities was helpful to reach this point. However, I believed that a good first step was to develop a heuristic that could help individual critical pedagogues propagate critical pedagogy to non-critical educators. Additionally, I wanted to answer the problem Breuing (2011) describes and examine how critical theory can be meaningfully implemented in the classroom. Therefore, I developed this heuristic and concentrated on curricula. I discussed how this heuristic could aid in professional learning communities in the further research section.

### **Rationale**

Pedagogy began as teachers trading tips, and such an exchange still happens daily in every school. One way a critical pedagogue could expand critical pedagogy could be to suggest to peers who seek his or her advice various online, critical pedagogy-based curricula that uses language with positive connotations. This example is akin to referring someone to Digital Pedagogy Lab, but in this instance, referring someone to critical pedagogy-based curricula that is friendly to educators whom are not even aware of critical pedagogy's existence or would bristle at the totality of its ideologue language (Neumann, 2013; Knight & Pearl, 2000; Weiner, 2007; Fobes & Kaufman, 2008; Yagelski, 2006). This strategy would also work toward answering Breuing's (2011) call for how critical pedagogy "can be meaningfully employed in classroom practice" (p. 2) as well Neumann's (2013) call for nudging educators' critical dispositions toward critical pedagogy. To characterize my rationale for the heuristic, I want to emphasize the work of Heather Thomson-Bunn (2014), who observes that:

[e]ven the terms embedded within definitions of critical pedagogy have strong emotive connotations. As Walton says, 'a word like 'liberation' has positive

connotations, while a word like ‘oppressed’ has negative connotations. Because of the lingering of this emotive meaning, the respondent is covertly persuaded’ to react a certain way (118). As new instructors and graduate students are introduced to the tenets of critical pedagogy, how many of them are likely to reject—or even question—something defined as ‘emancipatory,’ ‘egalitarian,’ and ‘liberating’? (p. 5)

This insight is rhetorically valuable to critical pedagogues and serves as the rationale for my heuristic. Rhetoric, or finding and using in a given situation the available means of persuasion, is a powerful tool that could help expand critical pedagogy.

Ethics deem that caution must be used to refrain from exploiting peers for the advancement of critical pedagogy. There is a fine line between rhetoric and sophistry, and recommending heavy-handed, ideology-based curricula to an unsuspecting peer without *any* context will probably result in the peer’s confusion or disengagement. This result would ultimately lead to further marginalization, undermining the goal of critical pedagogy.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations with this heuristic.

First, this heuristic may result in describing the tone of the language of curricula based in critical pedagogy, but it does not judge or characterize the quality or adaptability of the curricula. Pragmatic, local narratives, a major theme of the literature review, are left at the mercy of the user of this heuristic to identify the quality of curricula beyond just the tone. Propagating curricula that, while positive in tone, are poorly constructed may actually hurt the overall purpose of this heuristic.

Second, this heuristic is hermeneutic. Many websites and unit plans rightfully use graphics to convey meaning, but this heuristic is unable to interpret that meaning. Again, the user of the heuristic has a responsibility to interpret graphics to find if the tone of the graphics matches the tone of the curricula.

Third, deciding which words carry positive connotations and which words carry negative connotations is largely under my own discretion based on my interpretation of the word and my interpretation of the work of Thomas-Bunn (2014). If my interpretations are wrong, then the heuristic is invalid. This fact is incredibly important to consider and discussed at greater length in the critical methodology section.

Fourth, the user of the heuristic has discretion about what the count of positive- or negative-connotation words means. Are critical curricula friendly if the curricula have five more positive-connotations present than negative-connotations? The number qualifying a result is abstract and undefined.

## **Critical Methodology**

### **Development**

For this study and the development of the heuristic, I felt that I needed a more comprehensive list of terminology to measure a wider range of the language I would encounter in critical pedagogy-based curricula. Because of this decision, I reviewed how scholars (Alegria, 2014; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Thomson-Bunn, 2014; Foley et al., 2015; Breuing, 2011) defined critical pedagogy's themes and ideas to create a list of what I've termed keywords. Large, gray terms such as 'race theory' were excluded as these umbrella terms had many varying definitions that were likely to invoke charged responses from educators.

