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This dissertation examines the lived experiences of teachers, students, and administrators at a public charter school based on progressive philosophies such as experiential education, restorative justice, and social justice. Through a qualitative constructivist grounded theory approach, this research discusses the ways that experiential education influences the teaching and learning at this school. Interviews and observations were utilized to gain a more thorough understanding of the ways in which these progressive pedagogies are enacted. Experiential education provides a co-created and student-centered learning environment that prepares students for lives as citizens of local and global communities. As a philosophy, experiential education can be utilized to help make meaning of experiences and motivate future actions.

Central to this project is the proposal of a new frame for critical experiential education that intentionally integrates social justice education, critical pedagogy, and experiential education. The creation of this frame attempts to put these seemingly disparate fields into conversation with one another thereby intertwining the elements of each such that the gaps found amongst them can be filled. The value of this work is the ability to create a more robust and comprehensive understanding and implementation of a frame of critical experiential education that is intentionally grounded in aspects of power, justice, context, history, and identity in order to recognize and encourage future action towards the alleviation of oppression in all its forms.

CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION: INTEGRATING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY,
SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION, AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION TO RE-IMAGINE
TEACHING AND LEARNING

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES viii

LIST OF FIGURES ix

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH INTEREST 1

 Problem of Study 1

 Research Questions 4

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW 6

 Intersection of Progressive and Traditional Pedagogies 6

 History of Experiential Education 12

 Differentiating Experiential Education (EE) and Experiential Learning (EL)..... 13

 Experiential Education in K-12 Schools 15

 Charter Schools 21

 Co-Created Knowledge 24

 Democracy and Education 25

 Contemporary Developments..... 29

 Question 1 Literature Review..... 31

 Why is a New Frame Needed?32

 Critical Pedagogy34

 Experience, Reflection, Freedom37

 Imagination and Vision39

 Dialogue41

 Call to Action42

 Question 2 Literature Review..... 43

 Social Justice Education43

 Social Justice as a Pedagogy46

 Uncomfortable-ness/Discomfort47

 Connection to Experiential Education.....51

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMING AND METHODS	54
Individual Positionality	54
Evan.....	54
Frannie.....	55
Collective Positionality	57
Lenses	59
Filters.....	60
Angles.....	62
Research Questions	62
Overview of Constructivist Framework and Theory.....	63
Research Methodology.....	66
Grounded Theory.....	66
Constructivist Grounded Theory (CTG)	68
Methods.....	69
Research Site	70
Recruitment	73
Interviews	77
Observations	78
Data Collection and Coding Process	81
Theoretical Sampling.....	83
Data Analysis	83
Ethics.....	85
CHAPTER IV: CONNECT	93
Enacted Progressive Education	93
School as Community.....	95
Identity and Mattering	102
Social Presence in a Virtual Environment.....	104
Relationships as Indicators of Community.....	106
Benefits to Students.....	109
Child-Centered Environment.....	114
World as a Classroom.....	119

CHAPTER V: CHALLENGE	123
Examining Tensions and Gaps	123
Teaching in a Pandemic.....	124
Espoused Values vs Lived Actions	126
Traditional Achievement Orientation.....	133
CHAPTER VI: EXTEND.....	137
Re-Imaging Teaching and Learning.....	137
‘Traditional’ School and Teacher Preparation	138
Teacher/Peer Mentorship.....	145
Operationalizing Experiential Education	149
Operationalizing Social Justice Education	156
Facilitative Education.....	164
Discussion: Connect, Challenge, Extend	167
CHAPTER VII: CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION FRAME.....	169
What's the Point of Reimagining?.....	169
How Did We Get Here?	173
Do We Need Social Justice Education and Critical Pedagogy Since Social Justice Education is Built on Critical Pedagogy? Why or why not?.....	181
What is the Reason Social Justice Education and Critical Pedagogy Need Experiential Education?	181
CEE: In the Service of Who?	181
CEE: In the Service of What?	182
What are the Goals of Our Work?.....	183
What is the Purpose of the Frame?.....	184
Critical Experiential Education	184
Critical Experiential Education Frame	187
CEE Principles of Practice	187
Next Steps for Critical Experiential Education	188
Conclusion.....	190

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION	192
Research Questions	192
Collective Reflection on the Research Process	196
Frannie’s Reflection	199
Evan’s Reflection	200
Limitations	200
Recommendations for TLS	204
CEE Coach	204
Extensive Professional Development	205
Parent/Family Involvement	205
Connecting to the EE Community	206
Student Curriculum Advisory Board	207
Supporting Pre-Service Teachers	207
Future Research Avenues	208
Call to Action	210
REFERENCES	213
APPENDIX A: CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION DEFINITIONS.....	227
APPENDIX B: CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE.....	235
APPENDIX C: ADULT CONSENT FORM.....	240
APPENDIX D: PARENT CONSENT FORM	246
APPENDIX E: STUDENT ASSENT FORM	252
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	254
APPENDIX G: ASSOCIATION FOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION “PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE”	258
APPENDIX H: LEARNING FOR JUSTICE “SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS”	261
APPENDIX I: NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION MENTOR STANDARDS.....	262

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Research Participants	76
Table 2. Data Collection Timeline.....	82
Table 3. Research Participant Involvement	87
Table 4. Definitions	172
Table 5. Key Areas of Focus.....	175
Table 6. Critical Experiential Education: Key Areas of Focus and Principles of Practice	188

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle.....	29
Figure 2. Kolb's Cycle with the Adventure Wave	32
Figure 3. Comfort Learning and Panic Zone	48
Figure 4. Frame of Critical Experiential Education.....	186

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH INTEREST

Understanding, complexifying, and co-generating space for critique, growth, and transformation through experiential education (EE) informs and helps re-imagine education in more equitable ways. Through a critical lens, EE offers the potential to engage students and educators alike in putting what educators re-imagine education to be into practice. A more equitable educational system calls for transforming our world into communities that are more generous, liberatory, kind, engaged, and appreciative of difference. The work of building these communities is the work educators and activists should focus on more now than ever in today's ever-changing and tumultuous world.

Problem of Study

This research sought to address questions around developing a critical experiential education (CEE) frame, the various ways CEE can be potentially utilized, and the impact this pedagogy has on student development. More specifically, this research examined how critical experiential education methodologies can disrupt normative educational systems to foster collaborative and more socially just educative spaces. The study also sought to investigate how CEE encourages the development of democratic values necessary to live equitably in communion with each other.

This research utilized a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2016). This project began with an initial idea and explanation of the need for increased criticality within experiential education. This initial idea was expanded and challenged through data collection in interviews and observations. Following data collection, we returned to the tentative idea to expound more fully on critical experiential education.

The initial question of this project examined how the transformation of a widely utilized experiential education frame could intentionally include spaces for critical framing. Although education happens in many ways and settings, we were interested in the transformative power of critical experiential education in a formal classroom environment. Through our combined 20 years of experience in the experiential education field we have examined the gaps and challenges in how experiential education is typically defined and practiced. We used qualitative data collection methods (interviews and observations) to assess how critical experiential education might impact formal educative spaces. We have experienced experiential education as a powerful pedagogy that has transformative impacts on students and their future development as community members. We were interested in exploring the use of a critical experiential education frame that ties experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy within a school environment that intentionally centers this work. This research focused on middle grades students (primarily 5-8th grades) as these formative years can be crucial in developing life-long skills for students. We recognized that not all educational environments have the same academic structure as The Loden School (TLS). We were excited to observe and articulate how this research might provide examples and resources for teachers and students to incorporate critical experiential education into their unique classrooms, contexts, and learning environments.

The second question of our research explored the development and creation of a new frame for critical experiential education. Following a constructivist grounded theory approach, data gathered in Question 1 continually and iteratively informed the development of a new frame for critical experiential education. An initial review of the literature and personal communication with leaders in the field showed that scholars have long critiqued experiential education as an exclusionary space (see, e.g., Breunig, 2019; Warren, 2019; Mitten, 1999) and one that failed to

fully incorporate a focus on justice, equity, identity, or access. While individual practitioners may have incorporated these components into their interpretation of experiential education, there has been a limited national discussion around the use of a critical frame in experiential education programming. The Association for Experiential Education (AEE), the governing body for the field, has made strides towards including social justice and diversity work into programmatic experiential education standards in adventure-based and wilderness therapy accredited programs. While this is a meaningful step, enacting a pedagogical model that fully includes critical examinations of identity, access, equity, power, context, and history is complicated given the breath of programming, where those programs are located, their client base, the experience of their staffs and so on.

AEE conferences and publications provide ongoing opportunities to have discussions centering the challenges of consistently operationalizing social justice values and community building through EE. Although options for discussion and action are available and dialogue happens with consistency, the lived expression of unsettling normative educational systems and praxis by generating the processes of social justice and community building have not been achieved based on the perspective of these scholars. We believe that some of the disconnects between the espoused and lived principles may come from the limited abilities of existing models to adapt to changing cultural, social, and political landscapes. As experiential education continues to evolve, we hope to contribute to a larger conversation about how the field can de-center institutions of dominance, histories of oppression, and a culture of Whiteness present in many spaces. We hope that critical experiential education can integrate many different fields or methods (experiential education, critical pedagogy, social justice education, etc.) to provide a path forward for an adaptable, responsive, interdisciplinary, and flexible pedagogy.

Question 2 was informed by data collected during Question 1 and included analysis done in a constructivist manner. Analyzing data in a constructivist way informed the creation and development of a new critical experiential education frame that incorporates a strong focus on justice, equity, access, and identity. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach means that Question 2 was inherently dynamic, changing based on the information provided by the participants.

Research Questions

Central to this research are the following two research questions described above:

1. How can the transformation of widely used models of experiential education (Kolb, Roberts, and Dewey most particularly) intentionally include spaces for critical framing?
2. How do the middle grades at The Loden School enact tenets of critical experiential education within their teaching, learning, and praxis to implement the foundational principles of the school?

The first question we asked in our research sought to examine the ways in which critical experiential education could serve as a positive disruption to traditional classroom processes and ways of teaching and learning. The first question offered the opportunity to uncover the potential impacts of that disruption on teachers, administrators, families, and students. Of particular interest were the structural elements, school culture and policies, teacher preparation, and teachers' prior experience that combine to either inhibit or foster critical experiential education in classrooms. A sub-question for question 1 was:

- a) How can a variety of conceptual layers combine to re-imagine experiential education with a more critical foundation?

The second question created the space to more fully address the limitations and critiques of current and widely used models of experiential education (Kolb, Roberts, and Dewey most particularly). The development of a frame of critical experiential education seeks to recognize this proleptic moment and address the limitations found in the EE model by incorporating elements of critical pedagogy and social justice, that provide a more thorough insight into individuals, groups, and communities and the systems of power and oppression at play. Through an iterative data collection process, we sought to understand the impact of critical experiential education on the lived experience of students, teachers, and administrators at TLS.

Relevant sub-questions for question 2 include:

- a) How can the use of a critical experiential education model promote the development of agency, belonging, and competence (Carver, 1996) among students, educators, administrators, and families?
- b) How do embodied teaching philosophies and practices following a critical experiential education frame impact the student experience?
- c) How can critical experiential education be used to provide a more thorough insight into the porous boundaries between learning, reflection, and doing in educative spaces?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an overview of fields and frameworks connected to the study and development of a critical experiential education frame. This review offers a manner of articulating an understanding of the questions educators and practitioners ask as they grapple with what education can and perhaps should provide to individuals and communities. The nuanced understanding of the complexity of perspectives from the practitioners and scholars described below promotes an understanding of the need to intertwine information gathered from multiple disciplines. As mentioned earlier, we have a broad combined experience in a variety of experiential education settings. Through our individual, professional, and academic experiences, we have come to question how experiential education, social justice, and critical pedagogy are interwoven with one another.

We organized this literature review around a series of conceptual layers based on each field as they relate to questions 1 and 2 of our research. There is a general literature review that sets the foundation for the research. We then delve more deeply into issues specific to each question. Each layer considered power, oppression, facilitation, imagination, and so on from a slightly different point of view. We have articulated general background information that we found important to the research project in general. We then incorporated information we found pertinent specific to each of the research questions. The information interweaves in ways that provide a more complex yet accessible understanding of the value of consistently re-engaging and re-imagining experiential education in the transformation to critical experiential education.

Intersection of Progressive and Traditional Pedagogies

The earliest forms of schooling in American were primarily private, religious schools that focused instruction on male children of wealthy parents. The curriculum of these schools

mirrored that of famous schools in England and focused heavily on the classics. As time passed, the focus shifted, and public schools became commonplace, funded by local communities to benefit those living nearby. By the 1830s, common schools were set up to provide a consistent educational experience for all students. *All* in this context recognizes children of white landowning males.

Common schools often had religious bents that imposed religious teachings on top of moral and civic ones. A crucial question of the era centered around religious school's ability to teach all students without imposing their particular doctrine. Ultimately, separate religious schools were formed distinct from public school models. This tension within and between religious traditions resulted "in the common school never truly being 'common' to all children" (Spring, 2018, p. 128). As public schools became commonplace across the country, schools became central sites for cultural creation and promotion. Classrooms were designed, and instruction materials were used in the curriculum (like McGuffey Readers) to instill 'American' values like capitalism to generations of students.

As industrialization changed America, the education system was forced to change as well. Schools shifted to be sites of economic preparation. "[B]etween 1890 and the Depression years of the 1930s, business dominated in the control of schools, and business values dominated in the management of schools" (Spring, 2018, p. 311). Education leaders worked closely with business leaders and realized that schooling could prepare children for their role as agents within the rapidly growing economy. Thus, we see a rise in the industrial model of education and the idea of school as a factory. Many changes made during this time continue to impact the educational system today. Classrooms are laid out in straight rows, school days are dictated by

bells, and there is strict adherence to a single source of authority to help implicitly prepare future factory workers.

This era also saw a rise in the focus on data as an educational tool. The development of the IQ test, tracking, and assessment all became popular ways of determining the growth of schools and individual students. "Psychologists saw the schools as playing a major role in the realization of a society in which intelligence would rule, and students would be scientifically selected and educated for their proper place in the social organism" (Spring, 2018, p. 313).

Children were assessed to determine their level of innate intelligence (often with strong racial overtones), and the results then decided their aptitude for future educational opportunities. These tests, first developed by the military, further moved the school towards a model of efficiency and greater control, ensuring that they would educate students for their place in society. Testing also helped solidify the racial bias in education, and administrators used results to justify excluding minority groups from educational opportunities. Scientifically selecting students for their proper path flies in the face of Plato's recommendations that children be allowed to discover their natural aptitude and the place they feel they best fit. Throughout the early 20th century, John Dewey and others in the Progressive movement sought a return to this idea through their concept of child-centered learning. The return to the concept of child-centered learning shifted the focus away from education as a universal, one-size-fits-all mentality to considering the individual child.

One of Dewey's ideas that became central to the Progressive school movement was this focus and appreciation of the individual student. Rather than assuming all students learned in the same way, needed the same levels of instruction in the same time frames, and had the same abilities, progressive frameworks sought to understand each student's needs, strengths, and

interests. Dewey argued that education should provide an "intimate and extensive personal acquaintance with a small number of typical situations with a view of mastering the way of dealing with the problems of experience, not the piling up of information" (Peterson, 2010, p. 43). Along with this ability to gain intimate knowledge and learn from experience came a desire to prepare students for life after school, to enable them to become productive members of a democratic society.

As progressive education took on a more significant influence across the country, there were challenges and difficulties as teachers, schools, and communities found ways to adapt. Critics of progressive education (and experiential education in turn) see it as laissez-faire or a no-rules approach that allows children to 'do whatever they want'. Graubard (1972) explains the critique against progressive education like this:

Reacting against authoritarianism and boring, sterile, simple-minded, and often propagandistic subject matter [of traditional schools], some new schools people took their affirmation of freedom to imply never interfering with children, never asserting values and priorities with the knowledge that one was quite possibly influencing the young people, condemning the ideas of authority and the idea of the significance of subject matter- 'the process of learning is what counts.' (Graubard, 1972, p.222)

These are the same critiques leveled at experiential education as a subset of progressive pedagogy. To someone who does not recognize the structure of EE, educational spaces appear to have no rules, educators that never 'interfere,' or students doing whatever they want. In reality, experiential education settings are highly facilitated, structured, and sequenced learning environments. In progressive education settings, students have choices about their learning and

how they would like to accomplish it. The choice here does not mean that teachers are no longer in control--the very opposite is often true. Teachers act as facilitators, providing students with a series of intentional, carefully designed opportunities to provide valuable learning experiences. In the act of choosing, students can explore their individual interests and the impact of their decisions on the overall community. "Students learn that this freedom [to choose] is directly connected to their disposition for being responsible as an individual and member of the school community. [Choice] provides kids with the opportunity to successfully negotiate what they and their teachers feel is important" (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997, p.84). It is essential for experiential educators to recognize that their teaching style and classroom management look very different from the 'traditional' model and will naturally draw some questioning or challenge. As Cagan (1978) discussed, the ideological orientation within which a particular activity takes place determines its quality and usefulness. Centering experiential education as an ideological orientation provides opportunities to enhance, improve, and further the work.

Incorporating progressive philosophies into traditional education is a challenging and sometimes tricky process. It requires rethinking everything from lesson planning to assessment to the layout of the physical school. For these (and many other) reasons, there is still a predominant focus on teacher-driven, outcome-based curriculum in many K-12 schools in the United States (Ball 2000; Cronin-Jones, 1991; Mintrop, 2001). Windschitl (2002) outlined four "dilemmas" behind the reluctance to adapt to new pedagogies that can summarize the situation.

First, conceptual dilemmas refer to struggles in understanding new pedagogies to make them appropriate in teaching. Pedagogies like experiential education can be vague and challenging to grasp, making it difficult to understand and implement. Second, pedagogical changes require time, energy, and knowledge investment. Finding time to make this investment

while in the current of high-stakes testing and outcomes-driven education can be nearly impossible. Third, cultural dilemmas appear when a redefinition of roles and expectations is anticipated from new methods that challenge traditional values persisting in schools. For experiential education, challenging traditional values is an explicit aim that can lead school leadership to shy away. Fourth, political dilemmas are associated with resistance from various stakeholders who question institutional norms and routines. As Franklin and Johnson (2008) have noted, implementing curriculum reform in schools is a messy and evolving process.

Curriculum implementation reflects how stakeholders interpret meanings concerning their history, experiences, skills, resources, and contexts. Reform is a process of change that entails struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretation, and reinterpretations. Lam's (2011) essay also shows teachers' difficulty adjusting to and incorporating a new curriculum. Lam chronicles a pre-service teacher's efforts to integrate a progressive pedagogy and found that pre-service or beginning teachers are much more willing to experiment than teachers who are more experienced. While this is perhaps not surprising, it is sobering to remember that as many as 40% of teachers leave the field within their first five years (Will, 2018).

Progressive pedagogy is a broad umbrella that has been expanding since Dewey's creation of the field. At TLS, specific progressive philosophies include experiential education, social justice education, restorative justice, Peaceful Schools, design-based thinking, and social-emotional learning. Each of these philosophies informs the curriculum and school design at TLS. Part of our research was to discover how they are enacted and intersect to potentially form aspects of critical experiential education. We explored each of these methodologies, including them in the literature review for our dissertation throughout the research process.

History of Experiential Education

The development of experiential education as pedagogy can be traced back to John Dewey, who first proposed a change to education in the late 1890s. In his writing, Dewey was pushing back against the increasing industrialization of education. Dewey saw education becoming universal and the process disconnected from the development of students as humans and members of society. Unlike other scholars of education at the time, Dewey proposed a greater connection between education and the society in which a student lived. He believed that education should prepare children to enter into and become productive members of society. Through this connection, students are "stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from [their] original narrowness of action and feeling and to conceive of [themselves] from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which [they] belong" (Dewey, 1972, p. 84). Rather than viewing education as a separation from the 'real world,' Dewey advocated for a greater connection between the two. He believed that education should mirror the world and enable students to enter the world successfully. Demonstrating the social value and importance of knowledge was essential to Dewey's philosophy of education. The school, therefore, must "avoid the teaching of abstract ideas; rather, it must provide actual conditions out of which ideas grow, and the child must be allowed within the school to test moral and social judgments" (Spring, 2018, p. 285). Dewey sought to break the increasing industrialization of education and hoped that children would learn how to engage as members of a productive community through the school.

Dewey advocated for a hands-on approach to education that allowed for experimentation, application, and engagement in his early writing. In Dewey's view, "education which does not occur through forms of life, forms that are worth living for their own sake, is always a poor

substitute for the genuine reality and tends to cramp and to deaden" the natural impulses and excitement that children have (Dewey, 1972, p. 87). Dewey also advocated for a different approach to teaching and suggested that the teacher act more as a facilitator who guided engagement and presented students opportunities from which to choose. This way of engaging students was a significant departure from how teachers and teaching had been viewed previously. As Dewey said, "the teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child" (Dewey, 1972, p. 88). In a departure from the norm, Dewey advocated for group projects, "learning by doing, relating material to the interests of the child, and doing projects" rather than the traditional rote memorization (Spring, 2018, p. 287). Dewey emphasized the importance of connecting to a larger community and a purpose outside of the classroom. Dewey's focus on the educational community became a central focus of experiential education and continues to influence the field today.