Various scholars (Alegria, 2014; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Thomson-Bunn, 2014; Foley et al., 2015; Breuing, 2011) have used various terms as key descriptors of critical pedagogy, so I reviewed them to develop the set of criteria. Alegria (2014) discusses terms related to critical pedagogy, such as “**culture**,” “**identity**,” “**personal growth**,” “**critical thinking**,” “**society**,” “**power**,” and “**inequality**” (p. 101-02; emphasis added). Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell (2008) characterize critical pedagogy using terms such as “**marginalized**,” “**critique**,” “**oppression**,” “**dialogue**,” “**empower**,” and “**social change**” (p. 183; emphasis added). Jean Ann Foley, Doug Morris, Panayota Gounari, and Faith Agostinone-Wilson (2015) use numerous terms in defining critical pedagogy, including “**democracy**,” “**social reconstruction**,” “**critical theory**,” and “**culture**” (p. 115-20; emphasis added). Heather Thomson-Bunn (2014) observes “core terms of critical pedagogy...: **student empowerment**, **social justice**, **liberation**, **democracy**, and **responsible citizenship**” as well as “**emancipatory**,” “**egalitarian**,” and “**liberating**” (p. 3-5; emphasis added). Terms listed in the work of Mary Breuing (2011) substantiate all of the reviewed terms while also adding “**social consciousness**” and “**multicultural**” (p. 8-9; emphasis added).

The assembled list of keywords is alphabetized in Table 1 with shading indicating negative connotation. A discussion of the process of interpreting the connotation of keywords is discussed after the table.

Table 1

*Keywords with Connotations*

Shading indicates negative connotation

**KEYWORDS**

**Citizenship**

**Critical theory**

**Critical thinking**  
**Critique**  
**Culture**  
**Democracy**  
**Dialogue**  
**Egalitarian**  
**Emancipatory**  
**Empowerment**  
**Identity**  
**Inequality**  
**Liberation**  
**Marginalized**  
**Multicultural**  
**Oppression**  
**Personal growth**  
**Power**  
**Social awareness**  
**Social change**  
**Social justice**  
**Society**

### **Connotations**

Similar to Heather Thomas-Bunn (2014), I believed that language contains emotive connotations. A word with a positive connotation evokes a positive emotional response, while a word with a negative connotation evokes a negative emotional response. The study of rhetoric recognizes the influence word choice has, and evaluating curricula for the rhetorical effect of words sensitive to critical pedagogy has value for a heuristic designed to identify rhetorically-safe critical curricula for non-critical educators.

Based on Thomas-Bunn's (2014) work as a guide, I interpreted keywords as either possessing positive or negative connotations, and I shaded keywords I believed to have a negative connotation. I evaluated each keyword and considered how it made me feel. This unscientific practice was highly subjective, but appropriate considering that the occurrences of these keywords would be posited in curricula and I have several years of teaching experience and several more years of pedagogy-related education. Still, several



keywords were open to interpretation. For example, someone with power may interpret social change as a negative. Considering the power that educators have, I interpreted the keyword of social change as having a negative connotation to non-critical educators. Educators teach through theory rather than teaching the theory, and the way this language is used in curricula is important and consequential to how students are taught.

### **Purpose**

There are two main purposes for testing the heuristic were: (1) to model how it can be used on an artifact and (2) to test it to see if it works as intended.

### **Artifact Selection**

I determined that the heuristic should be used on critical pedagogy-based curricula. If the practical purpose of the artifact is to measure critical pedagogy-based curricula, then it should be tested on such curricula. While reviewing literature about professional learning communities was helpful to arrive at this point, educators who may have never heard of critical pedagogy would probably not be able to access critical professional learning communities. In the context of the heuristic's goals, reviewing professional learning community discourse would not accurately test the heuristic. Further, with the proliferation of the Internet and how people search for information now, I determined that the artifact should be found online using Google's Search Engine. While educators who do not know about critical pedagogy may not easily access these sites, critical pedagogues who could suggest these curricula to colleagues would.