Differentiating Experiential Education (EE) and Experiential Learning (EL)

Buzzwords found in the literature like "experience" include experiential learning, experiential education, place-based learning, active learning, hands-on learning, inquiry-based learning, outdoor or adventure education, study abroad, project and problem-based learning, work-study, vocational education, adult learning, collaborative learning, democratic education, and work-integrated learning (Roberts, 2016). Each offers a slightly different bend on what constitutes "experiential" based on definitions to which the practitioners and educators of a particular field adhere. Each has specific methodologies and practices, but the general principles of experiential education are relatively universal.

Motivated by the work of psychologist Kurt Lewin, David Kolb is credited with the development of experiential learning theory, which suggests educators should take a holistic approach to learning by incorporating experience, perception, cognition, and behavior (Kolb, 1984). Itin proposed the following definition of the philosophy of experiential education:

Experiential education is a holistic philosophy, where carefully chosen experiences supported by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis, are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results through actively posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, constructing meaning, and integrating previously developed knowledge (Itin, 1999, p. 93)

Jay Roberts clarifies the difference between the two terms saying, "experiential learning is informal-one can learn through experience in any number of contexts and curriculum situations. Experiential education involves a broader and more systematic pedagogical process" (Roberts, 2016, p. 24). The Association for Experiential Education defines experiential education as a "philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities" (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.). The Independent Schools Experiential Education Network defines EE as "a pedagogical process by which educators engage students through a cycle of direct experience, reflection, analysis, and experimentation. Experiential education values personal connection to deep and applied learning and inspires growth in both the student and the teacher" (Independent Schools Experiential Education Network, n.d.).

These definitions, in combination, include learning through reflection and critical analysis, actively engaging the learner in their own education, authentic learning experiences that engage intellectually, emotionally, and socially, and a desire to provide experiences that result in transferrable learning applicable to future situations. Although experiential education and 'traditional' education processes may look similar, there are important distinctions. Education that simply provides an experience is "insufficient to be called experiential education. [It] is the reflection process that turns experience into experiential education" (Joplin, 1981, p. 17). A review of the history of EE sheds light on the challenge of using these terms interchangeably.

John Dewey's work provides the base on which the field of experiential education was built. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey describes a novel form of education that the learner guides, focused on holistic learning, and seeks to make meaning from lived experiences. As described previously, Dewey is often described as the founder of experiential education, and his ideas have helped shape the development of a field that is constantly evolving. One of Dewey's most fundamental principles that we as educators adopt is that a particular experience does not have inherent value--the same experience may be life-changing for one participant and meaningless to another. It is the educator/facilitator's responsibility to help provide a variety of experiences and to help process them so that participants make meaning for themselves.

Experiential Education in K-12 Schools

Educators in K-12 schools have incorporated various aspects of experiential education into their teaching practices for many years. As a pedagogy, experiential education provides students with the opportunity to engage with content in a hands-on and interactive manner while also exploring 'real-world' connections and working collaboratively with their peers. Experiential education also offers students ways to build higher-level skills like empathy through service-

learning, intercultural awareness through global engagement, or social-emotional skills through interactions with their peers.

As a field, experiential education encompasses many different modalities: service-learning, internships, project-based learning, environmental education, cooperative learning, expeditionary learning, global engagement, outdoor education, practicums, simulations, and more (AEE, n.d.). Experiential education is a pedagogy used in various ways in K-12 education due to the breadth of the field. The incorporation of experiential education in K-12 classrooms has traditionally been utilized to add to the formal curriculum rather than as a valuable teaching tool. Murrow (1982) comments that the formal curriculum rarely "provides any link to the experience of the student" (p. 38). Rather than viewing experience as a way to cement or expand on the formal curriculum, schools have viewed experiential education as an add-on or a student engagement tool rather than an opportunity to reinforce content and help students learn in new and different ways. Murrow challenges this disconnection by saying that schools, especially elementary schools, need to incorporate experiential education early.

The elementary classroom is the place to begin experiential learning, or, more realistically, to build upon the experiences that the child has had and will continue to have in his family— and the ones he may have had in nursery school or pre-school (Murrow, 1982, p. 39)

The challenges to adopting experiential education that Murrow articulated in 1982 are similar to ones heard today: hesitancy about moving to an uncertain future, fear of risk-taking, lack of support for moving beyond the formal curriculum, and concern for becoming more visible to the school and community (Murrow, 1982). Murrow encourages schools to find ways to easily incorporate experiential education by providing in-service training to teachers that

focuses on helping them unlearn the structures of the formal curriculum and seek opportunities to expand learning beyond the classroom (Murrow 1982).

Otten (1985) continues Murrow's discussion and provides an opportunity for infusing experiential education into the high school curriculum. Otten wrote a piece the year after David Kolb's seminal work on the experiential learning cycle was published. As Murrow and Otten both point out, experiential education was in its infancy during this period and was unfamiliar to most teachers and administrators. While Kolb's work helped codify experiential education into a model and a process, broad adoption of the framework took several years. Otten articulates the challenge between experiential learning and experiential education and focuses on the role of the teacher in an experiential education context. Otten's framework for experiential education suggests that an experience needs to be introduced, facilitated, and analyzed (Otten, 1985). An introduction must include the student objectives, and outcomes and analysis must connect the experience back to the formal learning that is the intention of the activity (Otten, 1985, p. 42). Otten focuses on incorporating experiential education in high school due to the differences he observes between younger and older students. Elementary students are learners, while high school students are on the way to becoming students. To further this point, Otten says, "a learner is anyone who happens to change through knowledge; but a student is someone who learns on purpose" (Otten, 1985, p. 44). This change from learner to student predicates an ability to be reflective about an experience. As students progress through their schooling, they become more skilled at reflecting on their reality and influencing change. Otten's piece, written in the early stages of experiential education, uses language and framing echoed by practitioners and scholars decades in the future.

Since the field of experiential education is so broad, it is often easier for schools to adopt a particular methodology of experiential education to infuse into their curriculum. Berv (1998) points out that service-learning easily incorporates experiential education into the formal curriculum while helping students gain curricular and social benefits. As Berv says, adding experiential education into K-12 schools has "largely been confined to programs and practices outside of mainstream education, often to be found in wilderness settings and approached in ways that have little explicit connection to the primary curriculum of schools" (Berv, 1998, p. 119). While these practices are undoubtedly valuable, there is a great benefit to be found from building experiential education directly to in-school education. Intentionally bridging experiential education into a formal curriculum can serve several important purposes: "a) unifying a highly fragmented curriculum, b) revitalizing pedagogy, and c) better serving at-risk populations" (Berv, 1998, p. 120). For Berv, service learning provides a bridge for educators to incorporate experiential education while reinforcing content and teaching interpersonal skills. Service-learning connects students to the community and strengthens the democratic nature of education by helping students recognize their ability to work collaboratively to influence change. Service-learning (and other forms of experiential education) "point to more meaningful and socially responsive and responsible education" that engages students and teachers alike in co-creating knowledge and making meaning from experience (Berv, 1998, p. 122).

In more recent years, experiential education has been incorporated into K-12 schools in specific ways or to meet specific educational goals. Scarce (1997) discusses the pedagogical value of field trips, framed as experiential education. Field trips can help students engage more authentically with the content in class and make the educational journey more enjoyable and realistic. Students who experience such a journey are more likely to remember the learning they

gained, even long after the experience itself has ended. Scarce writes that students are "motivated to learn when they concretely experience social phenomena through everyday settings of field trips; such experiences are impossible in the classroom" (Scarce, 1997, p. 220). Furthering illustrating the value of field trips, she notes they can also be "instrumental in challenging students' preconceived notions and breaking down stereotypes" (Scarce, 1997, p. 220). Other authors have written about the benefits of experiential education on content knowledge, social-emotional learning, empathy, or other life skills prevalent in school. Recent literature focuses on one aspect of experiential education (service-learning, global engagement, and outdoor education appear to be the most pervasive). The literature also focuses on how that aspect is incorporated into K-12 schools. While all forms of experiential education are different, they can provide similar benefits to students. Millham (2012) articulates the process needed to create a classroom culture and student population comfortable utilizing experiential education techniques. Millham involved high school students in creating her class and sought to make them feel like valued community members, all while aligning her curriculum to the state standards. Millham is aware of the critique that experiential education is a distraction from the formal curriculum and seeks to explain how experiential education can benefit standardized tests. Through utilizing an inquiry-based project that was co-created by her students, Millham saw that students had higher engagement and agency in their learning. This process "empowered students with the ability to think through the process of inquiry-based investigations [and] resulted in impressive levels of achievement on classroom assessments that were mirrored with a 96% passing rate" on their standardized test (Millham, 2012, p. 180). Millham credits this success to the fact that students experienced their education and were active participants in their own learning.

More recent literature has explored the various ways that experiential education is incorporated into K-12 schools and the benefits that it can provide to students. Gartland (2020) discusses how critical service-learning is used in elementary schools to foster student's voices, enhance self-efficacy, and strengthen classroom community. De Bilde et al. (2015) examine how experiential education pedagogy can aid in the transition to school and support all students in achieving success. These authors utilize the child-centered nature of experiential education to individualize educational support for each student entering kindergarten so that all students can thrive. Streelasky (2017) highlights the place-based nature of experiential education by discussing the connection between self and the natural world. Through experiential education, elementary students can share their perspectives on their environment and explore their role as curricular informants while learning about a specific place's cultural history and context. Broda (2002) explores how outdoor education can enhance middle school students' content knowledge and social-emotional processes. Learning in and for the outdoors expands the perception of learning beyond the four walls of the classroom and helps teachers and students alike to realize that the world around them is a valuable teacher. Educating in this way plays on the natural curiosity and intellectual development common in middle school students. Zaff and Lerner (2010) focus on the benefits gained by high school students through participating in service-learning programming and activities. These benefits speak to the larger Deweyian aims of education: students gain an increased knowledge of the world around them, recognize their ability to influence change, and gain a greater understanding of civic processes. Service-learning can help students to become more informed and active citizens in their communities. Scogin et al. (2017) articulate the multiple benefits that an experiential education program provides to

middle school students: a more positive perception of school, noncognitive skill development, higher academic performance, and more engagement in their academic journey.

Charter Schools

Within the history and development of public education in America, charter schools are a fairly recent development. As a concept, charter schools were initially discussed in 1988 as a way to provide groups of teachers the opportunity to explore new educational techniques and objectives (Budde, 1988). In his report *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts*, Ray Budde outlines what he sees as the need for sustained and future-oriented reform within educational institutions. It is worth noting that Budde's report came five years after the landmark 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, which sounded alarm bells about the current state of public education. Budde begins by saying that "little long-term progress will be made on any front unless the local school district—where teaching and learning actually take place—is organized in a substantially new and different way" (Budde, 1988, p. 16). As part of this change, Budde advocated for reforming the role of the teacher, increasing accountability, and enhancing leadership throughout the educational system. Significantly, Budde also discussed the need for greater parent/family involvement in schools, including providing parents the choice of school for their child. "The fact of having choice of school may not in itself change the role of parents; however, parent choice may have sufficient impact to change the internal organization of both the schools chosen and the schools rejected" (Budde, 1988, p. 20).

To accomplish the reform he believes necessary, Budde proposes a series of goals including giving teachers responsibility and control over instruction, enhancing connections between schools and the communities in which they exist, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning, and enabling principals to focus on providing an effective

learning environment for both teachers and students (Budde, 1988, p. 30). Budde proposes granting charters to teams of teachers with “visions of how to construct and implement more relevant educational programs or how to revitalize programs that have stood the test of time” (Budde, 1988, p. 49). In discussing the development of charters, Budde mentions the risk and uncertainty in embarking on a new and unknown journey. “‘Education by Charter’ is a vehicle for us to launch into the future and this cannot be done without taking some risks” (Budde, 1988, p. 49).

In more recent years, proponents of charter schools have taken Budde’s vision and goals and implemented them in various ways throughout the country. Distinct from private or religiously affiliated schools, charter schools are public schools and are accountable to many of the same standards and requirements as non-charter public schools. The National Assessment of Educational Progress defines charter schools as “public schools of choice” (NAEP, 2004, p. 1). Charter schools “serve as alternatives to the regular public schools to which students are assigned” and provide flexibility and choice within educational settings (NAEP, 2004, p. 2). Importantly, charter schools are exempted from some state regulations, but not from state oversight or accountability. Charter schools are funded through taxpayer funds like traditional public schools (traditional used here meaning non-chartered). Unlike traditional schools, however, charters have flexibility with how to spend those funds. Charter schools are open to all students and the individual school may not handpick their students (Hill, Lake, Celio, 2002, p. 4). When they are granted a charter to operate, charter schools are given flexibility and autonomy with teaching methods and philosophies. They are responsible for achieving educational outcomes and for student performance. As Junge (2014) puts it, “charter schools trade regulation for results, bureaucracy for accountability” (p. 14).

Accountability is one of the most contentious topics within charter schools. As Hill, Lake, and Celio (2002) point out, the general public tends to have widely disparate views of charter schools, some of which are not based in personal experience with this school style. The rise and increasing popularity in charter schools in recent years has led to debates about the efficacy and structures of charter schools. Many charter school laws focus on performance-based oversight of schools while making individual schools responsible for demonstrating student learning and allowing teachers to focus on individual student achievement (Hill, Lake, and Celio, 2002, p. 2). Charter schools and their leaders are answerable to both the state-specific charter laws and the authorizing body that granted their charter. Charter school leaders “know that they must meet performance goals set by the government agencies that authorize them to receive public funds” (Hill, Lake, and Celio, 2002, p. 3). For the most part, these authorizing agencies are state boards of education and the office of charter schools within the Department of Public Instruction. These agencies set out specific expectations for school achievement that are outlined in the performance agreement with the individual school. Breaches of this agreement may result in a denial of funding or even a revocation of the charter.

Charter schools are one in a long line of school reform ideas in the American educational landscape. By reforming the regulations and structure of education, charter schools hope to provide space for innovation and creativity. Bringing private sector ideas into public sector settings like schools hopes to spark a “shift in provision away from public districts, but within the publicly funded sector, [that] can lead to both more effective and equitable outcomes” (Lubienski, 2013, p. 499-500). In the charter school context, a movement towards privatization focuses on a movement “towards individual models of control” (Lubienski, 2013, p. 502). Charter schools “shift control to consumers, who are both private individuals and the consuming

public” while continuing to hold schools accountable through public agencies and authorizing agencies (Lubienski, 2013, p. 503). As a public-school reform tool, it can be helpful to think of charter schools in terms of marketization. Charter schools are “a vehicle for importing market mechanisms such as choice and competition into the publicly funded sector” (Lubienski, 2013, p. 503). Charter schools provide an opportunity for teachers, school leaders, parents, and communities to advocate for change at both individual schools and across larger educational institutions. Adopting a market-driven approach focused on the consumer means that charter schools are able to be adaptable as communities, societies, and contexts change. Information about charter schools specific to North Carolina is explored in greater depth in the next chapter, as we discuss our research site.

Co-Created Knowledge

Co-created knowledge production has roots in experiential education, critical pedagogy, and social justice education. Co-creating knowledge de-centers the teacher as the sole voice of authority or content delivery in the classroom and instead invites students and teachers alike to act as facilitators of learning. Bettez notes that "scholarship on social justice teaching (see Freire, 2003, Gay, 2000; hooks, 1994; Kumashiro, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shor, 1992; Wink, 2007) often focuses on how teachers and students can grow together through the shared exchange of teaching and learning" (Bettez, 2011, p. 7). Bettez' concern with activist teaching includes the importance of the lived experiences of students. She says,

Activist teaching requires that teachers recognize and acknowledge the lived experience of their students. Activist teaching encourages situated voice and knowledge rather than an abstract, disembodied voice. It is only through acknowledging how knowledge is situated that we can

deconstruct the underlying operations of power and strive for more significant equity (Bettez, 2008, p. 279).

Kumashiro states, "what students already know when entering school functions as filters or backdrops or lenses for what they experience, process, make sense of, act on, and otherwise learn in school" (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 26). He engages this conversation further as he argues against standards in education, saying, "I suggest any way of making sense of the work is necessarily partial: Only certain people with certain values and experiences have made certain choices to create these perspectives" (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 27). Dewey argued that instead of requiring rote learning based on subjects of no interest to children, they should have the freedom to determine what and how they want to use the actions they see others doing to develop their way of completing an action (Noddings 2016). Noddings adds to the conversation when she says the experience must hold meaning to the person active in it, be connected to prior experience, and happen in a social/cultural context (Noddings, 2016). From each field of study, co-created knowledge production is recognized as a valuable component of education.

The examples listed above illustrate the value of knowledge production when co-created and the challenge to students and others when their lived experiences, beliefs, and curiosities are not included. The example of what happens when students are not credited with the wealth of knowledge they bring to educative spaces should warn educators that students are whole beings. They should be allowed to bring their whole selves to educative spaces.

Democracy and Education

Dewey's work also helped to formalize a connection between learning and citizenship. Dewey promoted the idea that education and schooling should serve a civic purpose and prepare students for lives as citizens within a democracy. Dewey advocated for truly holistic learning and

viewed the student as more than a passive receptacle for knowledge. In Dewey's perspective, education would seek to provide learning opportunities that were appropriate based on a student's past experiences. Viewing a student as a collection of experiences informs how we approach curriculum and teaching itself. While this is a more complex and potentially time-consuming teaching method, it is essential to recognize the lived experiences that inform how we view and interact with the world. Slattery (2013) phrases it slightly differently:

Pinar's method of currere challenges educators to begin with the individual experience and then make broader connections. [...] Curriculum development in the postmodern era is attentive to both the interconnectedness of all experiences and to the importance of the autobiographical perspective. (p. 68)

Both societal construction and education serve a larger purpose and have an overarching goal that can easily be missed when examining details. Societies serve those who compose them—they attempt to develop "unity, praiseworthy community of purpose and welfare, loyalty to public ends, [and] mutuality of sympathy" in those that makeup society (Dewey, 1920, p. 95). At the same time, each person's goals within a community may be slightly different as societies in general work to establish a shared experience that is mutually dependent on everyone within it. Members of society work to meet its aims because they know it will benefit them and others. Societies naturally encourage a sense of interconnectedness among members and other societies. In Dewey's terms, this interconnectedness and mutual work towards success by members of a society "are precisely what characterize the democratically constituted society" (Dewey, 1920, p. 100).

Similar goals are present in many education systems. They strive to instill values into students that will make them productive members of the societies mentioned above. Education works to prepare students for lives in which they will contribute positively to the society in which they exist. This positive contribution can be thought of in pragmatic terms, as Dewey (citing Plato) says:

a society is stably organized when each individual is doing that for which he has an aptitude by nature in such a way as to be useful to others [...] and that it is the business of education to discover these aptitudes and progressively train them for social use (Dewey, 1920, p. 102)

Education, on one level, exists to help students discover the skills they have that benefit society the most. On another level, education serves to prepare democratic citizens that can shape and guide the societies in which they live.

Dewey defined democracy as "more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1920, p. 87). Citizens shape the associated living of which they are a member. Spanning these many forms is the belief that democracy is a way of life that involves values and behaviors necessary to continue and develop. These behaviors and habits include individual characteristics like "caring, compassion, generosity, fairness, respect, imagination, courage, kindness, and cooperation" coupled with "communal systems and arrangements that support inquiry, problem-solving, diversity, and ongoing efforts at social reform" (Hyttén, 2017, p. 5). Both individual and collective behaviors and values are necessary for democracies to be successful. Beane coalesces these two main interconnected ideas and defines democracy as a system in "that people have a fundamental right to human dignity and that people have a responsibility to care about the common good and

dignity and welfare of others" (as cited in Hytten, 2017, p. 5). Developing these habits and behaviors is an ongoing and iterative process, with the citizen learning from the society and vice versa. However, in the United States, students undergo no formal training program to become influential democratic citizens; they have nowhere to practice these skills. For Dewey and his contemporaries, education was where students could learn and practice the skills and behaviors they would need to exhibit later in life. This need to practice a behavior, receive feedback, and reflect upon that behavior, and develop strategies for future improvement is why experiential education can be seen as fostering democratic citizenship.

Ira Shor's work, a critical pedagogue could play an essential role in providing a path towards encouraging democratic processes in the classroom. Kincheloe notes, "Shor has carefully worked to integrate critical notions of social critique with techniques of pedagogy in ways that create new educational possibilities" through the use of a dialogical pedagogy. In this type of pedagogy, "the teacher starts with student experience, student response to themes, texts, and/or problems" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 87). Shor considers the educator as more facilitator than an authoritarian teacher or "sage on the stage," whereby "the classroom is the venue for the construction of knowledge, not merely for its inculcation" (Kincheloe, 2008, p.88). Kincheloe (2008) suggests "achieving the best balance of teacher and student input into the critical classroom is central to Shor, as he pushes the boundaries of the democratic classroom as a sophisticated form of group process (Shor, 1980, 1987, 1992, 1996; Shor and Freire, 1987; Shor and Pari, 1999a, 1999b)" (Kincheloe, 2008, p.89). The engagement suggested here coincides with Dewey's work and where EE, in some way, sits today.

Contemporary Developments

Contemporary scholars such as David Kolb have taken up Dewey's work in their own contexts. His work in the 1980s operationalized Dewey's philosophies for the modern time, and his Experiential Learning Cycle has become the foundation of many forms of experiential education. Kolb proposes an 'inside-out' approach to teaching grounded in our experience as individual educators and uses that as the starting point for engaging students. In his view, "the experiential educator is a unique person in relationship with equally unique students, influenced by a wide variety of contexts" (Kolb & Kolb, 2017, p. xxi). Just like Dewey saw the importance of child-centered learning, Kolb brings the importance of context into experiential education. Educators must recognize that individuals will perceive and interact with content differently due to their lived experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to resist calls for universal 'one-size-fits-all' curriculum models.

Figure 1. Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle



Like Dewey, Kolb speaks to the necessity of relationships within experiential education. "For educators, the magic of experiential learning lies in the unique relationship that is created between teacher, learner, and the subject matter under study" (Kolb & Kolb, 2017, p. xxiv). This

focus on relationships changes the nature of the teacher/student experience as both groups have different relationships with the content.

Rather than assuming the teacher has all the knowledge, experiential education puts both groups on a somewhat equal footing since both have essential contributions and perspectives. "Questioning differences that arise from these multiple perspectives is the fuel for learning and new insights. Challenging the expert's viewpoint even becomes possible" (Kolb & Kolb, 2017, p. xxv). This ability (and even encouragement) to challenge normative views on power within educational spaces continues to be an essential part of experiential education. De-centering knowledge and changing the educator role to more like a facilitator are central aspects of modern experiential education. The Association for Experiential Education includes both in their Principles of Practice. They discuss how both the educator and learner (roles that can be loosely defined and can switch) can experience success and failure together at various points along the learning process (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.).

Jay Roberts expands upon Dewey and Kolb by putting experiential education into the context of higher education and offering suggestions for educators looking to adopt this pedagogy. Roberts pushes against the rising tide of online and remote learning opportunities within higher education by discussing the educative power of the 'live encounter.' The live encounter "gets beyond the script, the expected, the given, and the predictable" to engage students and educators alike in organic opportunities for learning (Roberts, 2018, p. 15). Roberts continues Dewey's discussion of the risks and consequences of experiential education and the importance these risks can have on student learning. Rather than sequestering knowledge behind a wall of academia, experiential education puts that knowledge into the world and allows students to wrestle with it head-on. "Classrooms and learning situations come 'alive' when

something is at stake"—these 'real-world' consequences allow students to experience the social, pedagogical, and ethical risks of implementing knowledge within the world (Roberts, 2018, p. 16).

Roberts' book includes a helpful set of tools for developing experiential education programs within higher education. While this is a specific context, it can serve as a resource for others looking to begin programs. Experiential education can be difficult to grasp fully, so this how-to manual fills an important gap in the field. One of the items that Roberts does not address in his book is the continued criticism of experiential education related to social justice. Although many forms of experiential education are described as exclusive and reinforcing dominant cultures, this is most clear in adventure or outdoor education. "Concepts of adventure are based in privilege and oppression," and it is crucial for us as a field to address how we perpetuate inequities through programming (Warren, Roberts, Breunig, & Alvarez, 2014, p. 90). A recent vein of research within experiential education has sought to bring an essential social justice perspective to our work. Scholars have examined gendered experiences of leadership (Bell, 1997), the experiences of LGBTQIA participants and educators (McClintock, 1992), the existence of a gendered hidden curriculum (Warren, Mitten, D'Amore, & Lotz, 2018), and the need for the field to be more aware of issues around social justice (see, e.g., Warren, 1998; Thomas, 2008; Riley, 2020; Breunig, 2019; Warren, 2019).

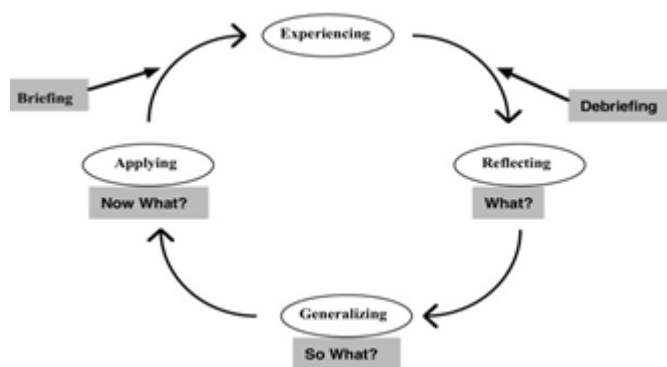
Question 1 Literature Review

The goal of question 1 was to critique and challenge the widely used experiential education model to examine opportunities for critical framing. We could have included many other fields and their unique perspectives. Through our research, we found the areas discussed

below to be most relevant to our study. Focusing on these fields aided in our operationalization of question 1.

As researchers and scholars, we recognize and value the need to embrace the interdisciplinary nature of experiential education in general and critical experiential education in particular. We believe it is important to utilize existing bodies of literature that are common in experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy. The conceptual layers below may be specific to one field or more broadly used across disciplines. These layers offer perspectives we believe to be central to developing a frame of critical experiential education.

Figure 2. Kolb's Cycle with the Adventure Wave



Why is a New Frame Needed?

As we have researched, participated in, and facilitated experiential education philosophy and methodologies for the last decade, we have begun to critically question the long-standing models utilized in experiential education programming and educative spaces in 2020. Laurie Frank (2004) integrated the Adventure Wave (reflection cycle) into David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, and that model has been used extensively in experiential education spaces.

Experiential education scholars have long considered the need to incorporate a more critical and socially just processing model that would encourage and invoke deeper reflection (see, e.g., Breunig, 2019; Mitten, 2018; Warren, 2019). Scholars have noted that previous models

lack criticality in operationalizing espoused principles of experiential education. As outlined below, we agree with these scholars and gravitate towards the Association of Experiential Education principles of practice.

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Relationships are developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others and learner to the world at large.
- The educator and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of experience cannot totally be predicted.
- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.

- The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, ensuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
- The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
- Educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments, and pre-conceptions, and how these influence the learner.
- The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes, and successes.

(Retrieved from aee.org October 3, 2020)

These principles of practice offer experiential education practitioners a mutual point from which to begin to consider experiential education in more critical terms and the direction principles of practice for critical experiential education might lean. These principles suggest a more individualized process centering around how individuals move through and reflect on the world. At times that reflection is in a small group and at others, this development is a more personal. Critical Pedagogy provides the ability to interconnect these mostly individualistic principles with a more holistic concern with systems and structures.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, born of the Frankfurt School, provides a lens or framework to examine and question the larger systems at play in the world around you. McLaren describes critical pedagogy by saying, “Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others are clearly not” (McLaren, 1994, p. 178). Experiential education,

unlike critical pedagogy, is inherently focused on an individual's actions to transform themselves and/or communities. Operationally, experiential education provides space and opportunity for transformation yet lacks the systemic foundation that critical pedagogy provides.

To many pedagogues today, Paulo Freire is considered the “father” of Critical Pedagogy (CP) (Kirylo, 2013, p. 49). He argued against the "banking system" whereby educators dole out the information necessary to be considered important, and students' responsibility is to regurgitate it back in the form of answers on a test (Freire, 2000). He said, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 2000, p. 72). In other words, knowledge production is a co-created social action that occurs over and over throughout time and involving multiple learners, including teachers, educators, and students. Another critical element or gift from Freire is his insistence on praxis, which he defines as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2000, p. 31). These elements of thought from Freire speak to and connect Dewey, Greene, Britzman, and other pedagogues described below. Critical Pedagogy recognizes various histories, beliefs, practices, and ways of knowing and asks questions of power, privilege, voice, neutrality, and the importance of experience, to name a few.

Joe Kincheloe and Henry Giroux have led the more recent charge in research and writing about CP. Kincheloe is highly regarded for his work in education and social justice work (Kirylo, 2013, p. 85). His writing often centers around the need for teachers to recognize those students considered to be on the margins of society and to advocate for their voices and perspectives to be heard. He says CP is profoundly concerned with understanding subjugated forms of knowledge coming from these various groups and examining them in relation to other

forms of academic knowledge (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 26). He believes (along with Dewey) that knowledge is created. Viewing knowledge production from this perspective, he recognizes critical pedagogues will invariably come to different conclusions as to what CP entails based on historical and social contexts. Kincheloe reinforces the value of recognition that the lived world is complex such that “diverse perspectives on similar events and alert us to various relationships between events” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 37). His encouragement to consistently question life events, experiences, beliefs, and contexts offer the possibility of re-imagining what has been and what is yet to be.

Kincheloe suggests, "advocates of critical pedagogy are aware that every minute of every hour that teachers teach, they are faced with complex decisions concerning justice, democracy, and competing ethical claims" (Kincheloe, 2008, p.1). Critical pedagogues are interested in schooling as a political endeavor, as an act concerned with social justice, the role experience plays in knowledge production, and the fulfillment of human potential (Kincheloe, 2008). Kincheloe cleanly describes the challenges teachers face as they negotiate the experiences of teaching, learning, and working in an educative community. Recent educational thinkers such as Kincheloe have taken the historical, social, and philosophic dimensions of education into account and then moved forward to consider how those disciplines merge into the interdisciplinary field of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy offers experiential education the theoretical foundation for which so many experiential education scholars have called.

Critical pedagogy invites actions focused on dismantling power structures or other types of systemic barriers in educative and other spaces. While this work is vital, practitioners cannot do it without individual and interpersonal action. Critical pedagogy offers a toolbox for individuals to use to take steps like "ridding oneself of false consciousness or of external social

transformation." (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 134). Actions within critical pedagogy and a critical theory framework tend to be less tangible and more systemic than actions taken within experiential education, which tend to be tangible but focused on the individual. Critical pedagogy, however, does not have associated methodologies available that operationalizes practice(s) in quite the same manner as experiential education. By blending both, critical experiential education offers the transformational capacity to operationalize action with co-created and emancipatory knowledge production.

Any consideration of Critical Pedagogy must include Henry Giroux in the mix. Giroux is a prolific writer and scholar, and his contributions to the field of CP are well known. In addition to the scholars and their contributions described above, Giroux adds an understanding that cultural politics are a crucial element in terms of knowledge production. He says, "Cultural politics matter because it is the pedagogical site on which identities are formed; subject positions are made available; social agency is enacted; and cultural forms both reflect and deploy power through their modes of ownership and mode of public pedagogy" (Giroux, 2011, p. 70). He certainly deploys a strong case that education is never neutral. Pedagogy "as a moral and political practice plays a crucial role in constituting the social" (Giroux, 2011, p. 123). Giroux brings us full circle to questions of philosophers and historians described above as he implores educators today to be aware of the many ways in which education has been and continues to be a political site and one that is perennially contested.

Experience, Reflection, Freedom

Noddings discusses Dewey as speaking of "education as synonymous with growth" (Noddings, 2016, p. 26). Many educators argue this line of thinking as they question growth towards what goals or ends? However, Dewey reasoned growth itself was a process and goal.

Therefore, education was a process and goal. Dewey advocated for the understanding that children do not just imitate what they see others doing and follow what they see. Students should have the freedom and experiences that lead them through determining their way of solving a problem or completing an action.

In a discussion on considering the habits social justice educators need, Bettez and Hytten (2013, p. 49) suggest being critically self-reflective as "the beliefs and positions we hold, why we see the world as we do, and remain open to alternative positions and possibilities." They then tether two scholars, Hackman, and Quin by quoting them as saying,

Hackman (2005) argues that social justice educators need "tools for personal reflection" (104), and Quin (2009) asserts that "we always need to keep deepening our consciousness of self and society—and self in society—to keep ourselves on the keen learning-awareness edge that ensures both" (Bettez and Hytten, 2013, p. 49)

Maxine Greene supports ideas of experience and the importance of reflection and adds the importance of consciousness as she says to find ourselves,

in the delight of experiencing requires a transaction with the world, an ongoing transaction with qualities and forms. This kind of transaction may be thought of in terms of acts of consciousness, meaning a series of moments in which we grasp what is given, in which we thrust into the world. To be aware of such moments is to be sensitive to how we originate them; it is to be conscious that we are the motivators of what is happening, that we are subjects responsible to and ourselves. (Greene, 1978, pp. 199-200)

Greene advocates for us to question the way experience(s) can affect consciousness and choice. Her concern is that our world is unbalanced in that we leave little time for reflection on those experiences (Greene, 1978). She argues that slowing down and engaging in conscious thinking "always involves a risk, a venture into the unknown" (Greene, 1988, p. 125).

Experience is not the end of the educative act. Students need reflection and even critical reflection to attempt to grasp the depth of understanding fully. Interweaving experience with reflection is not necessarily a sequential process that requires these two to happen close together. The 'ah-ha moment,' though uncomfortable, may come much later, if at all.

Imagination and Vision

Scholars from all fields and disciplines engage in the topics of imagination and vision in more articles, books, and chapters than can begin to be conceived of or acknowledged here. Instead, Maxine Greene's *Social Imagination* and John Paul Lederach's *Moral Imagination* will be discussed as they are relevant to understanding social change in experiential education spaces.

The aesthetics of social change proposes a simple idea: Building adaptive and responsive processes requires a creative act, which, at its core, is more an art than a technique. The creative act brings into existence processes that have not existed before (Lederach 2005, p. 73)

The proposal Lederach grapples with is that moral imagination is required to transcend violence. Here is a time to interject the use of different words for similar meanings. Lederach's use of the word "violent" would undoubtedly be a word used to describe oppression in the United States today. Lederach spends a significant amount of time explaining the multiplicity of ways religious leaders and scholars come to this term (Lederach, 2005). They mostly agree "the moral

imagination develops a capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye" (Lederach, 2005, p.26).

Stated simply, the moral imagination requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies; the ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the all too familiar landscape of violence (Lederach, 2005, p.5).

Maxine Greene calls for a similar collective visioning process grounded in aesthetics that encourages freedom and responsibility. She clarifies these terms when she says,

This is the one way of conceiving of what freedom signifies – the freedom to alter situations by reinterpreting them and, by so doing, seeing oneself as a person with a new perspective. Once that happens, there are new beginnings, new actions to undertake in the world (Greene, 1988, p.90).

She takes this further when she talks about the social imagination as "the capacity to invent visions of what should and what might be in our deficient society, in the streets where we live, in our schools. Social imagination not only suggests but also requires that one take action to repair or renew" (Greene, 1995, p. 5). For Greene, "envisioning what can be happening on streets and in schools, this is a call for a collective visioning process, an invitation to enter into the community". Quin (2009) considers yearning, imagining, and dreaming toward a shared direction as central actions necessary for social justice education (Bettez & Hytten, 2013). The idea of community must be strongly associated with vision as Bettez and Hytten note, "We best

blend content and process when we work in harmony with others, that is, within a supportive community that helps us to collectively imagine and act upon transformative possibilities" (Bettez and Hytten, 2013, p. 50).

Dialogue

Bettez and Hytten are two scholars who regularly research and write about social justice, community building, and democracy in education. For these scholars, dialogue is essential for each of those processes and goals to happen. They suggest that "to sustain a sense of empowerment and agency in their efforts, social justice educators must regularly engage in dialogue with others" (Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 50). From their perspective, dialogue is an ongoing process. Schwalbe echoes that perspective by recommending an openness to the understanding of others better, all must enter into dialogue with one another and that this dialogue should be ongoing and complex. (Schwalbe, 2005).

A call for dialogue and authentic conversation is also an invitation to lean into discomfort and embrace opportunities provided by genuinely listening. Delpit suggests gaining awareness of and processing through who we are and why we are to recognize our biases and assumptions. Delpit means we hear from a space of curiosity, not judgment, and that "we must learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness" (Delpit, 2006, p. 47). Shapiro urges us to be vulnerable and be fully attentive to one another's narrative (Shapiro, 2006).

These facilitators claim to value awareness of biases and predispositions that are inequitable. As both a skill and an art, facilitation is challenging as the conversations are often centered around conflict. Bettez is noticeably mindful of facilitation challenges stating that "artful facilitation requires learning how to interrupt people in respectful ways that allow for the

continuation of dialogue. It requires learning how to ask questions that can allow anyone to participate and to open spaces for all to do so" (Bettez, 2008, p. 281). She further encourages active listening as a critical component of facilitation, defining it as "recognizing the importance of and seeking out dialogues across lines of cultural difference" (Bettez, 2011, p. 13).

Bettez and Hytten discuss dialogue as a foundational component of participating in critical communities where working in and with difference is encouraged. They say:

To do so effectively, we must listen carefully to others, share our own ideas thoughtfully and humbly, seek to bracket our assumptions to better hear others, and remain open to the possibility that our worldviews may fundamentally change. In fact, we should assume that we will change during the process of working with others and will be exposed to new, potentially more enriching, and just ways of being in the world and in communion (Bettez and Hytten 2013, p. 54)

From the information gathered here, dialogue appears to be as much about listening as it is speaking.

Call to Action

Experiential education, critical pedagogy, and social justice all have a shared desire to move towards action. Each field encourages adherents to find opportunities to right wrongs, act with a liberatory intent, and seek to improve the world around them. Everything about life offers the chance to wake up, turn around and realize that everything that happens provides us with an opportunity for transcendence. Transcendence in this context is associated with radical hope. Radical hope the problem in all its manifestations but not being discouraged by the seriousness or difficulty of the task ahead" (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2003, p. 39). Understanding complexity

through dialogue, community, experience, reflection, uncomfortableness, and the other themes found in this literature review, provides all educators and learners the opportunity to recognize the proleptic moment we inhabit and imagine a different future for educators and students.

In particular, critical experiential education engages scholars, educators, and learners in acknowledging, understanding, and disrupting power dynamics that disadvantage some people and advantage others. Experiential educators are concerned with disrupting systems and groups situated and grounded in normative practices in educational and other spaces and contexts. Experiential education provides a way to operationalize disrupting power dynamics so that all students can sit in discomfort to join together to create new ways of being together. We define critical experiential education as a broad philosophy of education whose practitioners seek to challenge and disrupt power dynamics as they appear in traditional educational settings. We believe in critical experiential education's power to center educator's and learner's identities and lived experiences. We believe the meaning made through structured reflection on experiences can inspire critical reflexivity. We believe critical reflexivity and the resulting call to action differentiates critical experiential education from experiential education.

Question 2 Literature Review

The goal of question 2 was to understand teaching further and learning praxis at TLS. We could have again included a variety of fields. Through our research, we found the fields discussed below to be most relevant to our study. Focusing on these fields aided in our operationalization of question 2.

Social Justice Education

The complexity inherent in describing social justice and social justice education (SJE) challenges scholars as they attempt to come to similar understandings. Lee Anne Bell defines

social justice as both a process and a goal. The goal, she says, "is full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (Bell, 2016, p. 3). The process she recommends for meeting this goal is that it "should be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, and inclusive and affirming of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change" (Bell, 2016, p. 3). Bell further describes SJE as 'both an interdisciplinary conceptual framework for analyzing multiple forms of oppression and their intersections, as well as a set of interactive, experiential pedagogical principles and methods/practices" (Bell, 2016, p. 4). AEE members see themselves as utilizing experiential education philosophy that closely connects to social justice.

On the front page of their website, AEE lists a series of guiding principles members espouse to value. From the full list described prior in this literature review, we determined several we considered as examples of SJE in action:

- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values
- Educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments, and pre-conceptions, and how this influences the learner
- The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.).

Although social justice is defined in different ways, we gravitate towards the definition offered by Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997): social justice is both a process and a goal, with an

aim of "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p. 3). We find this definition to be beneficial because of its simplicity and its connection to experiential education. Naming it as both a process and a goal helps to explicate the processes involved in social justice work. This definition also speaks to the continually evolving and iterative nature of social justice—as society and culture continue to evolve, the definition of social justice must too. Much like experiential education, social justice education seeks to adapt to the needs of individuals and the society in which they live.

As one of the eminent scholars associated with social justice education, Paolo Freire strongly connects the understanding that learners bring with them their skills and ways of being. Freire asserts the humanist educator's responsibility in participant's learning "must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" (Freire, 1993, p. 75). He argues that the "banking system" of education does not offer students the opportunity to determine their own goals or reasons for learning, much less what they learn or how that knowledge humanizes the student. (Freire, 1993).

There is also a strong connection between social justice education and Dewey's work in that both see the importance of a connection to something more significant than the self. Dewey advocated for learning that was life, built on relationships, and connected to the 'real world.' Social justice, similarly, "involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997, p. 3). This sense of action and responsibility towards others are hallmarks of social justice education and experiential education and provide opportunities to bridge the two fields together.