Using Google's Search Engine with the terms "critical pedagogy teacher blogs lesson plans" yielded many sites. Because research on usability (Krug, 2014) suggests that users of the web rarely go beyond the first webpage of search results and also take an

average of three seconds before deciding whether to investigate a webpage further, one of the first few results was selected because it was near the top of the list of returned. This webpage's URL, the exact one Google's Search Engine results linked, is:

<https://subversiveenglishteacher.wordpress.com/lesson-plans/>.

The webpage contained brief overviews of each unit as well as hyperlinks to .pdfs with the full units enclosed. These .pdf documents are what the heuristic analyzed.

These three unit plans were selected as the artifacts to be evaluated with the heuristic. An image of the webpage was provided as Appendix A. Images of the first page of each unit plan are provided as well. Appendix B displays Unit 1; Appendix C displays Unit 2, and Appendix D displays Unit 3.

### **Factors in Selection**

Important determining factors for the selection of the artifacts were that the artifact: (1) hosted units that lacked graphics that could have interfered with the study; (2) was accessible with Google's Search Engine and a top result more likely to have web traffic; (3) was hosted by an aesthetically pleasing and inviting website that would attract users; (4) offered plenty of curricula of which I analyzed three full unit plans; (5) contained work from different authors, an important aspect of a professional learning community and important for contrasting the positive- and negative-notations between units; (6) each unit plan was fully developed and provided ample material to pilot the heuristic's use on; and (7) the units are modular, meaning that a critical pedagogue could download one unit and attach it via e-mail to a colleague.

### **About**

Each unit is a 4-week, 20-lesson plan unit. All units are designated as critical literacy units. Unit 1 is about South Africa's Apartheid, is 19-pages long, and targets grades 11-12 AP. Unit 2 is an exploration about using a critical approach to explore media, is 44-pages long, and targets grades 10-11. Unit 3 examines how music affects students' lives, is 41-pages long, and targets grades 6-8.

### **What I Am Looking For**

An opportunity for testing the value of the heuristic was that I could analyze three different unit plans by three different authors. The heuristic's value exists in comparing curricula for critical pedagogues to discriminate. This aspect of the heuristic allows critical pedagogues to identify "friendly" curricula to proliferate. Because of this opportunity, I counted all occurrences of the keywords in each of the three units.

### **How I Tested**

Viewing a unit plan, I used the "Find" function, accessed by pressing the "Ctrl" and "F" keys simultaneously, to search for instances of keywords. I counted every instance of the first keyword, "Citizenship," and then used the "Find" function to tally every instance of the next keyword, "Critical theory." I repeated this process until I ended with finding instances of the last keyword, "Society." I repeated this overall process for all three units.

### **How I Measured**

I counted the occurrences of keywords in each of the three units and presented those findings in a table for quick comparison.

### **Measurable Goal**

Success of the heuristic is defined as the heuristic reporting results that differ between curricula. If one or two units contain more positive-connotation wordage than other units, then this heuristic was successful.

### Variables

This study contained several variables.

One unit was approximately half the size of the other two units. This could lead to a decreased number of occurrences of keywords. However, the balance between keywords with positive connotations and keywords with negative connotations should not be different.

Additionally, people might not look over every page of the unit plan. An occurrence of a keyword on the first page might carry more effect and weight than an occurrence of a keyword on the last page. However, it seems unnecessarily abstract to examine only the first few pages of each unit plan.

Additionally, the three units are written for different grade levels ranging from grades 6-8 to 11-12 AP. The count of keywords could be different depending on which grade level the unit was written toward.