Social Justice as a Pedagogy

Conceptualizing social justice education as a pedagogical framework is challenging due to the emotional nature of the experiences and the uncertainty they bring. There is no one path forward through conversations around justice, privilege, oppression, and equity. There is no prescriptive set of questions that can help a student wrestle with their privilege. Instead, educators must wade into murky waters, lean into discomfort and ambiguity, and risk having to acknowledge this lack of consistent context and structure to students. These topics can stir up intense emotions, making the educator's responsibility all the more challenging.

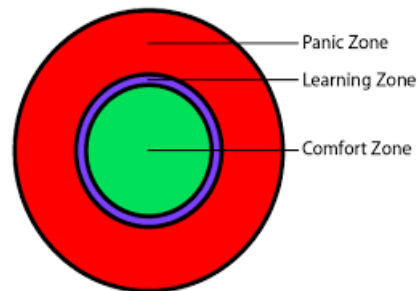
Within social justice education, Adams, Bell, and Griffin present a series of pedagogical goals: the need to balance emotional and cognitive elements, providing support for the individual as they wrestle with systemic issues, and a focus on increased awareness and growth as a result of the process that can only come through reflection (Bell, Adams, & Griffin, 1997, p. 30). Kumashiro expands on these pedagogical goals by offering suggestions for the teacher who aspires to teach social justice. Teaching in an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, social justice-focused way is challenging and often contrary to dominant norms present in a typical educational setting. The importance of engaging in social justice work is the centering of humanity present on all fronts and to remember that students are not blank slates as they enter the classroom. As Kumashiro says, "the notion that teachers can correct what students already know does not often account for the unpredictable ways that students' prior knowledge can invite and/or hinder new learning" (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 26). The acknowledgment that students (and teachers) bring critical cultural perspectives that will influence their ability to learn can be known as culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), or reality pedagogy (Emdin, 2016). Regardless of its name, this teaching style seeks to ensure that

teachers and students alike are seen as important sources of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) rather than as obstacles to overcome. In other words, "what students already know when entering school functions as filters or backdrops or lenses for what they experience, process, make sense of, act on, and otherwise learn in school" (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 26).

Uncomfortable-ness/Discomfort

A central feature of experiential education recognizes the learning that can come from discomfort. Within outdoor/adventure-based learning, engaging with discomfort or crisis is phrased as 'challenge by choice,' a concept developed by Project Adventure (1991). Challenge by choice asks participants to challenge themselves and participate fully in each experience. An essential aspect of challenge by choice is the idea of comfort, growth, and panic zones (see Figure 3). Participants are encouraged to expand their comfort zone to enter the growth zone where they can learn more effectively. The group must recognize that any activity or goal may pose a different level and type of challenge for each group member and that authentic personal change comes from within. Whereas one participant might take a significant personal risk, face fears, and step into their growth zone when they climb to the top of a six-foot ladder, another participant might need to be blindfolded for the same activity to be a challenge. Challenge by choice is different for each participant. In a learning community, it is not about who goes further or does the most, it is about how much each person chooses to push themselves and the mutual respect and support they receive from their group.

Figure 3. Comfort Learning and Panic Zone



When participants agree to practice challenge by choice, they agree to respect and support each other's thoughtful choices. Agreeing to respect and support each other's thoughtful choices means that the group will offer support and encouragement but not push someone into their panic zone through peer pressure. Although this may result in participants playing different roles during an activity, all participants still contribute to the group's process. Each person is responsible for setting their own goals and limits based on their own understanding of their comfort zone and growth circle. No one can tell someone else what they need to accomplish to have a growing experience. Challenge by choice is the open door that invites participants to step out of their comfort zone and push their growing edges. It helps create a caring atmosphere in which participants can challenge themselves.

Rather than shying away from discomfort or treating it as a situation to be avoided, experiential education invites both teachers and learners to embrace discomfort. Actively seeking out situations to provoke feelings of discomfort challenge us to get beyond the normal and push ourselves into spaces of learning. Paulette Regan (2006, 2010) prompts educators to "be willing to be uncomfortable, to be disquieted at a deep and disturbing level in order to welcome transformative learning and the kind of experiential learning that engages our whole being." (As cited in Shore, 2015, pp. 1-2). The uncomfortableness Regan offers is the initial feeling many

people have as they begin to recognize their way of being and living in the world may not be as it seems.

Greene's theme of "wide-awake-ness" (Greene, 1978) allows us to give our full attention to the way we live our lives, the choices we make, and the consequences of those choices, to be able to recognize then the ways we learned to navigate the world may be incorrect. If we find that our ways of being have led us to be complicit in oppressing or otherwise harming others, we may feel a sense of guilt or discomfort. Lederach understands the discomfort Greene and Regan describe and nevertheless encourages us to "reach out to those you fear. Touch the heart of complexity. Imagine beyond what is seen. Risk vulnerability one step at a time" (Lederach, 2005, p. 177). He is imploring us to recognize and act on our fears so that we may reach new understandings of others to build or become something new.

Kumashiro says, "learning things that reveal the partial and oppressive aspects of our knowledge of and actions in the world can lead us into crisis" (Kumashiro, 2015, p.30, emphasis in original). He continues by saying, "Students who are in crisis are on the verge of some shift and require the opportunity to work through their emotions and disorientation" (Kumashiro, 2015, p.30). He then offers the response students need from teachers in this context is to be provided with experiences that encourage and aid in helping them process through the discomfort.

As social justice education continues to formalize, increasing attention is paid to the connections it has with cultural foundations, experiential education, critical pedagogy, and other fields both within and outside of a traditional educational environment. The pedagogical goals presented earlier serve as guideposts and a unifying force for Adams, Bell, and Griffin. These goals help to guide the many ways social justice education can appear and provide a sense of

unity between these fields. Borrowing from critical pedagogy, social justice education seeks to have "students learn to look critically at messages about the 'other' coming from the media and other sources of cultural information, practice new behaviors and communication skills, and develop social change scenarios" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997, p. 43). Also central to the work of social justice education is this focus on social change. Like critical pedagogy, social justice education includes an inherent focus on the future while situating change in the proleptic moment. In these contexts, knowledge should be gained with an eye towards emancipation, action for the betterment of others, and the improvement of society as a whole.

Maintaining this focus on future action can, as Kumashiro says, help students navigate and process their emotional responses towards the challenging information they learn. When students encounter information that challenges their privilege, exposes oppression in a new way, or calls on them to act in an anti-racist way, they can enter a period of crisis. Kumashiro defines this crisis as "a state of emotional discomfort and disorientation that calls on students to make some change" (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 30). While this change can be internal, it is essential to help students reflect and consider how their actions can impact society.

Dewey and Roberts speak to the importance of risk and uncertainty in experiential education. Similarly, Kumashiro argues that one cannot truly learn without experiencing some form of challenge or crisis. "If students are not experiencing crisis, they likely are not learning things that challenge the knowledge they have already learned that supports the status quo" (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 32). Without that challenge, students cannot have their perceptions expanded and recognize new forms of thinking. Therefore, it becomes more critical for educators to provide opportunities for invoking moments of crisis, providing what Biesta calls an interruption on the way to achieving "grown-up-ness" (Biesta, 2017).

Connection to Experiential Education

Social justice education calls on teachers and educators to shift into a new role. Instead of typically acting as a ‘sage on the stage’ social justice education asks teachers to take on the role of facilitator by guiding their students' experiences. Here, social justice education borrows terminology from experiential education and, in turn, offers valuable tools for experiential facilitators looking to infuse social justice into their work. There are several similarities between the Association of Experiential Education's *Principles of Practice* and the pedagogical goals that Adams, Bell, and Griffin outlined earlier. Both call for a change in the relationship between teacher and student, invite an appreciation of the unknown, and challenge the notion that education needs to be free of risk and consequence. In social justice education, educators need to be self-aware before they can be effective for their students. This need for a reflective and reflexive praxis is another connection to critical theory, particularly Freire's work. In working with students, Kumashiro says that educators need to be "flexible, attentive to the particularities of different students, and aware of the unpredictability of their responses" (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 31). While there is tremendous value in leaning into the unknown and focusing on the needs of individual students, this is challenging work. Kumashiro encourages rethinking teaching to be a "process that not only gives students the knowledge and skills that matter in society but also asks students to examine the political implications of that knowledge and skills" (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 41).

Within experiential education, there is a growing conversation around the implications and connections of social justice education. Warren, Mitten, Loeffler, Thomas, and other authors have called the field to task for failing to address systemic inequities, perpetuating systems of oppression, and failing to merely acknowledge the need to approach the work with a social

justice lens. These conversations echo the importance of moving towards action and encourage readers and practitioners to reconsider their work with a justice lens. As Warren (2019) says, we must use these "conversations as a foundation for re-creating just action in the practice of experiential education" (p. 6). Just as Kumashiro calls for an increasing focus on social justice within teacher education, Warren (1998 and 2002) encourages outdoor education preparation programs to infuse social justice topics and content intentionally. "The attention to topics of race, class, and gender in staff training and professional preparation programs in the outdoors is imperative" (Warren, 1998, p. 24).

Harkening back to the original aims of education, social justice education encourages a reconnection with and commitment to establishing democracy. Education should prepare people for their lives as members of a democratic society and equip them with the skills necessary to effect change. Central to that argument is the need for education to result in a call to action—an encouragement of a sense of personal responsibility and an increasing knowledge of one's ability to act. Of course, individuals within all contexts have a choice in their actions. They can (to some extent) choose their level of engagement, the scope of their actions, or even if they will be present at all. Within experiential and social justice education, the element of choice becomes more critical and popularized by Project Adventure with the phrase "challenge by choice."

Breunig (2019) problematizes this phrase within the context of social justice education by applying a critical lens to it. In an attempt to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of individuals through employing a choice philosophy, educators and facilitators can unintentionally reinforce dominant norms. These choice philosophies often "involve making assumptions about participant's lives" and making educational decisions based on those assumptions (Breunig, 2019, p. 19). Similarly, Carlson and Evans (2001) draw attention to the

inherent ableism within a choice philosophy. How do educators involve those who are unable to choose or unable to express their choice? As they remind us, there are "inconsistencies in the foundational bricks of the challenge-by-choice ideology which appear to prevent the philosophy from being adhered to in all situations" (Carlson & Evans, 2001, p. 58).

Concepts like choice, safe and brave spaces are popular within both experiential and social justice education. However, it is essential to remember that both can reinforce dominant narratives and silence participant voices if not used well. Breunig encourages that those wishing to implement choice reflect on their intentionality and positionality.

Educators applying the principle of challenge by choice must consider the varying levels of individual agency and power dynamics within any group.

Participants need to be taught and encouraged to understand how their privilege enables them the opportunity to make choices in a manner that is significantly different from others (Breunig, 2019, p. 19)

The literature above provides an insight into how we seek to understand teaching and learning praxis at TLS. The variety of layers, fields, and concepts discussed in this chapter enabled us to better recognize and acknowledge the depth of experience we were observing and hearing from TLS study participants. As we consider the development of a new frame of critical experiential education that is inherently trans-disciplinary, the multitude of fields and ideas included here offer valuable nuggets of information and perspective. While this is not an exhaustive list, they have provided us with a starting point and a foundation from which to build.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMING AND METHODS

In considering our positionality for this work, we first sought to orient ourselves towards learning. As Glesne says, “you must be alert to taking on the mindset of a learner, not that of an expert” (Glesne, 2016, p. 134). From that perspective and starting point, we first recognize we are in a perpetual state of learning as researchers, practitioners, and human beings. Aware of the knowledge we entered the project with ideas of who we were and where we were starting from, we first articulate our individual and collective positionalities. Following those descriptions, we remind the reader of our research questions, describe the methods of data collection and analysis we chose and why, and then explain constructivist grounded theory and why we found it most relevant to this study. Finally, we have included tables that provide a clear graphic to understand who participated in the study and some of the more important details of them and the research site.

Individual Positionality

Evan

Since this could be considered backyard research on a school with which I am fairly familiar, I sought to operate from a place of curiosity rather than assumption. I aimed to question my own intentions and motivations for engaging in the work. As both Bloom (quoted in Glesne) and Bettez discuss, questioning and addressing aspects of power are central to naming my positionality, especially in the ‘insider’ context of my work. Bettez (2014) speaks to this directly when she cautions researchers against insider research: “an insider must learn to manage the influence of being a researcher and the researched” (p. 937). I have worked with some of the participants at The Loden School (TLS) in a variety of roles over the last two years. Having worked with them before (especially in a trainer role), I may have played a role in the stories

they shared. Therefore, I prepared to question my involvement and influence on their experience within the program.

Since I was already familiar with my research site and some participants, trust, relationships, and communion needed to take a different shape. Rather than focusing on developing an initial relationship, I needed instead to shift the perspectives and rapport I had with participants, to foster a space in which they felt comfortable speaking their truth. When talking with teachers and students, this attention was especially important due to the power dynamics inherent in those roles. Operating from a critically reflexive framework makes it easier to be “aware of how power operated in the various aspects” of this research, from the initial request for an interview through the coding and analysis of the data (Bettez, 2014, p. 940). Pillow (2010) discusses the need for ‘dangerous questions’ throughout the research process. These questions invited us to examine not only our interpretations of data but the entire way in which we operate as researchers. Through asking myself these questions throughout the design and implementation of this project, I embodied a sense of reflexivity that “challenges the common sense [and] promises to help [me] see what is unthought” (Pillow, 2010, p. 274).

Frannie

For me to recognize why I approach this research as I do, I first had to consider who I am, what makes me that way and why that matters. I had to consider how I might intentionally and continuously evolve to become more authentically whom I believe myself to be and why that mattered. I finally had to think about whether I was thinking about all of this too much. The answers to each of these questions were relevant as they affected the way I saw myself personally and in how I approached being a researcher interested in critical experiential education. I saw these evolving views as important parts of my positionality. Bettez (2014)

defines positionality as involving the combination of social status groups to which one belongs (such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) and one's personal experiences (understanding that experience is always individually interpreted, and it is the interpretation that gives an experience meaning) (p. 934).

As I considered the questions listed above, I recognized that as a 56-year-old white woman from a southern working-class family, the questions of power, equity, and accessibility have been a consistent concern in the recesses, if not in the very forefront of my mind. During my lifetime, I have acknowledged and experienced times and places where access to information, awareness of differences within and among people, and an understanding of power, oppression, racism, discrimination, and exclusion have all played significant roles in my growth or lack thereof, as a human being. I consider my own experiences and those of others I share space with, and the co-creation of meaning from shared yet diverse experiences to be substantial in the building of educative communities. This way of looking at and understanding the world comes from a constructivist perspective. These lenses affect my ability to perceive information about social and educational life in swatches that others may not see or agree with.

From these circumstances, I began to realize the limitations my filters have put on my ability to see and appreciate difference, to question where these limitations come from, why I have them, and how I can change the color and timbre of my view. I have come to recognize more fully the value each person brings to an educative community based on their experiences, beliefs, and ways of thinking and being in the world. I welcome difference as a strength and yet also recognize the many challenges that come with acknowledging and encouraging diverse voices in communities.

As I have had opportunities to be critically reflexive about these experiences, I have come to recognize that in this particular research, the opportunity for me to be considered the one in power is possible as I have worked with TLS in a number of ways including as the director of a program that provided some of the first professional development for teachers, ongoing staff development, and with some of the older students as the school in its early stages. I considered diligently and consistently what I needed to say and do, how I presented myself, and the extent to which I listened rather than spoke as well as how that affected how the teachers and others at TLS responded and interacted with the research process. I made every effort to continue building on the trust we have already established and encouraged the research participants to engage in co-creating meaning of our processes and shared experiences.

Collective Positionality

We enter into this research as experiential education practitioners who strongly believe in it as a philosophy and pedagogy. We recognize this belief biases us towards the efficacy of experiential education. We recognize that other educators may view experiential education as a philosophy with little depth and as a pedagogy in which learning is haphazard if present at all.

We acknowledge we are grounded in experiential education as practitioners. We have seen teachers and students at TLS experience the challenges with implementing this philosophy and pedagogy as similar to what we have seen practitioners in our field struggle with. It is entirely possible our biases towards the efficacy of experiential education predisposed us to picking up on examples that fortified our beliefs and biases. It is also conceivable that as newer students to critical pedagogy and social justice education, we missed information that someone with more longevity in those fields might have noticed or been able to analyze more deeply. As researchers we crossed checked each other and made every effort to be aware of these prospective pitfalls.

However, the newness of the research experience and these blind spots certainly predisposed us to the likelihood that our analysis of the data was not as intricate or complex as it could have been. Our increased awareness around our blind spots and predispositions speaks to the future potential for deeper research analysis. The avenues for future research we discuss below are just a few of the ways we envision this project continuing.

We recognize that practitioners and scholars from experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy may struggle to see the purpose and benefits of combining the fields. Through our experience and conversations with leaders in the experiential education field, however, we believe that an integration of these seemingly disparate fields will be in the best interest of students and teachers alike. This integration offers practitioners, scholars, and students a holistic approach to education that is grounded in an understanding of power, centered on the context of the learning environment, and oriented towards a future that is more just and equitable.

Both of us have been involved in various settings and disciplines as participants, instructors, facilitators, and educators and recognize the value of these experiences on student and participant learning. Frannie's experience and background includes service learning, outdoor experiential education, community building and engagement, and experiential peace building through simulation work. Evan's experience and background include service learning, outdoor experiential education, environmental education, and global engagement. Together our experiences set the stage for our interdisciplinary research focus. Although these experiences gave us a solid foundation as educators, we realized we had an overarching interest in social justice and issues of power within experiential education programming.

We looked for Ph.D. programs that intentionally grounded critical pedagogy, social justice education, critical theory, and were excited to explore these topics deeper as we worked through our classes and coursework. Given our academic background it is no surprise we gravitated towards social justice education and critical pedagogy in this research. We took a variety of classes to gain new insights into how experiential education programming could become more critical and how we might engage other professionals in that criticality. This Ph.D. program affirmed our ability to articulate and operationalize our beliefs in the combining of the three fields discussed in this dissertation. The combining of the three fields offered us the opportunity to see how our work through the lenses of our collective positionality.

Saldaña and Omasta (2018) use the metaphor of a camera to describe the nuances of positionality. In thinking about a co-authored dissertation, we have had many discussions about our shared positionality. We appreciate the camera metaphor as our collective positionality influenced how we viewed our research, what we choose to capture, and what we kept and preserved for later. Our collective approach is discussed below, utilizing the metaphor of a camera's lenses, frames, and angles.

Lenses

According to Saldaña and Omasta (2018), like the lenses of a camera narrow our view to a specific reference point, we also used our research lenses based on our past experiences, identities, and membership in social communities. Both of us grew up in families who frequently relocated throughout our childhoods. Although the reasons for these relocations were different, those experiences provided us with a malleable and evolving view of the world. Both of us eventually settled, grew up, and currently live in the southern area of the United States. Both of us have experiences of being the 'outsider' from the stereotypical Southern worldview--Evan

grew up with a staunchly liberal, hippie father, and Frannie is a self-proclaimed 'army brat.' These experiences provided us with early opportunities to hone our critical skills as we learned to operate in different spaces and under different sets of expectations. Living in the South, both of us have found ourselves challenged by the cultural norms around the performance of niceness and a desire to avoid controversial topics like race, religion, socioeconomic status, or political affiliation. As we have continued to evolve in our perspectives, we have seen and will continue to see the world through our unique lenses based on our lived experiences.

Filters

The filters of a camera are chosen by the photographer and add nuance to the final photographs. As researchers, we have used the experiences discussed above and have begun to realize the limitations we carry with us as we move through the world. Deborah Britzman's work is relevant here. She asks guiding questions, with the most crucial being "What is it to learn and to unlearn?" (Britzman, 1998, p. 213). We find relevance in her use of queer theory towards the study of limits and ignorances. This project borrows from and is inspired by Britzman's work as we ask ourselves and our participants what we cannot bear to know, what we thought we knew, and how espoused values match (or do not match) with our lived values. As part of engaged pedagogy, Britzman's study of ignorances encourages a process of "dislodging what is previously understood and envisioned" (Villaverde, 2008, p. 121). "Ignorance is constructed in the lived spaces between theory, ideology, or belief system and practice, at the margins where idea and action are at odds and many times in contradiction" (Villaverde, 2008, p. 79). The study of limits challenges us to consider the "unmarked criteria that work to dismiss as irrelevant or valorize as relevant a particular mode of thought, field of study, or insistence upon the real" while also encouraging us to explore the "limit of thought." (Britzman, 1998, p. 216). In our work, the study

of limits came into play when examining dominant perspectives and how they took shape within experiential education and other educative practices. We sought to challenge students and teachers to utilize experiential education to consider what they might not have previously considered. By actively moving towards the limits of current thought, we worked to help ourselves, other educators, and students become more aware of the implications and opportunities offered in terms of inclusion, justice, power, and diversity.

Britzman's study of ignorance also challenged us to consider the difference between espoused values and lived experience, especially within the field of experiential education. The Association for Experiential Education mission statement professes a strong desire towards inclusivity and an appreciation of diversity. It is crucial for experiential education as a field to recognize the assemblages of identity (Puar, 2007) students and educators alike bring to the educative space. As educators, we recognize that our assemblages of identities influenced the "actions we participate in every day and the intricacies of human relationships that map the critical ways [we] negotiate self and world" (Villaverde, 2008, p. 133). It is vitally important for us to be cognizant of how we approach and co-generate educational practices in these liminal spaces.

The filters we put on either inhibit or assist our ability to see and appreciate differences and critically examine their origins. This examination led us to realize that filters are constructed and, therefore, can be de/reconstructed as we seek to change the color and timbre of our worldviews. We held each other accountable to recognize the filters we were wearing and more fully value what each person brought to the TLS educative community based on their experiences, beliefs, and ways of thinking and being in the world. We intentionally operated from strengths and asset-based approaches and seek opportunities to acknowledge and encourage

diverse voices in educative communities. We worked diligently to bring our habits and dispositions as facilitators in the research process. We consistently processed and reflected on what went well and what we needed to change so that we were more able to see what needed to come next.

Angles

Angles are intentionally chosen and allow the photographer to decide which direction and from what distance a photograph will be framed. Throughout the ELC program, we have had opportunities to be critically reflexive about our experiences and assemblage of identities. We acknowledge and experience times and places where access to information, awareness of differences within and among people, and understanding power, oppression, racism, discrimination, and exclusion have all played significant roles in our growth as human beings. From this, we consider the co-creation of meaning from shared yet diverse experiences to be substantial in building educative communities. This angle, or way of looking at and understanding the world, comes from a constructivist perspective. Each lens, filter, and angle we have described above clarified our understanding of how and why we initiated and maintained critical curiosity in our research. This curiosity guided us as we explored the following two questions.

Research Questions

Central to this research are the following two questions described previously:

1. How can the transformation of the widely used models of experiential education (Kolb, Roberts, and Dewey most particularly) intentionally include spaces for critical framing?

2. How do the middle grades at The Loden School enact tenets of critical experiential education within their teaching, learning, and praxis to implement the foundational principles of the school?

A relevant sub-question for Question 1 is:

- a) How can a variety of conceptual layers combine to re-imagine experiential education with a more critical foundation?

Relevant sub-questions for Question 2 include:

- b) How can the use of a critical experiential education model promote the development of agency, belonging, and competence (Carver, 1996) among students, educators, administrators, and families?
- c) How do embodied teaching philosophies and practices following a critical experiential education model impact the student experience?
- d) How can critical experiential education be used to provide a more thorough insight into the porous boundaries between learning, reflection, and doing in educative spaces?

Overview of Constructivist Framework and Theory

Saldaña and Omasta (2018) (in referencing research) suggest that "a methodology is *why* you are going about it in a particular way" (p.30, emphasis added). A theoretical framework then refers to *what* you consider to be necessary. Lincoln (2010) introduces the concept of paradigms as concepts that "tell us something important about *researcher standpoint*. [...] They tell us something about what the researcher *counts as knowledge* and *who can deliver the most valuable slice of this knowledge*" (p. 7, emphasis added). For this research, we operated under a constructivist paradigm, believing that "we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society" (Lincoln, Lynham, and

Guba, 2011, p. 103). A constructivist paradigm leads to a personal and individual epistemological perspective that says "we cannot separate ourselves from what we know. [...] [H]ow we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world [...] and] we are shaped by our lived experiences" (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011, p. 104). The focus on the social construction of knowledge and the importance of the shared experience and interactions between people within a society informed the research questions and the data analysis. This constructivist paradigm mirrored the philosophy of experiential education, where co-creation and democratization of learning are core principles.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggest, "constructivism connects action to praxis and builds on anti-foundational arguments while encouraging experimental and multi-voiced texts" (p. 98). Anti-foundational here refers to any means by which truth with a capital "T" can be determined or agreed upon (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). In considering a paradigmatic constructivist perspective in the context of this research, two critical points emerged from Denzin and Lincoln's work. The first is that collective perspectives and voices of community members are valued so that one person holds neither the ability nor the power to tell one side of the story.

The second reminds us that telling of the stories is not the end result; instead, there must be a push in a call to action. Our educational philosophy strongly hinges on a belief that knowledge is locally co-created based on people's shared (although sometimes diverse understandings of) experiences in that circumstance. Knowledge is contextual, and, therefore, research must consider the context in which knowledge is produced. Constructivism provides the theoretical opportunity for researchers to examine the context of individuals, groups, and institutions as sites of discourse, knowledge production, and cultural transmission.

This research utilized and was based on a constructivist grounded theory approach, in that we used data to both inform and critique our initial understanding of critical experiential education. "Grounded theory is not a theory in itself, but a methodology for developing theory that is 'grounded' in data" (Glesne, 2016, p. 288). We undertook this research informed by our professional experience, informal conversations, and initial literature review. Following a constructivist grounded theory approach, however, we did not embark on data collection with a specific framework in mind; we instead provided openness and space to allow the data to inform our work on a critical experiential education frame. Utilizing constructivist grounded theory allowed us to go beyond data collection "on a topic, analyze those data for conceptual categories, link the categories into a tentative theory, and then collect more data to see how the theory fits" (Glesne, 2016, p. 288). As we utilized constructivist grounded theory processes, we focused our attention more thoroughly on data and data collection, and the "examination of research relationships, situations, and representation of research participants; and reflexivity about the researchers' standpoints, starting points, evolving viewpoints, and decisions throughout the research process (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane, 2018, p.414). We believe this is an inherently iterative process with lived experience constantly informing praxis and vice versa.

Grounded theory allows us as researchers to assemble a "bricolage of theory and method" that can help us to "produce more rigorous, multidimensional knowledge" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 132). This approach enables us to enact a "research eclecticism" in which there is a continual conversation between research methods and research circumstances (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 133).

Research Methodology

Grounded Theory

As a research approach, grounded theory aims to utilize data and lived experiences to inform the creation of theories. This iterative process begins with the researcher's initial thoughts, curiosities, and experiences before collecting data that inform, alter, or critique the development of a more defined theory. As practitioners and researchers, we have had a significant number of conversations centered around what we found to be engaging in espoused versus lived beliefs, values, and experiences about experiential education, social justice education, democratic schooling, and their intertwining. We decided to make these wonderings the focal point of our research as we continued to find a discrepancy between what we heard, what we read, and what we observed when we connected with educators in the experiential education field. Working with a school whose principal points of focus are experiential education, social justice education, and democratic schooling provided us with an opportunity to gather and decipher data and the lived experiences of those associated with the school. That data then informed our ability to create a frame of critical experiential education that aligns social justice education and critical pedagogy more so than the previous ones used by experiential educators.

While the purpose of grounded theory may be to develop a formal, generalizable theory, researchers often use it to develop theories that explain specific events. Grounded theory centers on an inductive analysis approach where the data are studied to see what theories emerge (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Although we admittedly came to this research with some prior experience and notions about what may emerge, we intended to expose ourselves and those associated with the school to the risk of learning or unlearning what we thought we knew about the

operationalization of experiential education and to understand how complex this seemingly simple pedagogy and philosophy actually can be.

All researchers enter the research process with biases, preconceived notions, or assumptions about the data or the research process. These initial thoughts are gained through a familiarity with the field, anecdotal experiences, or informal conversations. In our case, we have initial experience with The Loden School and have had frequent conversations with school leadership about the organization's mission, vision, and philosophy. This experience, combined with our familiarity with experiential education and critical pedagogy, provided the impetus to engage in a grounded theory approach. As researchers, we cautioned ourselves not to let this background knowledge prematurely inform or cloud our perceptions of the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) caution researchers to be aware of how their prior knowledge can unintentionally filter their perception of the data and encourage a constant open mind that allows for the process to follow where the data lead.

Grounded theory can be used to "demonstrate relations between conceptual categories and to specify the conditions under which theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained" (Charmaz, 2002, p. 675). Rather than engaging in research with a specific framework, theory, or lens in mind, grounded theory allows us as researchers to enter with an open mind and be guided by the data to the development of an understanding of what we hear, see, and read that can be used to explain what is put into marketing information and spoken about when encouraging students and families to join the school. "Grounded theory work involves specific procedures for data collection and analysis that include continual data sampling, coding, categorizing, and comparing in order to generate theory" about a particular experience or observation (Glesne, 2016, p. 288).

Grounded theory as a method calls for a distinct approach to data collection and analysis. Since there is a close relationship between lived experience and the theory it generates, we engaged in a continual cycle of data collection and data analysis. As a tentative frame emerged, we collected more data and either used that data to elucidate or critique the initial theory. As Willard states, "This process is repeated over and over, using various areas for research [...] and even quantitative studies until a point of data saturation has been achieved, grounding the theory in the data" (Willard, 2016, p. 51). We utilized this process to get a deeper understanding of experiential education as it related to praxis in TLS.

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CTG)

Kathy Charmaz built on the grounded theory presented by earlier researchers. She contends earlier grounded theory was more objectivist and considered the need for generalizations that would accommodate multiple contexts regardless of the circumstances of how and why these generalizations were produced (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Instead, Charmaz suggests a constructivist grounded theory which situates itself differently. "It emphasizes multiple realities, the researcher and research participants' respective positions and subjectivities and situated knowledge and sees data as inherently partial and problematic" (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 417). We considered the difference in constructivist grounded theory and grounded theory strongly when we started to approach this research. We determined constructivist grounded theory to be more applicable to our research as we were interested in the perspective and voice of the administration of TLS and staff and students. We fully recognized that even with the inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices listed here, we still did not have a complete picture and did what we could to emphasize the holes we found. We also needed to think deeply about and

grapple with the inconsistencies arising from our research. Constructivist grounded theory offers a connected approach to research by considering an epistemology that centers truth as more constructed in the context, lived experiences, and perspectives of those involved in the research process.

Researchers engaged in the processes of constructivist grounded theory are solidly concerned with data and data analysis. We tethered the belief that data and the analysis of that data are never neutral, inherently problematic, and that data is not to be found in the world but instead are constructed based on the lived experiences of the researcher and researched. This recognition of data and analysis gives the researcher the ability to branch out from "tacit assumptions, privileged statuses, or the particular location from which they view studied life" (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 417). The need and desire to focus on what the researcher brings to the research arena offers opportunities to negate preconceived notions or presuppositions into the research (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane in Denzin & Lincoln 2018).

Methods

This research involved a number of qualitative methods in order to obtain a thick description (Ryle, 1948) of the research site and how participants operate within it. The information about the research site and recruitment as well as methods we used including interviews and observations is described in more detail below. Protocols and recruitment methods were the same across research questions and between the co-researchers. The lay summary of the research can be found in Appendix A.

Research Site

This research utilized an existing partnership with a K-8 public charter school. This school is in an urban setting within a medium-sized city in the southeastern United States. This school is in its fourth year of operation and serves approximately 356 students. This school employs various progressive pedagogies and philosophies, including restorative justice, design-based learning, experiential education, and social justice. Located on a downtown campus, the school uses place-based opportunities for learning and community engagement.

As discussed in Chapter 2, charter schools have long been viewed as a tool to reform public education across America. Charter schools operate similarly to traditional public schools and, while they are exempt from some state regulations, are held to the same state standards for achievement. Our research site for this project is a charter school located in an urban environment in North Carolina. The information below provides some context on the history, development, and operation of charter schools within North Carolina.

North Carolina was among the earlier states to pass a charter school law in 1996. The law and authorization of the initial wave of charter schools contributed to a rapid growth of charters within North Carolina. By 2001, North Carolina was home to the sixth-largest number of charter schools in the United States (McNiff and Hassel, 2002). When written, North Carolina's charter school law aimed to "improve student learning, encourage creative teaching methods, provide increased school choice and learning opportunities, and create new professional opportunities" (McNiff and Hassel, 2002, p. 209). Applications for a charter school within the state must be submitted under the auspice of a private nonprofit corporation. Authorizations are then given by a local board of education or the state board of education. The law allows charter schools to be exempted from certain school regulations while holding them to many others, including the

number of instructional days, ensuring health and safety practices in school, and administering state assessments. Charter schools are funded at the same per-pupil rate as traditional public schools. Importantly, charter schools are not allowed to use state funding to purchase facilities or other capital projects (McNiff and Hassel, 2002). This provision means that many charter schools, including our research site, rent buildings from private individuals or corporations.

Charter schools nationally tend to be located in urban communities with high populations of minoritized people (O’Sullivan, Nagle, and Spence, 2002). This trend continues in North Carolina, where charter schools are concentrated in the major cities of Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh-Durham. Their location in urban communities means that charter schools in North Carolina tend to be more racially and economically diverse than traditional public schools (O’Sullivan, Nagle, and Spence, 2002). As of June 30, 2020, charter schools in North Carolina reported an enrollment of economically disadvantaged students at 22.48% and traditional schools in this same time reported an economically disadvantaged student enrollment of 43.24% (State Board of Education, 2020). The NC School report card data noted that in 2019-2020 TLS listed 9.2% of students as economically disadvantaged (NC DPI, 2020).

Charter schools in North Carolina are overseen by the Office of Charter Schools within the state Department of Public Instruction. DPI sets state-wide education policy and assessment measures, including testing requirements. All charter schools administer the same tests as traditional public schools and are held to the same state standards. The State Board of Education is the governing body for charter schools and has the final authority on granting or revoking charters. Our research site is able to capitalize on the autonomy and flexibility granted to charter schools through the incorporation of philosophies like experiential education, social justice education, and design-based thinking. While they enact these progressive pedagogies and

student-focused instructional goals, teachers and administrators continue to be accountable to and reviewed by the Department of Public Instruction.

As a research site, The Loden School (TLS) provides a rich opportunity to explore the development of culture, institutional capacity, and individual experiences with critical experiential education. The two main questions in this research project address both the macro and micro levels of The Loden School as an institution. As Frannie and Evan both have experience with the Loden School and relationships with various members of the school community, recruiting participants for the research depended on work done by both the researchers and school leadership.

Within The Loden School, we focused on the middle school houses (grades five-eight). These students are the oldest in the school. Many of them have been with the Loden School for several years. They, therefore, have the most experience with the experiential education model used at TLS and would be the most impacted by it. Additionally, the upper grades (grades seven-eight) are essential transition periods as students prepare to leave TLS and enter another educational community for high school. While some students will leave and enter private or charter schools, many will enter a public school for their high school education. The last two years at TLS are vital points of transition and potential dissonance as they consider what a school not grounded in critical experiential education may mean for them. Interviews with these students helped us examine how they perceive their time at TLS as they prepare to leave TLS. As with other schools, the middle school at TLS provides students with more flexibility and autonomy and provides an opportunity to examine the co-creation and democratic community building crucial to critical experiential education.

TLS chose to conduct much of instruction in the 2020-2021 academic year through virtual learning due to the ongoing global pandemic of COVID-19. This pandemic forced many schools to re-imagine how to conduct education while following guidelines for student safety. Although TLS's decision to continue teaching and learning in a virtual environment provided some challenges in how community and experiential education were enacted, virtual learning still provided spaces for implementing experiential education and place-based approaches. All interviews and observations were conducted virtually using Zoom and were recorded using Zoom's video recording feature. Interviews were also recorded on Otter, an online transcription service.

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants began in January with a series of conversations between the researchers and TLS school leadership. Once the university IRB approval was granted, TLS's research committee approved the research for the spring semester. In our initial planning conversations, we focused our recruitment efforts and research lens on the middle school house classroom teachers. We recognize that other teachers at TLS interact with middle school students (teachers in art, music, dance, Spanish, specialized education services etc.), however we chose to focus on classroom teachers who were with the students much of the day and were centrally responsible for designing their learning experiences.

Frannie and Evan sent initial recruitment emails to middle school house teachers (fifth/sixth grade and seventh/eighth grade). We then visited the staff meetings for each group of teachers to answer questions and more thoroughly explain our research and what their involvement would entail. Teachers were given a three-week timeframe to read, sign, and return a consent form if they wanted to participate. Ultimately, four teachers chose to participate fully,

and one chose to participate in observations only. One teacher who had initially expressed interest in being observed but not interviewed gave consent and permission to be observed.

In recruiting teacher and administrative staff participants, we sought to involve as many fifth/sixth and seventh/eighth teachers as possible. Initially, we planned on including just the teachers and administrative staff. Once we began observations, however, we realized that student teachers and teaching assistants played an essential and integral role in these teams, so we reached out to include them. One student teacher and one teaching assistant decided to fully participate in the research and one teacher initially decided to answer questions via email versus a full interview. We refer to this participant as anonymous because they chose not to participate fully and so were not assigned a pseudonym. This gave us 6 participating adults.

Recruitment for student participants followed a similar process. We sent recruitment messages out in the house newsletters to parents and families. Interested families responded to the newsletter invitation and emailed us with a desire to participate. We then sent the consent form and research overview to parent/family email addresses. Parents/families sent a signed consent form back, and then our communication shifted to the student's TLS email address. We sent the student assent form to their email and asked them to respond with a signed copy. Of the student population in the middle school, four students chose to participate fully. Several other students had their parents return a consent form, but they never responded to additional follow-up emails.

In seeking to recruit student participants, we paid attention and ensured participants represented the entire middle school house. We sought to have equal numbers of fifth/sixth and seventh/eighth students. Ultimately, our student participants consisted of two fifth/sixth students and two seventh/eighth students, for a total of four participants. Although teachers helped us with

initial recruitment by including materials in the newsletters, teachers were unaware of which students participated in the study.

In recruiting participants for interviews, attention was paid to ensuring that a variety of voices, perspectives, and experiences were heard. Unfortunately, a smaller-than-expected response from both teachers and students meant that we had a smaller group who wished to participate. We were surprised at the small response from teachers. Many teachers never responded to our emails or requests to participate, while others said they were willing to be observed but not interviewed. While we cannot be entirely sure about their reasons for not participating, several told us that participating in our research felt like "one more thing" in an already busy year. We did not want them to feel pressured to participate, although we certainly welcomed their views, and so we followed up with each teacher twice after hearing no response.

The chart below introduces the participants in this study. We assigned participants pseudonyms in the coding process. The chart provides the participant's names, their connection to TLS, and their identity assemblages. We asked participants how they would like us to refer to their identity in the research, and the information provided below are their answers.

Table 1. Research Participants

Research Participant	Involvement with TLS	Identity
Sara	Executive Director, recently hired at TLS	White Female
Cynthia	5th and 6th grade teacher, 2 nd year teacher, 1st year teacher at TLS	Black Female
Marlene	5th and 6th grade teacher, recently hired at TLS	White Female*
Laurie	Current undergraduate student, 5th, and 6th grade student teacher at TLS	White Female
Marjory	7th and 8th grade teacher at TLS for 3 years at TLS	Black Woman**
Sharon	7th and 8th grade teacher assistant, recently hired at TLS	White Female
Christopher	5th and 6th grade student, student at TLS for 3 years	White Male
Tera	7th and 8th grade student, student at TLS for 3 years	White Female
Grayson	5th and 6th grade student, student at TLS for 3 years	White Male
Melanie	7th and 8th grade student, student at TLS for 3 years	White Female

*This participant engaged only in some portions of the research and did not agree to participate fully.

**This participant prefers the term Black Woman whereas all other participants either stated no preference or male and female

Interviews

We conducted interviews with several different students and teachers at TLS. Frannie and Evan both were present at most interviews, although one would generally take the lead. Having both of us present allowed for one to focus on notetaking while the other led the conversation. Our different perspectives also aided the analysis of interviews. Frannie led interviews with administrative staff. Evan and Frannie both conducted interviews with teachers and students. There were only two interviews where only one of us was present. Generally, we co-facilitated both the interview and analysis process together. We transcribed the audio recordings for each interview and saved the video recording to refer to if we could not understand something a participant said. We used the video recording for reminders about the setting or participant reaction to questions. We coded all transcriptions following the process outlined in the data analysis section. We scheduled interviews at the convenience of the interviewee and lasted varying lengths of time between 45 minutes and one hour in length. We interviewed the five teacher participants once, four student participants twice each and the Executive Director three times. The approximate data collection time for interviews was 20 hours.

Most participants were asked to do 1 initial 45-minute individual interview. Cynthia was interviewed twice due to an interruption in the middle of the first interview. Both of us were present for most of these interviews, which were scheduled in February and March. Evan was not present for Cynthia's second interview and Frannie was not present for half of Tera's interview. Teachers were observed during regular classroom instruction throughout the months of February through April. During observations, we focused on the interactions between teachers

and students. Observations were generally for at least 45 minutes each and were conducted during regular class meeting times. Our protocols and questions are found in the appendices.

Observations

Observations have the potential to yield vitally important data, especially to consider the impact that critical experiential education has on the classroom dynamic and student experience. Allowing an inside look into the workings of the classroom provides an opportunity to examine unscripted interactions and real-world reactions to pedagogies and events.