## Findings

### General

Table 2

*Results of Heuristic Use*

<b>KEYWORDS</b>	<b>UNIT 1</b>	<b>UNIT 2</b>	<b>UNIT 3</b>
<b>Citizenship</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Critical theory</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Critical thinking</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Critique</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Culture</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Democracy</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Dialogue	2	0	0
Egalitarian	0	0	0
Emancipatory	0	0	0
Empowerment	0	0	1
Identity	2	4	4
Inequality	0	0	0
Liberation	1	1	0
Marginalized	0	2	0
Multicultural	0	0	0
Oppression	2	0	0
Personal growth	0	0	1
Power	8	12	4
Social awareness	0	0	0
Social change	2	0	0
Social justice	2	0	0
Society	1	2	1

### Compared in Context

Table 3

#### Contextual Comparisons

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Unit 1</u>	<u>Unit 2</u>	<u>Unit 3</u>
Grade Level	Grades 11-12 AP	Grades 10-11	Grades 6-8
Page Length	19 Pages	44 pages	41 Pages
Positive Connotations	19	23	15
Negative Connotations	4	0	0
Total Occurrences	23	23	15
Net +/- Occurrences	+15	+23	+15

### Advanced Metrics

Table 4

#### Metric Analysis

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Unit 1</u>	<u>Unit 2</u>	<u>Unit 3</u>
Total Words	6,041 Words	8,735 Words	10,726 Words
Rate of Occurrence <sup>1</sup>	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%

<sup>1</sup>Rate of Occurrence was calculated by dividing Total Occurrences with Total Words.

## Discussion

Based on my adaption of the work of Heather Thomson-Bunn (2014), the heuristic successfully reports back findings of occurrences of keywords that have both positive and negative connotations. However, the results are not stark or conclusive. Per

Tables 2 and 3, the presence of keywords with negative connotations in Unit 1 suggests that this unit would be less suitable to proliferate than Unit 2 or Unit 3, but the low number of keywords with a negative connotation is not substantial enough to warrant making a decision.

One positive correlation I notice from Table 4 is that the rate of occurrence of a keyword declines as grade level declines. The Grades 11-12 AP Unit Plan has a keyword occur once every 262 words, while the Grades 10-11 Unit Plan has a keyword occur every 380 words and Grades 6-8 Unit Plan has a keyword occur once every 715 words (whereas  $n = \text{Total Words} \div \text{Total Occurrences}$ ). Does this positive correlation exist in other scholarly literature?

### **Limitations**

The variables of the study and the limitations of the study pose problems to the use and validity of the heuristic. The differing total word values of the units, the differing grade levels of the units, and differing locations of keywords are all variables that affect this study. Further, the limitations of the heuristic also pose problems for its use. The heuristic has several limitations: the heuristic does not judge the overall quality or adaptability of curricula; as a hermeneutic, the heuristic cannot evaluate graphics in an increasingly multimodal educational landscape; the positive- and negative-connotations of keywords were chosen by me; and the user of the heuristic has the ultimate power in deciding action based on the information the heuristic returns. This power that the user of the heuristic has is also undefined because there is no set guide to results of the heuristic; does the occurrence of five more positive-connotation keywords in one unit mean that unit is better than the unit with five less positive-connotation keywords?

## Conclusions

I believed this heuristic would be sound and lead to tangible results, but the results clearly demonstrate that the heuristic is lacking: the results from analyzing the three units report information too abstract to really help critical pedagogues. While a scholarly attempt, this heuristic aids the effort to address the problem Neumann (2013) and Breuing (2011) describe. This study followed Neumann's (2013) discussion of Cuban, how first-order change works within a current system to create practical rather than second-order change. I attempted to help critical pedagogues enact first-order change: rather than create something which holistically addresses the structural problems that critical pedagogy seeks to remedy, I proposed a heuristic that aimed to help individual critical pedagogues expand critical pedagogy.

This research matters because it attempts to propagate critical pedagogy by providing a tool for critical pedagogues to use to influence non-critical educators. The scope and magnitude of the larger problem critical pedagogy addresses, the oppression and marginalization of peoples and the fact that this problem is ubiquitous, means that trying to propagate critical pedagogy is a good goal because critical pedagogy seeks to solve that problem. Reviewing relevant literature that describes a problem and finding linking knowledge that suggests a solution were both important, and developing and testing this heuristic as part of that solution was a necessary first step in actualizing a solution. Finding a solution requires trial and error, and though this trial was unsuccessful, it is a success when contextualized as part of the process of solving such a complex problem. Using this heuristic still could potentially identify educator-friendly curricula for critical pedagogues to use to ultimately propagate critical curricula in an

effort to help expand critical pedagogy's influence. However, more research is necessary to conclusively judge the heuristic.