Glesne (2016) discusses how observations are a useful tool while also challenging the researcher to expand their perspective. From our experience of online observation, this process was a challenging and difficult data collection tool as we were limited by what we could see and physically experience in the observational space. This challenge became more pronounced this spring as TLS began their third semester of virtual school. There are also significant benefits to a virtual observation, as we were able to visit classes more frequently and see multiple aspects of each house's dynamic.

Observations were conducted throughout February and March in each house. As each house had a slightly different schedule for synchronous instruction each week, we were able to observe at several different times a day or week. We observed morning meetings as well as content instruction. Initially, we planned to observe just those teachers who had agreed to participate in interviews. However, we realized that the seventh/eighth house conducted much of their instruction as a full house, with all the teachers and students present on one Zoom call. In contrast the fifth/sixth house has morning meetings as a full house on Mondays, the rest of the time they meet by homeroom. After morning meetings, they then split by grade for math and science, language arts/literacy/integrated studies. We completed nine joint observations for a

total of 14.5 hours. Individually we completed one additional observation each for a total of two hours of individual observations. The total data collection time for observations was 27 hours.

As the interview phase concluded, we began scheduling observations in the hope that we could use them to look for findings coded from our interviews. We intentionally scheduled interviews and observations after the winter break to allow teachers time to reestablish their classroom community and group norms. During observations, we primarily observed the teachers and how they interacted with students. We were also interested in the techniques and pedagogies the teachers utilized throughout their lessons as well as the classroom community they created. As we were also observing virtually, we were able to see how teachers and students utilized online engagement tools to encourage their social presence.

One of the benefits to virtual observations was that our presence as researchers was less disruptive or noticeable than had we been in person. During the Zoom meeting, we kept our cameras and microphones off so that we were not intrusive. This enabled us to blend into the background more easily. We aimed to be cognizant of how our presence in the space influenced the actions by teachers and students. This consideration was important since we have both been involved with TLS since the school started. While we are not truly insiders, we are no strangers to the community and teachers. Most importantly, we sought to be aware of our positionality and the impact our presence could have on teachers. Several of the teachers we observed were either first-year teachers or new to the TLS community. Earlier this academic year (before our research began), we led professional development sessions with all the teachers that focused on ways to infuse experiential education pedagogy into a classroom. These teachers have experience with viewing us as resource providers and content experts, rather than researchers. Therefore, we needed to make sure that we clarified our position so that teachers do not view us as either an

evaluator or as a helping hand in the middle of a lesson. To lessen the potential impact our presence could have, we worked to embody a peripheral observational role (Adler & Adler, 1987) wherein we observe without interference or engagement with the participants.

During observations, neither audio nor video recordings were used. Instead, we took contemporaneous notes which were then revised and expanded after each observation. These field notes were expanded to include additional context, nonverbal responses, and information that can be utilized in later analysis. Occasionally we would utilize Zoom's chat feature during an observation to capture messages that students and teachers were sending. We also used this feature to individually message a teacher with a specific question during an observation. After each observation, we addressed any follow-up questions we had with teachers via email. As we did not have full consent from all teachers, their responses were not coded in our data but were used to add context to the information gained through the observation.

Observations generally were used to examine how educational philosophies are enacted and embodied at TLS. We looked for examples of how TLS's guiding philosophies (social justice, restorative justice, etc.) are implemented into the classroom. Observations were also used to further refine the critical experiential education frame, as critical experiential education combines many of the TLS philosophies with core principles of experiential education.

Due to the lower-than-anticipated participant response, we did not utilize focus groups. We had four students (two from each house) and five teachers (three from fifth/sixth and two from seventh/eighth) who agreed to fully participate (the anonymous fifth/sixth teacher mentioned earlier did not agree to fully participate). We chose not to utilize a focus group for these participants because of the low numbers, the difficulty in communicating with them, and the perceived stress that scheduling another meeting would provide. We heard from students and

teachers frequently that virtual teaching and learning is challenging, and we certainly did not want to add to their burdens.

Data Collection and Coding Process

The chart below provides an overview of the flow of data collection and coding. Utilizing a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, we used an iterative coding method and therefore coded as data was collected, rather than waiting until the end of data collection. This iterative coding allowed us to reformulate questions, add new topics, or realize new avenues that needed to be explored. This chart includes our planned data collection alongside the actual data collection.

Table 2. Data Collection Timeline

Data Collection Timeline	Planned Data Collection	Actual Data Collection
Round 1	Executive Director Interview	Executive Director Interviewed
Round 1	Interview 2 teachers from each 5-6 and 7-8 houses	Interviewed 3 teachers from 5-6 and 2 from 7-8 houses, for a total of 5
Round 1	Observe 1 classroom from each 5-6 and 7-8 houses	Observed 4 classrooms, 2 from each house
<i>Initial coding: Analyze data and begin to pull initial themes and concepts to inform the next round of data collection</i>		
Round 2	Interview at least 6 students from each 5-6 and 7-8 house	Interviewed 2 students from each house, for a total of 4
Round 2	Interview remaining teachers from 5-6 and 7-8 houses	No additional teachers consented to be interviewed
Round 2	Conduct focus groups with 5-6 and 7-8 students from Round 2 2 nd round of observations on all classrooms	Focus group process was not completed due to smaller than anticipated participation. 2 nd round of observations of consenting classrooms completed
Round 2	Executive Director Interview	Executive Director Interview
<i>Intermediate coding: Analyze data with initial themes and concepts in mind, checking for consistency or variations in those themes. Analyze deeper to see if additional avenues need to be explored. Analysis will inform the next round of data collection.</i>		
Round 3	Conduct focus groups with 5-6 and 7-8 teachers from Round 1 and 2	Focus group process was not completed due to smaller than anticipated participation.
Round 3	3 rd round of observations on all classrooms (if needed to cross-reference data)	3 rd round of observations was not conducted due to smaller than anticipated participation.
Round 3	3 rd interview with Executive Director	3 rd interview with Executive Director
<i>Advanced coding: Continue to analyze data, checking for consistency within and across themes; examine any new avenues that appear in the data; utilize information gained to inform any new model development</i>		

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling involves intentional choices made by the researcher to search for and elaborate on data that not only supports theoretical categories, but also provides the ability to define variances within a category and/or to clarify connections between categories (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In our process, we began our data collection with a small group of initial participants. Our goal was to then expand that group based on the initial coding and eventually include others from the two houses. However, our small participant size made theoretical sampling more challenging for us.

Data Analysis

Data analysis operated in a continuous and iterative manner, following the process of a constructivist grounded theory approach. We undertake data analysis as a “systematic search for meaning” and seek to ask questions of data to discover answers that can inform both current and future work (Hatch, 2002, p. 148). Throughout this process, data takes many forms and is collected using a variety of methods. Initially, we began with our own anecdotal experience and informal conversations that provided us with data to develop a tentative conceptual theory or frame of critical experiential education. Through more formal and thorough data collection including literature reviews, interviews, and observations, we embarked on a cyclical process of analysis, revision, and reconceptualization of that tentative frame to arrive at a more conclusive result that is informed by participants’ lived experiences.

We used inductive analysis based on the questions we are interested in and the conversational/facilitative way we will ask them. An inductive method “proceeds from the specific to the general” to draw meaning from the data (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). While we started with particular questions, we remained open to the possibility that answers will most likely lead

to further questions we have not initially considered. Potter (as quoted in Hatch, 2002) says, "inductive analysis begins with an examination of the particulars within the data, moves to 'looking for patterns across observations, then arguing for those patterns as having the status of general explanatory statements" (p.161). Our data analysis process followed the steps Saldaña (2009) outlines, including developing codes, categories, themes.

Saldaña (2009) differentiates these by saying that codes capture, in a word or small phrase, the essence of what the researcher sees in a particular part of the data. He suggests categories are derived from groups of like codes and share some overarching feature or pattern. Themes are not coded but are something that comes from categories and reflection on the process and data (Saldaña, 2009, p. 13). We first took on the coding process separately. We then looked at what each other had developed, discussed which terms or words best fit that particular set of words or information, and then developed draft categories (intermediate) based on our agreed upon codes. Through further conversation and our advanced coding process, we further honed the categories and refined the various codes within them. Once we settled on categories and codes, we recognized 'connect, challenge, extend' as useful themes that not connected to experiential education reflection processes, but also elucidated our data analysis

The following example highlights this process. When coding the data, both individually and collectively, we recognized relationships, collaborative, accountability, and classroom continually bubbled to the fore. From there, we sifted and grouped the many codes we developed together looking for connections between them. We then used those connections to develop our categories. An example of the category developed from these codes is school as community. Finally, from our list of categories, we determined the themes we saw throughout the data.

In constructivist grounded theory, coding involves two levels that are inter-related and non-linear. Initial coding remains the same and incorporates the need for researchers to “stay close to the data and remain open to exploring what they define as what is going on in these data” (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 424). Focused coding allowed us to work through the significant amount of data we gathered and determine what codes more fully tell the story of what is happening in the data. We were then able to specify the relationships and connections between them.

Throughout the analysis and coding process, we utilized each other to read, challenge, and check our analysis. We ultimately combined our different perspectives which led to varying ways to view and code data. We were able to challenge and critique each other’s reading of the data and offer perspectives that the other had not previously seen. This is certainly a benefit of having two researchers and is bolstered by our long history of working together.

Ethics

Guided by our adherence to critical pedagogy and experiential education, we recognize that everything is political. The research we conduct, the paradigms we employ, and the results we publish are tinged by the undercurrent of our own politics. Given that critical pedagogy has an overarching focus on liberation, we realize that our work can fly in the face of the dominant narrative. This can make our work challenging yet we believe, all the more important. Our positionalities and frames become more relevant in thinking about the ethics of this research and of us as researchers. As critical researchers, we are reflexive of our position and acknowledge that objectivity is not desirable and may actually be harmful to the research process. As such, we strive to be aware of our own biases and how our identities are shaping our ability to engage with and perceive data. We recognize that we are never neutral in our work and strive to have our

words reflect the emancipatory aims of the field. Researchers “concerned with voice, power, interpretation, and representation have struggled with the ethics of research” (Lincoln & Cannella, 2009, p. 277). We struggled with these and other ethical considerations throughout this research. We continually aimed to embody what Lincoln and Canella (2009) refer to as a set of ‘reflexive, critical ethics’: those which “include a concern for transformative egalitarianism, attention to the problems of representation, and [a] continued examination of power orientations” (p. 279).

In working through the research design, data collection, and analysis processes, we were deeply concerned with how to engage in this process while paying attention to trustworthiness, credibility, power, and usefulness. It was important to recognize the hierarchical power dynamics at play, especially when our research participants included people in positions of authority within TLS. It was also important to consider when working with students, especially within the context of their classroom. No matter what, opportunities arose that forced us as researchers to make the best decisions possible, in that particular context. We always attempted to make choices on what to include and what to exclude while remaining focused on our desire to stay true to the stories we were able to gather. An example of this decision-making process occurred during our discussion of the idiosyncrasies between the practice and self-perception of a teacher at the school. Although we describe this situation in more detail below, our observations of this teacher’s actions did not match her espoused values. The tension this situation provided challenged us as researchers to recognize our responsibility and accountability to the research and data analysis. While at the same time, we recognize the difficulties teachers may have in terms of aligning their passion as a progressive educator with the requirements and the rigidity of the traditional academic structures in which they teach. It was important for us to represent all

participant stories fairly and accurately, and we strove to be cognizant of our biases to avoid unintentionally mis-representing any data. We sought to represent the participants' words and intentions authentically and in ways that they would feel comfortable reading them.

Table 3. Research Participant Involvement

Research Participant	Role	Interview	Observation	Follow-up Communication (emails, Zoom calls, etc)
Sara	Executive Director	Three interviews	N/A	Yes
Cynthia	Teacher	Two interviews	Two observations	Yes
Marlene	Teacher	N/A	Three observations	Yes
Laurie	Student Teacher	Two interviews	Three observations	Yes
Marjory	Teacher	Two interviews	Two observations	Yes
Sharon	Teaching Assistant	One interview	Two observations	Yes
Christopher	Student	One interview	N/A	N/A
Grayson	Student	One interview	N/A	N/A
Tera	Student	One interview	N/A	N/A
Ashlyn	Student	One interview	N/A	N/A

As stated previously, interviews were all conducted virtually as TLS was remote for 2020-2021 academic year. Students and teachers were emailed individually to set up times to interview and conversations were conducted and recorded on Zoom. Otter was used to record and transcribe audio files from interviews.

In conducting interviews, it was important to note both the setting and the participant's reactions to researcher questions (Glesne, 2016). While conducting research virtually had benefits in both reducing barriers and easing access to participants, Zoom interviews meant that we experienced a disconnect between researcher and participant. As facilitators and educators, we are most familiar with in person interactions. We struggled to get a full sense of the participants and their setting while working to build relationships virtually. We were able to see some of the backgrounds behind each participant but were not able to be present with them to observe nonverbal cues, body language, or other reactions. Establishing a relationship or rapport with participants became challenging via Zoom and we found this challenge to be more pronounced with participants we did not previously know. We were also cognizant of 'Zoom fatigue' and how it might lead to a lack of interest or response, especially as students were interviewing at the end of the school day when they had been online for several hours already. 'Zoom fatigue' can lead to "weariness, fatigue, boredom, [...] difficulty concentrating, physical exhaustion, [and] anxiety" (Garcia-Bulle, 2020). Especially when students were interviewed at the end of the school day, we noticed the signs of Zoom fatigue that Garcia-Bulle discusses.

Student participants generally conducted their interviews in the same place they had been for online class earlier that day. Occasionally we would ask students about some aspect of their setting, but for the most part, we wanted them to be in a place where they were comfortable. None of the students used virtual backgrounds or filters during the interview. The only time we extensively inquired about a student's setting was Melanie, who wanted to show off her leopard gecko in a tank behind her chair. Student interviews were generally conducted in the middle of the day or after synchronous instruction had concluded and so they were in the mindset of focusing on Zoom. Students were excited to participate, although some appeared nervous about

some of the questions being asked. For example, Melanie stumbled over her words and asked us to repeat questions a few times at the beginning of our conversation. As she became more comfortable with us and the process, her answers flowed more easily.

We recognize the challenges that may come with asking students to participate in answering questions about their school. Asking students to reflect about their school, their teachers, or their peers can potentially put them in a vulnerable and difficult position. We took steps to make sure that the students felt as comfortable as possible with us and reminded them that none of their teachers would hear their answers to our questions. We wanted to ensure that the space was open if students had impactful experiences to share.

Students had a variety of techniques that we witnessed to make them feel comfortable in interviews. Of the students we interviewed, two of the students had a parent present and one of those parents were actively involved in encouraging and guiding the student to answer the questions we asked. The other student's parent was in the same room, yet the student answered most of the questions individually. The other two students we interviewed were in a space without parent involvement that we are aware of. Other students were playing with toys or items on their desks while talking with us.

Teacher and administrative staff participants generally conducted their interviews in their office or classroom (either at home or at TLS). As with student participants, the setting was acknowledged but generally not discussed. Teachers had set up a home office or teaching space that they had used for synchronous instruction. The only time this space was specifically mentioned was with Laurie (the student teacher), who used it to highlight her organizational system and how excited she was to start teaching once she graduated. Teachers appeared to be aware of their backgrounds and what was visible to students. Most had their cameras facing

towards a blank wall or a whiteboard behind them. Marjory was sitting in front of a bookshelf with a series of books and other items prominently displayed.

In interviews, students and teachers alike were attentive, engaged, and focused on the conversation. As the camera field for Zoom is generally fairly small, it was challenging to see more than a participant's shoulders and head. We weren't able to observe many of their nonverbal cues while in interviews, but we did notice vocal cues like pausing filler words, or tone changes. We also noticed some students looking away from the camera as they thought about how to answer questions and other facial expressions.

Observations were conducted during a period of regular classroom instruction. As with interviews, all observations were conducted virtually, as we joined a Zoom link that the teachers had established for students. During most observations, the entire house (teachers and students) was present on one Zoom call. One teacher would generally take the lead on the content delivery and the others on the call would support by answering questions in the chat, un-muting to remind students about expectations, or managing the waiting room. Some observations were specific to one individual classroom and involved smaller numbers of teachers and students. An average of observations generally involved around 40 students and 3-4 teachers. TLS modified its schedule this academic year to provide houses with more flexibility in content delivery. Each of the two houses we studied had a different schedule for their synchronous instruction. The 5th/6th house began the day with morning meeting at 9:50am and then continued directly into content until around 12:30 pm. The 7th/8th house began with morning meeting at 10:00 am followed by arts at 10:30, then had a break until they rejoined instruction at 11 am.

In both houses, teachers utilized similar pedagogical approaches to teaching during a pandemic. They would frequently screen share to show slides, videos, or articles. Students would

go back and forth between Zoom, Google Classroom, and Gmail to get their information and class materials. Students frequently used collaborative resources like Google Docs to work together and share ideas. Although our observations occurred as TLS had been teaching virtually for almost an entire year, some students were still confused about where to find certain information or how to access Google Classroom. Teachers included frequent reminders in their slides and exit tickets about where to find links and assignments.

A significant difference was noted in how the 5th/6th students interacted as compared to the 7th/8th students. In observations with the 5th/6th house, a majority of students had their cameras on and teachers encouraged students to have an active presence. Students often utilized virtual backgrounds or Zoom filters to display their personality, make jokes, or showcase other aspects of themselves. Teachers set an expectation that your ‘Zoom name’ (the display name on the Zoom window) had to contain your first name, your pronouns, and your grade. Students often added other elements to their names, including on St. Patrick’s Day where everyone had an “Irish-sounding” name. In addition, some students used wigs, costumes, and props in their rooms to highlight a theme for the day or make a joke. The teachers mirrored and modeled these behaviors and would encourage students to be funny and authentic. Teachers and students alike used the chat feature extensively to have conversations, answer questions, and contribute to their community. Students often un-muted themselves to chime into a conversation or answer a question. Several times, teachers had to remind students to stay focused and on-task.

In contrast, the 7th/8th house observations showed much more of a “traditional” school environment, with clear discipline and classroom management. Many students had their cameras off (in one observation, only 2 out of 40 had it on) and were muted almost the entire time. One or two teachers would lead a discussion or instruction and would ask for student involvement in the

chat feature. When prompted, a few students would respond, although there were several that never participated during an observation. Teachers were much more formal than the 5th/6th team and 7th/8th students did not utilize any of the techniques (virtual backgrounds, filters, changing their names) that we saw with the younger students.

CHAPTER IV: CONNECT

The previous chapter provided an overview of our methodological framework and data analysis methods. What follows are the categories that were generated from the coded data and the interpretation of those categories. The categories in this chapter were identified and grouped under the ‘Enacted Progressive Education’ theme.

The findings presented below are organized into three chapters. As we mentioned earlier in the phase one literature review, part of our goal is to further the discussion started by Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle and Frank’s Adventure Wave. Frank’s addition of the Adventure wave condenses Kolb’s cycle into three questions: ‘What,’ ‘So What,’ and ‘Now What,’ While we appreciate the simplicity of these three questions in general experiential education programming, we encourage the adoption of a ‘Connect, Challenge, Extend’ framework as a way to deepen the reflexive praxis in critical experiential education. ‘Connect, Challenge, Extend’ is a widely used model to encourage students to think critically about new ideas. Incorporating this framework into experiential education provides students and teachers alike the lens with which to view past lived experiences, current knowledge, and future action (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2019). Therefore, our findings are presented using the ‘Connect, Challenge, Extend’ framework. Each chapter will be defined and explained in more depth.

Enacted Progressive Education

‘Connect’ seeks to tie the current experience or moment to prior knowledge and hearken back to information gained in the past. Experiential education recognizes that prior knowledge is crucial for future action and so ‘Connect’ seeks to more thoroughly examine the context and foundation that led to the present moment. At TLS, that context includes the school’s foundational documents, core principles, and guiding philosophies. In this framework, ‘Connect’

also speaks to the espoused values of the school, how these have been shared/communicated, and how those show up in practice in the day-to-day lives of students and teachers.

TLS's foundational philosophies and guiding principles speak explicitly about a progressive educational model based around social justice, project-based learning/design-based thinking, restorative justice, and experiential education. Their mission statement encapsulates this by saying that the school focuses on child-centered learning and utilizes a variety of progressive pedagogies like project-based learning/design-based thinking and experiential education. TLS is founded on ideals of inclusion and seeks to develop active and engaged citizens who are committed to positive social change. A summary of TLS' philosophy and beliefs are below:

- Children have innate intelligence, curiosity, creativity, and wonder.
- Children are active participants in their knowledge production.
- The use of inquiry-based, multimodal learning experiences encourages children to explore their passions and engage actively with their local and global community.
- Experiential education enables students to engage in a new experience; reflect and review the experience while noting feelings and thoughts; make meaning and generate learning from the experience while connecting it with prior experiences, and apply action plans to change the world

In addition to these guiding principles, TLS utilizes frameworks from restorative justice, social-emotional learning, and social justice education. These progressive pedagogies are implemented with a focus on the benefits they provide to students. The charter application originally submitted for TLS made a distinction between TLS's model and those of nearby schools, which were falling below state standards. The application materials make an effort to

point out that TLS would be able to better serve those students who tend to get left behind by ‘traditional’ education and that TLS welcomes students from all backgrounds, abilities, languages, and identities. As a school with both a neighborhood and city-wide draw, TLS sets itself up as a unique educational option for students and teachers across various communities. The individualized, child-centered approach inherent in TLS’s foundational philosophies means that students can get attention and support to thrive in this environment. The themes below were generated from the data collected and speak to the benefits and progressive, child-centered approach that TLS espouses. This chapter includes the themes of school as community, identity and mattering, social presence in a virtual environment, relationships as indicators of community, benefits to students, child centered environment, and world as a classroom.