I believe that this study contributes to the scholarly literature about critical pedagogy because it reviews diverse criticisms of critical pedagogy in one article, contextualizes and redirects change efforts of critical pedagogues, and attempts to answer Breuing's (2011) and Neumann's (2013) critiques.

The positive correlation the research discovered substantiates a problem that critical pedagogues often face. Expanding critical education to primary schools is difficult. This difficulty could occur because of the extremist tone of critical pedagogy, which could cause parents to disengage just as it often causes non-critical educators to disengage. My own opinion about the positive correlation is that the main objective of primary schools is to provide students with the basic skills and language that secondary schools construct beliefs with. A critical education does not necessarily challenge the ways in which building blocks are defined but the oppressive results of a society socially constructed with those building blocks. Challenging and changing the social construction of knowledge that has led to oppression and marginalization is paramount to critical pedagogy, so expanding critical pedagogy to primary schools may not be fruitful because students learn the basic language in primary school. These are my own opinions and they would be interesting to research further.

### **Further Research**

I have several suggestions committed to further research and refinement of the heuristic.



First, a study re-examining which keywords have positive connotations and which keywords have negative connotations could yield less variability. I believe that a lot of undiscovered, relevant potential exists in the underlying rhetoric of emotive connotation and keywords. Further examining this rhetoric could lend itself to a reconstruction of the heuristic, the study, and, potentially, new metrics with which to measure the heuristic's findings. This new study would be helpful to compare with this study, and those comparisons could yield additional information relevant to the goal of this study: attempting to answer Breuing's (2011) and Neumann's (2013) criticisms of critical pedagogy and to develop part of a broad solution to their described problems.

Second, a study piloting the heuristic on a scholarly article, such as the pragmatic, local narrative examples discussed in the literature review, could be useful for testing the heuristic on critical curricula that has been analyzed and taught. However, this further research could only work if those scholarly articles included detailed descriptions of curricula.

Third, a study using the heuristic to evaluate three unit plans of the same grade level as well as three unit plans of different grade levels could corroborate the positive correlation my study found. If the positive correlation does not appear in either of those suggested studies, then the positive correlation is probably a unique result of this study.

Finally, although I reviewed literature about professional learning and professional learning communities, I focused on helping individual critical pedagogues with the heuristic. Is there an adequate method of expanding critical pedagogy that incorporates professional learning communities? Would the heuristic fit into this in its current form or in a revised form? I am unsure of what this study would look like, but I

believe that such a study would be helpful because it could lead to expanding critical pedagogy's influence and answering Breuing (2011) and Neumann (2013).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Website Which Hosts the Artifacts

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SUBVERSIVE ^ TEACHER

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**Critical Lesson Plans**

**Unit 1**

**In Word and Deed: South African Apartheid**  
**Author: Chris Watson**  
Grades: 11-12 AP  
Lesson Plan Type: 4-Week Critical Literacy Unit  
Estimated Time: 20 50-minute sessions

**OVERVIEW**

This unit centers on having students engage with four texts, all of which focus specifically on apartheid in South Africa. The first, Nancy Clark & William H. Worger's historical nonfiction work *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, will provide necessary historical background for the unit. Next, students will watch the 2009 science fiction film *District 9*, an alternate-reality reimagining of the forced removal of African residents from their homes in Johannesburg's District 6. The third and fourth texts are each key novels from the early 1980s written by South African Nobel Laureates: Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* and J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*. The unit will culminate in a series of research presentations given by student groups on relevant historical topics such as the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and the Sharpsville Massacre. After giving their presentation, each group will lead the class in a critical discussion.

**FEATURED RESOURCES** (for crucial teacher supplementary research prior)

Frontline: The Long Walk of Nelson Mandela Website  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/>  
An excellent source for supplementary information and multimedia on general apartheid history.