School as Community

School as community was one of the central themes that emerged from the research. Students and teachers alike spoke to the community feel of the school and how that supported their learning and teaching practices. Students spoke to how they felt connected and supported by their peers and teachers while teachers articulated the relationships they had with their colleagues and students.

Several of the participants we interviewed were new to TLS and/or new to teaching in general. The Executive Director, who was just hired in the fall, talked about the importance of the community early in our conversation: “To be honest, I’ve learned so much from these people that I work with, they’re amazing human beings and it’s... it’s really been [a] fantastic experience for me.” Sara’s comment speaks to how she is embodying the collective and experiential nature of the school, where members of the community learn from each other throughout the process. Rather than assuming she has all the knowledge needed, Sara seeks to establish herself as a

learner as much as a leader. Sara's perspective on the collaborative and co-created nature of the school was echoed by others. Fostering a strong sense of community enables difficult and challenging conversations to become more natural and expected. Marjory commented that her students have taken to the co-created and collaborative process well, especially in conversations about social justice: 'they're like calling in' each other. And they're calling us [as teachers] in.' This also speaks to the importance of a community that is authentic, rather than performative. If teachers had not modeled and fostered this community, students would not necessarily feel comfortable calling their teachers into challenging conversations.

Community needs to be established, built, and maintained. It takes effort from all members to sustain a vibrant and effective community. The teachers in particular spoke to the difficulties (and the benefits) of creating their classroom community. Sharon talked at length about the long-term benefits of establishing a consistent effort towards community:

But the kids who needed the extra time the kids who needed the visuals and the kids who needed us to actually sit there and like, explain, repeating decimals which one would not think would be that hard of a concept but we take that time and make it the community's issue, and that like, you know, not always fair, but it's worked out and making them feel very responsible for one another. And we've done like a group project and science that we all didn't learn until college, that group projects we're going to be our downfall. We taught these babies early. They're like, you might actually have to pick up and just run with it by yourself, you might actually not get to express every single one of your thoughts about how they should go because there's another leader in your group, right. So it

kind of just. It's experiential, but I think as far as I've noticed it is giving them, it's making them comfortable in their community and I like that. It's taken 24 weeks but we're here.

In Sharon's class, students feel part of a community and sense of belonging and, by extension, feel responsible for each other. When it becomes "the community's issue", students pay attention to how their peers are doing and become more cognizant of the impact of their actions on the broader whole. Existing as a community means that, as Sharon points out, students need to learn how to navigate sharing their perspectives and listening to others. A group project might take a different direction than they intended, and another student's ideas may become the ones that the group gravitates towards. By spending time building a community where students feel responsible for each other, students have a strong sense of agency, belonging, and competency (Carver, 1996) and are more easily able to function as members of a collaborative space.

Sharon's last sentence speaks to the challenges and the time needed to create such a community. This is especially prevalent in a virtual environment, where students can feel disconnected from each other and from TLS. Teachers had a variety of techniques they used to build community within their classroom. The 5th/6th house was particularly energetic about this, using their morning meeting times to encourage students to dress up, apply virtual backgrounds, or show off pets. They also utilized their morning meetings to build interactions between students. In one memorable morning meeting, students were asked to greet each other with a funny laugh and the student's name. Students seemed to really enjoy an opportunity to be silly and have fun with their peers and teachers. Throughout all Zoom interactions, the 5th/6th teacher team took time to remind students to use names, greet each other, and clearly articulate their

thoughts. Every time a student raised their hand or wanted to contribute, teachers asked the class to “say hi to them!” and ensured that students, to the best extent possible, felt connected to each other. Teachers took advantage of the tools that Zoom provides to deliver both academic content and community development. In one 7th/8th-grade morning meeting, Marjory shared a meme of Beyoncé and asked students to choose which Beyoncé they felt like today. Students responded energetically in the chat and some un-muted to share their thoughts on “Queen B”. Across the classrooms, teachers allowed students the freedom to express themselves through creative re-naming on Zoom, the use of virtual backgrounds, and free-ranging conversations in the chat that usually centered on thoughts about the Marvel Cinematic Universe. In a more traditional educational environment, these moments might be seen as wasted time or time away from instruction, yet at TLS they are viewed as central to the school day. Teachers strived to encourage students to show up authentically and modeled the kind of engagement they want to see from their classes.

Teachers used a variety of methods to infuse community development into their lessons and interactions with students. Small things like asking students to greet each other by name have the ripple effect of ensuring that students know each other and recognize that it’s important to acknowledge the people in their community. While this focus may be seen as time lost on instruction in other environments, Sharon points out some of the hidden benefits to students that a focus on community can bring:

And, I don't know if it's unique to the seven/eight team.... I think it's really just kind of an expectation that we set early in the school, but early on in the year...we try to take specific time within the small groups, introduce ourselves. Talk about ourselves, even if we know one another like you've

been here three years yes, but and then we, for the most part, spend a lot of time in those town hall-like spaces individualizing things and asking students to individualize things so that they get an opportunity to speak in front of a group of people, and then understand that the response that they get from that, good, bad, ugly, most of the time good is eliciting community for them, right? So we're trying to build a community for them to see what it's supposed to look like before they go find their own.

Helping students to learn about a community in their classroom can serve them later in life when they must “go find their own” space. Taking time to introduce each other and learn more about each other is a crucial skill in building both community and other life-long skills like social-emotional development and empathy. In particular, we appreciate Sharon’s point about having students introduce themselves, even if they’ve been in the school for many years. This speaks to how community development is an iterative and evolving process and that we need to continually learn more about each other.

The community aspect of TLS applies to teacher teams and their collaborative work as well. Since so many of our participants were new to TLS, this is an aspect they commented on frequently, especially on how it felt different from other educational environments they had experienced. When asked how TLS was different from other places she’d taught, Cynthia was quick to answer that, for her, the difference was:

Individualism versus collectivism. So with that, I feel like in my past experience I felt like I was the homeroom teacher; I had to take care of everything. I was responsible for planning for my class, I was responsible for everything teaching-wise. [But at TLS] it's very collaborative, different

teammates have different responsibilities. And it really is a lot more about teamwork and collaboration, and not so much about... like what is this teacher doing, you know.

The focus on co-teaching and collaborative planning was echoed by other teachers.

Sharon commented that she enjoyed:

the flexibility, something that I'm really enjoying now that I've never really had a chance to is the co-teaching aspect. Um, that's something I really really enjoy being able to have somebody that I can feed off... you know their energy. Being a beginning teacher is really nice to have a more veteran teacher that I can kind of lean on and be like, hey, like what do you think about this, do you have anything to add or, you know, different ways that we you know incorporate the different teaching you know co-teaching models.

Sharon's and Cynthia's quotes both speak to the importance of community action at TLS, even among the teachers. Rather than having to 'take care of everything', Cynthia has a supportive team of teachers who have a collective goal of working with students. Their community has been formed to both foster student development and to work collaboratively with each other. Sharon's point about feeding off a co-teacher's energy speaks to the pedagogical value of this collaborative working environment. In experiential education, we recognize the value and benefits of co-facilitation and we were excited to hear Sharon speak to similar benefits she gained from a co-teaching experience. The benefits gained by teachers echo and enhance the benefits gained by students.

In TLS's charter application, they discuss how a mixed-age and co-teacher model would be a benefit to both students and teachers, saying that teachers can more easily incorporate different pedagogical techniques and can make their lessons more interdisciplinary and individualized. This initial aim is clearly seen as an asset to the teachers in our study, who all commented that they enjoyed the flexible curriculum, dedicated planning time together, and the ability to learn from other teachers. This has been particularly important this year, as teachers are constantly having to adapt their lesson plans and activities to a virtual environment while combating Zoom fatigue, testing requirements, and an evolving public health crisis. We noticed that TLS had initiated structural changes to make this process easier for students. Both the 5th/6th and 7th/8th houses had a weekly schedule with asynchronous instruction one day per week. This ensured that the teachers had time to plan, work together, and alter lesson plans for the coming week.

The development of community is a challenging and energy-intensive process. It takes continual effort from teachers and students to ensure that the school as a community is vibrant and inclusive for all members. Marjory sums up the focus on community well when she says:

How do you stay engaged and stay in conversation and community with people? Are you too young to have an opinion, are you trying to engage? Of course not. But once you come into the realization that you can and should, how are you going to do that? Are you just gonna flick off the person who's completely different from you, be ignorant of their perspective, be disrespectful, downright rude and just come to a standstill, or are you going to think your way through that and figure out some tools and some skills, right, that can move you through the dialogue

conversation experience to be in community with others? What you are living through, what you are witnessing, is the essence of the willingness of people to be in community.

Here Marjory describes some of the deeper aspects of community--those centering around collective living skills. Rather than ‘flicking off’ others, living as a community means that skills around conflict transformation, communication, and vulnerability need to be practiced and enhanced. Marjory’s last line speaks to the central issue within school as a community--members of that community must be willing to commit to that community and to each other as members. Committing means engaging fully, being willing to work through the hard parts, and recognizing the value of community as a form of collaborative and democratic living. Collaborative and democratic living provides a space to appreciate the significance of identities of individuals.

Identity and Mattering

An important and essential part of the development of a community is the acknowledgment that all members have multiple individual identities that all form various assemblages. This focus on identity is present throughout TLS, especially in the curricular focus on social justice. Within the context of community, a focus on identity helped teachers and students to feel valued and appreciated and that their voices should be heard as part of the community. This focus on identity relates to Bettina Love’s (2019) concept of ‘mattering’. According to Love, mattering is the “quest for humanity” (Love, 2019, p. 7). To Love (and to TLS), mattering is inextricably tied to identity. It is impossible to truly matter in a community where your identity is not respected and understood.

At TLS, conversations about identity are invited throughout. Teachers are quick to remind students to include their pronouns in their Zoom name so that they can be addressed appropriately. When mistakes are made (someone mis-genders someone else, for example), teachers are skilled at facilitating a restorative process to ensure that both members of the community can express their emotions and to arrive at a productive solution. Teachers take time to learn about their students and their families to be better able to understand cultural or language differences. Conversations about identity, power, and privilege are common in both co-curricular and curricular settings. Teachers are thoughtful to be representative of various identities when choosing books, videos, or articles to share with the class.

Teachers, more so than students, spoke explicitly about how they feel their identity is valued at TLS. When describing a previous school, Marjory explained that she felt like she was in “an environment where I was a minoritized faculty, right, I was on the margins, my voice was never valued or prioritized”. Similarly, Sara described how she felt at TLS as compared to other schools. “Yeah, I definitely feel much more comfortable. I actually feel like I am truly myself more so than I probably have been. I didn't realize how constrained I was feeling in my day to day. It's actually somewhat freeing.” This ‘freeing’ feeling shows how important it is to foster spaces of authenticity and vulnerability within communities so that members of the community share a sense of acceptance and belonging.

As with community, conversations around identity provide students and teachers with a shared language and comfort around challenging topics. Sara pointed out how it felt to transition into TLS from a very different environment where conversations about social justice were not as prevalent:

So, I mean, for me personally, it was just very interesting when I first got there because people knew that I came from Catholic education, [and] I felt some bias towards me and my beliefs and I got asked some questions that, like, really why did you ask me that? What does that matter?

Sara's experience helps to show a potential pitfall of a community that values identity and inclusion. Communities can be self-perpetuating, and members can, perhaps unintentionally, limit access to those that believe similar things. In Sara's case, she described entering TLS as a learning experience and as a time where she had to humble herself. She was aware of the perceptions that others had about her and her faith tradition and worked hard to have members of the school see her as a leader committed to the values of TLS. She felt like she had to earn her place and the respect of those who had been at TLS before her.

Identity is crucial to ensuring that all members of a community can be authentic and whole in their interactions with others. A focus on authenticity and human centeredness also helps to foster a positive social presence, especially in a virtual environment.

Social Presence in a Virtual Environment

Social presence is a term often used in communication studies and computer studies to distinguish how people utilize tools found in Zoom, Google Classroom, and other virtual sharing sites to express who they are and what matters to them. The definition of social presence we will use includes "the ability of learners to project their personal characteristics into the community of inquiry, thereby presenting themselves as 'real people'" (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2001).

Laurie specifically mentioned students and teachers alike felt comfortable showing quirky and fun sides of themselves and why that might be important in building community:

Like, going to this school would make your kids more well-rounded as...as people. There's such an emphasis on loving others for who they are, being yourself, which is why our kids get to be so weird, right. At other schools, they're too stressed out about, like seeming normal, and, our at school, kids are, you know, cheered on for being as weird as they can be, and just being themselves. So I think I would also mention that how students are free to explore who they are, who they are as people. who they are as people.

At TLS, social presence, community, and a focus on identity combine to foster a space where students and teachers alike can be who they are. School members are comfortable expressing their true selves as they know they will be valued and appreciated for that expression. We saw repeated examples of students and teachers positively reinforcing the importance of vulnerability and authenticity by welcoming and encouraging expressions of who each other are as people in the 5/6 house especially.

We observed a 5th/6th house morning meeting where we noticed specifically the background, filters, names, and costumes the students and teachers were wearing. Admittedly some of these were based around the fact that this was Saint Patrick's Day as some kids were renaming themselves Irish-sounding names such as "Spudsy o' cabbage"; "Lucky o' charms" which we found very interesting. This seems to be a consistent process. We noticed that some students and teachers were in their own spaces (bedrooms) and had personal items in view, others were in shared spaces that did not offer the same personal items in view. Most had their camera on, yet 6 of 34 did not. Everyone is encouraged to be authentic and sometimes silly. Students and teachers were encouraged yet not required to participate in these ways, which

showed us the deep desire for supporting risk-taking, authenticity, and choice in a virtual setting. Risk, vulnerability, and choice are central to experiential education. We were excited to see these enacted in a virtual setting.

Relationships as Indicators of Community

Relationships between teachers, students, and content help to foster a positive and vibrant community. These strong relationships were demonstrated frequently and have been evidenced in the sections above. Teachers and students alike commented on the feelings of inclusion, agency, connection, and belonging they gained from their time at TLS. When asked what made her interested in staying at TLS, Marjory responded in part “it’s because of the students and the connections that I had with those students.” Teachers feel a strong connection to their students due, likely, to the time that they spent building a community within their classroom.

Progressive educational philosophies recognize that students all have different needs and strengths. While our research did not focus specifically on identifying students who accessed special education services, there is a strong connection between relationships with an adult and a student’s ability to thrive in an educational setting (e.g., Ungar, 2013; Brown and Shillington, 2017; Tsai and Cheney, 2011). Connections and relationships serve as protective factors that help to provide resilience in the face of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma. Relationships help students to feel valued, heard, and empowered as members of the educational community. That students and teachers alike commented on the relationships they felt across all levels at TLS shows how deeply embedded these connections are. Cynthia, a new teacher who is interested in becoming a school counselor, recognized the mental and emotional benefits of these relationships, saying “I find like as I've gone through teaching, I find that I have a real passion for building relationships with students and focusing on their social-emotional wellness.” She

later commented that her desire to switch from classroom teaching to school counseling stemmed from a need to use her relationships with students to help them through their struggles. While she was able to do some of that work as a classroom teacher, she found herself wanting both the knowledge base and dedicated time as a counselor to help students more fully.

Students also commented on the connections they had with their teachers and how that has benefited their learning. Christopher was asked to compare his teachers at TLS to his previous elementary school. He noted that his elementary school had frequent staff turnover and that he rarely had a teacher for an entire school year. However, at TLS, “it's been like the same teachers, and nothing's really changed so it's been really easy to get to know them. I think if like a teacher left and a new one joined it would be a bigger impact than it was at [his previous school].” This is especially important because Christopher is a 5th-grade student and has never met his 5th-grade teachers in person due to TLS’s virtual learning environment. However, he still feels connected to them and that his learning would be impacted if they were to leave. TLS teachers work hard to build relationships with their students. During in-person instruction, relationship building looks like one-on-one time, individualized instruction, personalized learning, and humor. As TLS shifted to a virtual environment, teachers were forced to adapt and consider what relationship building looks like online.

The importance of relationships and connections is all the more crucial this year when TLS is virtual, and students can more easily feel distanced from school. Sharon, a teaching assistant for the 7th/8th-grade house, has a unique role in that she can work with all of the teachers and students in the house. She commented that her position gives her the ability to form relationships with all students, which is particularly important “this year with these kids, [and] it's been really nice to be able to be that extra touch for them.” She sees the work that she does as

helping students academically and socially, as she takes time to get to know them as individuals. Towards the end of our data collection, TLS began conversations about adopting a hybrid in-person model for some part of the spring semester. In discussing this potential change, Sharon mentioned how it would be challenging to establish a different type of relationship with her students once she meets them in person. This foresight speaks to the iterative nature of relationships—we must continually work to develop, strengthen, and maintain relationships. As TLS transitions back to an in-person learning environment, teachers will need to spend time re-establishing relationships with students, some of whom they have never seen in person.

As with building community, relationships take time and investment to establish and maintain. Structural elements at TLS like smaller class sizes, interdisciplinary classes, and a teacher: student ratio of 1:20 help teachers build relationships with their students. When TLS is in-person, students work together frequently on group projects and discussions in class. In a virtual environment, it is more challenging to foster student relationships with each other. Efforts like virtual backgrounds, silly greetings during morning meetings, and a focus on names certainly help students to get to know one another. However, there is a limit to relationship building virtually, especially when some students have never met each other in person. Sharon demonstrates the tension between what teachers hope for and what students gain by saying:

I think there was a lot more effort in the beginning of the year to get them to use their voices and like be communal, share with one another, and [build relationships] in ways that we really can't because we're not in the building. But we're finding that the more we don't stress that and we just let them come to us, they're willing to do so.

Sharon's point here is well-taken and speaks to the broader challenges of teaching virtually, especially when using pedagogies that are typically utilized face-to-face. TLS teachers were able to form deep and meaningful relationships with their students virtually this year. Just as with in-person instruction, however, teachers sometimes struggle to realize what happens in the rest of a student's life. Forming relationships online can be complicated when faced with issues like Zoom fatigue, burnout, stress, and the collective trauma of the ongoing pandemic. Sharon highlights the limits of relationship building when students are not in the building. Although these limits and challenges to relationship development are areas of concern, we saw overwhelming evidence of the benefits to students that these connections to their peers and their teachers provide.

Benefits to Students

TLS's original application listed the ways that a progressive, experiential, and social justice-focused school environment could benefit students. It was hoped that TLS would provide students with individualized instruction and the opportunity to apply content in an interdisciplinary context across the curriculum. In such an environment, students would be able to grow their critical thinking skills, develop as writers, and be informed and active citizens.

Scholars from Dewey on have commented on experiential education's ability to help students explore content and learn in a different way. Experiential education helps students learn their strengths while navigating areas of growth. TLS's model combining experiential education, social justice, and restorative justice practices (among others) helps to establish an effective and beneficial environment for students. Although the Department of Public Instruction's School Report Card lists TLS as below average in math and science, comments from both students and

teachers help to provide more context to the benefits provided to students. The last two years North Carolina suspended state tests due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked to articulate the benefits that TLS provided to students, Sara responded by saying:

So, our students are really learning how to be independent thinkers. And they're really learning how to express how they feel about something, anything, and the relationships they have with each other and with their teachers is pretty amazing. And I think about that because we have eighth grade and they're going off to high school and they're probably most of them are going to, because there's really no option for them to continue [at TLS] so they're going to go into a traditional school setting and I just feel like they're going to look around at their peers and be like, what I mean I just feel like they're going to constantly looking around saying what's wrong with you what, why, why is this so hard for you to understand why? Why aren't you able to just take this? And, and work with it?

The focus on student preparation and skills, especially compared to their peers at a 'traditional' school, was also echoed by Marjory, who said "overall when they get to high school they're gonna definitely run rings around their counterparts in terms of just having a certain level of confidence about what they know, how to show it, be stronger readers, stronger writers." Marjory and Sara articulated how students gain both academic skills like writing and critical thinking and higher-level skills like confidence. These two teachers believe that TLS's methods are setting students up for future success, in whatever environment they enter next. The other

teachers interviewed did not speak directly about the benefits of TLS methods for future learning experiences.