The Essential Gesture (Nadine Gordimer) and J.M. Coetzee: *Doubling the Point*  
The former is the most famous anthology of Gordimer's political and critical writings, while the latter is the longest and substantial collection of both interviews with and criticism by Coetzee.

[District 9 director Neill Blomkamp Interview](#), [Nadine Gordimer – The Idea of Gardening](#), [Nadine Gordimer – Nobel Lecture](#), [Nadine Gordimer – Living in the Interregnum](#), [J.M. Coetzee – Nobel Lecture](#)


**FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE**

Shor, I. (1996). *When students have power: Negotiating authority in a critical pedagogy*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

"Making students feel that they are "being listened to" and that they therefore "count in the rhetorical setting" (p. 49): As Shor says, a teacher must do everything they can (for him, it was taking notes on student comments, which teachers of this unit should also do) in order to make students feel that their participation is both meaningful and welcomed. This has the obvious consequence of students feeling more encouraged to participate, which is crucial for such a discussion-centric unit to be truly successful. "[F]rontloading student discourse and backloading the teacher's commentary" (pp. 40-41). The idea seems obvious enough, but is too often infrequently or ineffectively practiced. hooks offers a comparable recommendation which I cite in point 2 below, but Shor describes at length in this excerpt how he actually put into practice, and my unit attempts to mirror his at least in part (though I am somewhat (emphasis on somewhat) constrained given that this is a high school rather than a college course.) As I say below, by setting an example of an equality-driven democratic classroom early on, the teacher can better prepare students for the presentations in the unit's final week.

"Following Shor's example of integrating Freire and Faundez's concept of a "pedagogy of questions" (p. 42). This is reflected in the lack of purely explanatory lectures in which the teacher "fills" students' "empty heads" with "correct and objective knowledge." Such an approach ignores a central function of democratic group inquiry:

**Authors**



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- [Rethinking Schools](#)
- [Blog at WordPress.com](#)

## Appendix B – The First Unit

### Lesson Plan

## In Word and Deed: South African Apartheid

Grades	11-12 AP
Lesson Plan Type	4-Week Critical Literacy Unit
Estimated Time	20 50-minute sessions
Lesson Authors	Christopher Watson Tuscaloosa, Alabama

### OVERVIEW

This unit centers on having students engage with four texts, all of which focus specifically on apartheid in South Africa. The first, Nancy Clark & William H. Worger’s historical nonfiction work *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, will provide necessary historical background for the unit. Next, students will watch the 2009 science fiction film *District 9*, an alternate-reality reimagining of the forced removal of African residents from their homes in Johannesburg’s District 6. The third and fourth texts are each key novels from the early 1980s written by South African Nobel Laureates: Nadine Gordimer’s *July’s People* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*. The unit will culminate in a series of research presentations given by student groups on relevant historical topics such as the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and the Sharpsville Massacre. After giving their presentation, each group will lead the class in a critical discussion.

### FEATURED RESOURCES (for crucial teacher supplementary research prior)

Frontline: The Long Walk of Nelson Mandela Website  
(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/>)

An excellent source for supplementary information and multimedia on general apartheid history.

*The Essential Gesture* (Nadine Gordimer) and *J.M. Coetzee: Doubling the Point*

The former is the most famous anthology of Gordimer’s political and critical writings, while the latter is the longest and substantial collection of both interviews with and criticism by Coetzee.

## Appendix C – The Second Unit

### Lesson Plan

## Critical Media Literacy

Grades	10-11
Lesson Plan Type	4-Week Critical Literacy Unit
Estimated Time	Twenty 55 minute lessons
Lesson Authors	Justin Cloud

### OVERVIEW

This unit is designed to introduce students to using a critical approach to explore the media and themselves. During the unit, students will look at ways in which the media uses advertising to control individuals and influence their self perceptions. Students will also take a critical approach to the news, and we will explore what types of stories the news chooses to present and how this affects our worldviews. Students will also be exposed to a number of self exploration activities aimed at helping them develop a positive identity. As a whole, students should learn to take a critical approach to the media while producing counter texts of their own to be displayed on the new media of a blog.

We will create a whole class blog that will serve as a intro to blogging and as a tool for future lessons. Additionally, students will create a blog of their own in response to a young adult novel. Students will be given choice in the literature they read, and they will be placed into literature groups in which a few students read the same text. We will use literature circles as a foundation for critical literacy. By the end of this unit, students should have a foundation in the critical approach to literature and to the media, and students will have explored their own identities by producing their own countertexts which will take the form of alternative new media to be displayed on a class blog as well as individual group blogs.

### FEATURED RESOURCES

This I Believe Essay- This allows students to explore their own personal identity through writing about their deeply held beliefs.

Literature Circles- Literature circles allow students to exercise choice in that circles can be



## Appendix D - The Third Unit

### Lesson Plan

## Music and Lyrics: The Soundtracks of our Lives

Grades	6-8
Lesson Plan Type	4-Week Critical Literacy Unit
Estimated Time	Twenty-one 50-minute sessions
Lesson Authors	Alana Smith Tuscaloosa, AL

### OVERVIEW

Music plays a large role in our students' lives, and in this unit students will explore music in a variety of ways. Students will:

- Discuss music as an influence in our lives
- Explore music as literature/poetry
- Critically analyze lyrics and read them from various perspectives
- Personally reflect on music as an expression of life milestones
- Creating and sharing a personal Soundtrack of Life

### FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Beck, A. (2005). A place for critical literacy. <i>Journal of Adolescent &amp; Adult Literacy</i> , 48(5), 392-400.	
	Students need to understand how texts work, what they intend to do in the world, and how social relations can be critiqued and reconstructed
	Students should be exposed to supplementary texts outside of the canon.
	Students should practice reading from a resistant perspective.
Clarke, L. W. (2005). "A stereotype is something you listen to music on": Navigating a critical curriculum. <i>Language Arts</i> , 83(2), 147-157.	
	Teachers should place students and their experiences and interests at the center of instruction
	Teachers should make opportunities to learn from their students.
	Students should read texts that challenge stereotypes and help build a sense of personal identity.

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## **EDUCATION**

### **Master of Arts in English, Rhetoric & Technical Communication**

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington

### **Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies, English & Education**

June 2014

Eastern Washington University, Cheney, Washington, Magna Cum Laude

### **American Bar Association-Approved Legal Administrative Assistant Certificate**

June 2011

Spokane Community College, Spokane, Washington

## **ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES**

### **Graduate Instructor** (September 2014-present)

*Eastern Washington University, English Department, Cheney, WA*

#### Courses Taught:

College Composition: Exposition and Argumentation (ENGL 101)

College Composition: Analysis, Research, and Documentation (ENGL 201)

Introduction to Technical Communication (TCOM 205)

### **Assessment & Evaluation Intern** (September 2015-December 2015)

*Eastern Washington University, College of Arts, Letters, and Education, Cheney, WA*

#### Duties:

Revised technical documents for the EWU Department of Education

Created documentation for State regulatory bodies

Consolidated numerous forms into Department templates

Completed substantial work using Excel for student metrics and program analysis

## **PRESENTATIONS**

(2015, April). *World of design: How meaning interacts with visual design*. Poster Session for Graduate Symposium at Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA.

## **SERVICE**

### ***Professional***

**Judge**, Parent Teacher Association Reflections Literature Contest. Central Valley School

District. Spokane, WA. Fall 2013

**Club Representative**, National Association of Legal Support Regional Conference, Kellogg, ID. March, 2011.

*Community*

**Volunteer**, Boys & Girls Club of Spokane. Be Great Club and Northtown Club. Spokane, WA. Fall, 2013.

**Volunteer**, Washington State Attorney General's Office, Spokane Division. Spokane, WA. 2010-2011.

**Volunteer**, Volunteer Lawyers Program, Spokane Silent Auction Gala. Spokane, WA. December 2010.

**HONORS AND AWARDS**

Graduate Assistant, Eastern Washington University, 2014-2016.

Chatburn Graduate Fellow, Eastern Washington University, 2014-2015.

Member of the Year, National Association of Legal Support, Spokane Community College Student Club, Spokane Community College, 2011.