Teachers frequently commented on how TLS's environment was different from their educational journey. Laurie said:

I would say that the students learn how to be independent, first and foremost, which is something that we all want to, like, teach our children to learn how to do not, not just physically but mentally to write. I mean in so many other schools, children are taught to depend on, just memorization, whatever the teacher says is the truth; that's what's right. It took until I was an adult to figure out, hey, maybe some of these things that my parents are saying are not exactly reality. I mean, it's reality for them, but it's not reality for most of the rest of the world.

Laurie views TLS's methods as providing students with the resources and skills to question what they're told to come up with their truth. This focus on independence is mirrored in TLS' charter application, which discusses the importance of the "ABCs of learning" (Carver, 1997). This model seeks to increase student agency, belonging, and competence to foster independent and self-actualized learners.

Throughout its philosophy, operations, and methods, TLS seeks to distinguish itself from other nearby schools. The charter application devotes significant time to detailing the ways that TLS will be unique from other neighborhood elementary and middle schools, and the benefits that this new approach will provide to students. TLS is in its 4th year of operation and so is still establishing a reputation among parents and community members. Even in its early years, however, TLS maintains a strong focus on setting itself apart as a place for students that is

distinct from other schools. Sharon sees a long-range vision for TLS to act as a positive force in the community by providing benefits and resources to students that other schools do not. She also hopes that TLS stops being unique and that other schools begin to adopt some of its methods. As she says,

But, eventually, we'll be in a place where this is not a utopia. Here, I feel like the gaps that were left in my own education, have the possibility of being filled for these kids. I know they're not going to learn everything from us. I know we're not perfect, I know we're not different in a wonderful way from other schools. I just think that there's the opportunity for learning in a different way and for different kids than there really was previously and that there are in public schools and certainly like [nearby] elementary schools.

Sara highlights an interesting contrast between the status of TLS and its potential future as a school. Currently, TLS is somewhat unique geographically in how it combines progressive pedagogies to benefit students. Sara visions towards a future in which schools like TLS are no longer the exception but become the norm. Through recognizing the gaps in her own education, Sara is modeling the reflexivity that TLS hopes to teach to its students. Through working to identify and fill these gaps, TLS provides students with preparation for life that is different from what they receive elsewhere. Students also recognized that the educational preparation they receive at TLS is different than at other schools. When asked what he was hoping to gain from the rest of his time at TLS, Grayson responded “I’m hoping to be able to see more, expand my horizon.” He views TLS as a place where he can learn more and go deeper than he could at his

previous elementary school. Christopher expressed a similar thought when he discussed the academic gains he'd made at TLS, as compared to his previous school:

I think [his previous school] would like lightly hammer, like let's say multiplication they would lightly hammer it in, check-in with everybody like are you getting this, and then just move on like to division or something. But at TLS, they're hammering that thing [emphasis in original]. They're hammering the nail into the wall super hard and making sure that everybody understands it and everybody's on the same level, basically. It makes sure that I never forget. I would forget a lot of, like, my math [at his previous school] because they wouldn't hammer it in as much. But at TLS, I'm like never forgetting one plus one.

A frequent critique of pedagogies like experiential education is that students do not learn as well as they do in 'traditional' settings. The flexibility and autonomy present in progressive educational spaces can look like chaos and a loss of control. However, Christopher highlights how the pedagogical framework of TLS makes sure he never forgot his math lessons--he was able to learn the same content in different and more engaging ways so that the lessons stayed with him.

When asked to articulate the benefits to students that TLS provides, teachers generally spoke about the higher-level skills and social-emotional learning strengths as mentioned above. Few spoke to specific academic benefits or strengths. While some discussed the skills that students would be able to take with them to their next school, Marlene responded that "students may struggle with how society operates, and the norms set in higher education or companies that do not correlate with the values TLS espouses and integrates. Students will absolutely thrive in

the aspects of community, respect for all, caring, social justice, critical thinking, and seeing multiple sides/solutions to situations.” This recognition of the differences between TLS and other environments has become more pronounced this year, as TLS prepares to graduate its first class of 8th-grade students. These students will leave TLS for public or private high schools, none of whom share the same foundational values as TLS. This anonymous quote seems to be raising the question of long-term benefits to students at TLS. If their experience in the school is so vastly different from what they will experience in other educational settings, how will they be able to adjust? TLS seeks to create students who can act as change agents in their communities. However, that goal is challenging when students are facing an educational system and society that is set up not to be challenged.

Child-Centered Environment

Originating with Dewey, experiential education includes a strong focus on child-centered learning. For students to learn most effectively, they must feel comfortable bringing their entire selves into the educational space. Teachers need to be able to understand, appreciate, and value all of a student’s history, culture, and context as it will influence their ability to learn. While child-centered learning is a core outgrowth of an emphasis on relationships, community, and identity, it includes an intentional focus on the educational philosophy that teachers utilize.

At TLS, teachers design curriculum and lessons using their knowledge of each student in their class. Throughout interviews and observations, we frequently observed teachers using this individualized knowledge to help students connect their experience, history, culture, and context to the lessons so that students gain as much as possible. Examples ranged from teachers asking about a student’s progress in a video game to choosing common reading books based on identities students hold. Child-centered learning can be seen as individualized instruction, as the

relationships teachers have with students, or as the ability of a school to welcome students from all backgrounds. Teachers at TLS talked about all these facets of child-centered learning as important pieces of their educational philosophy.

Cynthia connected child-centered environments to experiential education when she was asked about the learning environment at TLS. She said that TLS's focus on the whole child "makes you see the student in a different light." Viewing students as holistic people (rather than just passive recipients of knowledge) shifts how teachers approach curriculum as well. Cynthia goes on to say "with experiential education, you kind of can embed it in the real world and then also use your students to kind of help you build but, with scripted lessons you're very stuck with what this says [at] this specific time. And I think that creates a barrier [for students]." Moving away from a universal, scripted curriculum towards a more individualized, student-led curriculum process both invites students to bring their perspectives to the conversation and models aspects of a vibrant community. Cynthia is a new teacher to TLS, and she commented frequently on how flexibility was a transformative aspect of the school for her. She felt like she had the ability to be flexible in her lesson planning, curriculum pieces, and student interactions. She also saw how TLS sought to give students choice and flexibility in their learning environments. In particular, she commented about flexible seating as a way to highlight student choice: "Here, [at TLS] they're very big on like students can choose and there's a choice and, you know, whatever is comfortable for the student, so it seems to be a little more student-led as well." This student-led component is essential in both child-centered learning and experiential education. Providing students with choice and agency in their environments allows them to feel ownership and a higher sense of engagement and competency as they become active in their own

learning. Students can construct their own knowledge and build relationships between new knowledge and their prior experience to determine changes for future action.

Teaching in a child-centered environment, as other aspects discussed previously, requires the teachers to adopt a certain mindset and philosophical approach to education. Cynthia articulates this well when she says that she sees excitement and value in:

[B]eing able to reach the students who need extra support. Some students, other teachers may write them off, are like the best student or you know the troublemaker. But for some reason, I've always been drawn to those students because I see so much potential in them. And I really get on their level to see what their understanding is, what their experiences are, and create that relationship. We've given interventions specific to, you know, specific students and they are thriving and I've seen growth.

Cynthia's approach highlights the strengths of a child-centered approach, as it shifts away from a deficit-based mindset and instead seeks to discover the strengths inside each child. By "getting on their level" and seeking to understand them as individuals, Cynthia is embodying child-centered learning. She is modeling to students how to treat others and showing them that she will not "write them off" as others have done. Cynthia's response also shows that this is difficult and challenging work. It is not easy for teachers to have the time or energy to spend time with students and have these conversations. It is often simpler and more efficient to group students together using test scores, class performance, or other more universal metrics. However, Cynthia also shows the impact that a child-centered approach can have on students.

Again, TLS has structural elements that help foster a child-centered environment. Small class sizes and flexible curriculum implementation allows teachers the time to have

conversations with students. Student choice, agency, and a sense of belonging allows for students to advocate for their needs and express how they can best be supported to learn. Melanie spoke to another element of TLS--its grading scale. Melanie talked about her report cards and how teachers took time to provide individualized feedback, rather than just a grade. Her report cards were:

[A]bout everything really. They do like a little bit of each like to say something about a little segment about like in math, I know this you are really good at this, which is why you can.... it's why you can do this so well, but I noticed like with this area, you're having more trouble. So, like, it's just different, like, just everything, just written assessment of everything.

This different approach to grading and assessment was important to Melanie because it also emphasizes a shift away from the deficit-based approach. Rather than just providing a grade, teachers take the time to provide specific feedback (both positive and negative) for each student. Having teachers point out Melanie's strengths allowed her to feel more confident in them and more dedicated to improving her areas of weakness.

Child-centered learning means that education has higher emotional investment, and that learning is no longer disconnected from the learners. Elements of risk-taking and vulnerability make child-centered learning more active for both teachers and students. Laurie told a story of a challenge that arises from focusing on a student's humanity and identity:

I want to be that perfect person, that perfect support system for them all the time. When I screw up sometimes, or when we as teachers, all of us did the other day when we had guests come in who used the wrong

pronouns for one of our students, and it... it was... it was damaging for our student. And we, none of us heard it, we, we weren't paying close enough attention and we should have called that out immediately. It's just really hard...you never ever want to be the reason your student is hurting, you know, and I'm still... I haven't gotten a chance to talk to that student personally yet to apologize. So I'm still so emotional about it.

Laurie's emotion was still evident when she told us this story, a few days after the incident. She spoke of how impactful it was for her to realize the mistake, witness the impact it had on a student, and yet not be able to prevent it from happening. Child-centered learning asks teachers to welcome their students as whole people while encouraging students to be authentic in their learning environments. In a setting with 40 plus students such as whole house meetings, it is understandable that mistakes will be made and that words might get jumbled and misspoken. Laurie's story shows the emotional toll that a child-centered approach can have. Laurie is a student teacher who has been interning at TLS since the fall as she completes her undergraduate studies. She spoke about how different TLS has been from her other internship sites and how she wants to embody the teaching styles she has seen throughout her time at TLS. In relating this story about the mis-gendered student, Laurie's connection to her students and passion for ensuring their voices are heard was evident. She, and the other TLS teachers, make every effort to ensure that students can be their true and authentic selves in their classrooms. Laurie's story also highlights how the learning and content does not end at the four walls of the classroom. Instead, TLS encourages students to see their learning as connected to the world. Rather than viewing education as preparation for the 'real world' TLS seeks to help students realize how their classroom knowledge connects to the knowledge they bring in from outside of school.

World as a Classroom

Frameworks like experiential education and social justice seek to tie more firmly education and curriculum to the world around us. Progressive pedagogies challenge the notion that learning can only happen inside the 4 walls of a classroom and instead encourage teachers and students alike to view the world as a classroom. TLS embodies this well as teachers are encouraged to bring the ‘real world’ into their classrooms and content. TLS’s location as an urban school located on a downtown campus provides ideal opportunities for field trips down the street to the public park, class walks to the library or visits to nearby museums. Their location and positioning as a neighborhood school also allow for projects like oral histories or place-based storytelling centered on local neighborhoods. TLS teachers and students seek out opportunities to expand their knowledge beyond the walls of the school.

Laurie and Cynthia in particular spoke to the importance of broadening education to include real-world experiences. Laurie began by saying “it’s really neat seeing stuff being implemented and then even before we teach them about how it connects to the world around them, they are already responding ‘that reminds me of this or that makes me think of this, or this was happening in the news.’” In her classroom, students were eager to make connections between what they were learning in class and what they were experiencing in the world around them. These connections have become all the more important this year as the pandemic has altered so much about daily life. Being able to connect a science, literacy, or math lesson to a real-world item can help students to make sense of the ever-changing world around them.

Embodying an expanded view of education beyond the walls of the classroom helps students to learn how to best interact with and perceive the world. Freire called this skill ‘reading the word and reading the world’ (Freire, 1987). He emphasized that students need to be able to

understand the world and how they (and others) operate within it to contextualize the texts and discourse they were learning. Viewing the world as a classroom enables teachers to incorporate a variety of teaching tools and content pieces to help students more fully understand what's around them. Laurie again talks about her educational journey and how those contrasts with the model used at TLS:

One of my favorite things about TLS is that we get to take things that are happening in the world, around the students that they see and deal with every single day and implement it into curriculum or literacy standards or like science, literally anything can be connected to what's going around them and things that they, you know, need to know about. Like I grew up only learning about, you know, like the whitewashed content that I, that was given to me, and it wasn't until one particular class at college that I realized where exactly I am in terms of in society compared to other people because of because of my race, because of my status.

By providing students with education that is connected to the world around them, TLS ensures that students read the world and understand how they operate within it. Laurie is excited about the potential for students to learn content that is not whitewashed and that is contextualized for them as individuals. As they continue their journey towards active citizens, TLS provides them with the foundation to critically analyze the world around them.

While the pandemic and resulting virtual learning environment has been a benefit for bringing content into the classroom, it has also made it more challenging for teachers. Especially earlier in the pandemic, we were all told to stay in our homes and disconnect from others. This disconnection can mean that students find it more difficult to see connections between the world

and the content they're learning. Cynthia points out that virtual learning and the stress caused by the pandemic have been challenging for teachers and students alike. As she says,

I would say it is anchoring their learning into the real world. Of course, it's more challenging, with it being virtual. And we want our students to represent themselves and present their background, but also like oh there's so much....

Cynthia trails off and does not fully finish this sentence. When asked later what she meant, she talked about how child-centered learning focused on identity is challenging in today's world, with a rise in hate crimes and identity-based violence (both connected to the pandemic and otherwise). When the world is scary and overwhelming, it can feel easier and more comfortable to stick to a scripted curriculum. With the pandemic, the presidential election, and a global reckoning around race, bringing the world into the classroom this year has been a difficult and fraught process. While TLS does not want students to shy away from difficult conversations, they also want to ensure that a school is a comfortable place for students to process the world. This tension between the 'real world' and the classroom is inherent in progressive pedagogy and something with which TLS continues to wrestle.

Throughout this chapter, we have examined the many ways in which TLS enacts its progressive foundations. During our observations and interviews, we recognized the benefits to students, broader connection beyond the classroom, and deep relationships that TLS fosters. TLS teachers embody and enact the progressive philosophical underpinnings of the school in different ways, depending on their subject and teaching style. We also observed that some teachers were more comfortable with these pedagogies than others and the depth to which they were enacted varied across the middle school grades. Just as TLS faces tension between their values and the

‘real world,’ teachers struggle to balance a student-centered approach with the requirements of a more traditional system of power. While TLS does many things well, our experience in the school also highlighted some of the tensions that exist when looking to enact progressive education within a broader system that is generally resistant to change. Chapter 5 will examine some of these tensions in more depth while also looking at gaps we found between TLS’ espoused values and their lived actions.

CHAPTER V: CHALLENGE

This portion of our analysis seeks to take a deeper dive into naming the tensions and demands of teaching and learning in a school that is relatively new while attempting to understand and live learning in ways that are much different from traditional schooling. This section looks at TLS' espoused progressive values present in 'Connect' and examines the tension of these values in practice in a school that still faces the same requirements and standards as traditional public schools. Similar to Chapter 4, the categories identified below were grouped under the theme of 'examining tensions and gaps.' An overarching tension is teaching, learning and this research have all occurred during the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic which has uprooted so much of what we thought we knew and could expect. COVID-19 has been well documented every single day in the news and social media since February of 2020. For that reason, we will not take time to describe the challenges COVID-19 has and continues to present unless those challenges are directly related to our research.

Examining Tensions and Gaps

The tensions TLS has faced are not so different from the tensions many schools have and will continue to face in the coming months. Decisions about whether to reopen have been one of the most concerning and difficult ones to make. Parents, teachers, students, administrators, and other staff have weighed in on what they think the best options are and as usual, not everyone agrees. The decision to reopen and to what extent also was affected by state and local agencies who have some sway or governance over schools in this region of the country. TLS has made the decision to remain virtual for the entirety of the 2020-2021 school year. The 2021-2022 academic year began amongst national, state, and local debate as to the efficacy and legality of

various pandemic precautions. To begin the 2021-2022 school year, TLS was preparing for in person learning based on CDC guidelines.

This chapter continues the conversation started in chapter 4 by recognizing the tensions inherent in enacting progressive educational values. The current environment including a global pandemic, along with heightened racial and political tensions means that schools like TLS face unique challenges to truly enact their values. The following themes (teaching in a pandemic, espoused values vs lived actions, and traditional achievement orientation) highlight the gaps we noticed in what TLS writes in its foundational documents, what teachers describe their philosophy to be, and how those teachers interact with and teach students. Teaching in a pandemic disrupted many educational spaces across the world and that disruption affected the lives of students and teachers at TLS as they transitioned to a virtual setting.

Teaching in a Pandemic

The decision to meet virtually at the beginning of the school year and to continue that through to the end of the 2020-2021 school year, although providing a safer environment, has not been without its own challenges, especially for a school that hangs its hat on experiential education and hands-on learning. Sara mentioned this when she stated that “it’s really challenged, because of coronavirus like I mean my...I’m being challenged every day on how you lead a school like this in a virtual setting.” She clarifies how not being in the same physical space has affected the school by saying:

That has really been a struggle for us because it...because we're not in the building. We've just been struggling, about, I think, how do we create that in this remote setting. And it's been more challenging with the younger students, and those teachers than with the older students, and I think it's

because they can do things more independently than the younger students. So that really has been the biggest struggle. And for me, I haven't seen the school in action. Right, so I haven't really seen the teachers try to live that out on a day to day. So, I mean that's the biggest struggle we're remote and we can't have the kids work collaboratively in a way we would want to. We can't go out and walk down the street and eat. I mean we just can't do those things and so that's really been the struggle.

Sara and other teachers alike noticed the tension of teaching and learning through experiential education in a virtual setting. The teachers had to figure out online learning in general, they also had to contend with determining how to fully incorporate experiential education, social justice, restorative justice, and other pedagogies valued at the school into a virtual format. Two of the students we interviewed offered their perspectives on physical versus online learning. Christopher explained why he thought physically going to school was better for students when he said, "I think that physical school is much better than virtual because of like, like I know a lot of kids don't like do their assignments in time. And [they do them on time] in a regular school, in physical school, but they don't [virtually]." Melanie reiterated this perspective when she said: "[In our projects] you can't have as much instruction as you would in person, and you get like a reflection on it and it's kind of really different..." Marjory was another of the participants that clearly articulated a challenge with teaching in a pandemic when she said:

A lot of times, our dysfunction...our impasses are because they [students] aren't able to see where we currently are as an experience that we can work our way through...we're [teachers] like "Oh my god, what are we gonna do." They [students] didn't learn anything.

Each of these research participants echoed that in the variety of ways listed above, teaching and learning in a virtual setting were more difficult than in a shared physical classroom.

To further Marjory's point from the quote above, challenges occurred when the middle school house as a community didn't see the experiences they share as an opportunity for growth and to infuse experiential education in the daily processes of the school, from a micro to a macro level. They did not seem to see the impact of using experiential education philosophy as something to be lived in every aspect of their school, including recognizing, and reflecting on the ways in which the challenges of this past year have affected their ability to teach and learn together.

Admittedly, teachers across the globe have had a tremendous learning curve to overcome in a short period of time in terms of transforming their curriculum to online learning formats. Those educators who abide by an experiential education philosophy have been even more so affected by the requirement to move to virtual classrooms and were woefully unprepared to meet this need. The intent at TLS seems to be there and yet the impact is that espoused values and philosophies may not be defined and lived with consistency at TLS, especially in the new virtual environment they had during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Espoused Values vs Lived Actions

In addition to moving to teaching and learning in a virtual educational space the last few months, one of the consistent key elements for TLS is to make sure students can co-create and engage in their learning as opposed to the traditional classroom where students are seen as vessels to gather information. Sara sees that as an institution versus what a school could be:

So, at my previous school, it was high school competitive college prep, and the kids came in, they sat at a desk, and they were talked at all day long. And that is not that's not school. That's, that's an institution.

We appreciate the distinction between traditional and progressive philosophies and pedagogies expressed and emphasized throughout the school. From the executive director to students, the recognition of and understanding that TLS was designed to be different from other schools is vital to the mission and values it holds. Upholding this philosophy and values through the enacted pedagogies TLS uses can be challenging as teachers and students have the freedom to enact them in the ways they see most connect to their own style of teaching and learning.

There is an inherent tension that comes from this freedom as students and teachers alike attempt to continue the focus on acts required to not only fulfill curriculum standards, but to also build relationships based on trust, mutual understanding, and collaboration in a virtual setting. Although not all students spoke directly to this tension, Christopher's individual lived experience and point of view about physical vs virtual school below relates to the quotes listed and discussed above in the schools as community and relationship sections:

I mean this is virtual so it is hard to make new friends, but I think if we just went back to physical right now, I would make tons of friends. I haven't met any of the new sixth graders in person, except for older friends I knew back at my old school.

Marlene expressed a similar thought when she said, "In this virtual world, it's a bit different than we would normally operate. We create spaces for students and teachers to work together and collaborate through projects and dialogue online and offer multiple times that we can meet." Although the teachers made every attempt to involve students virtually in similar ways as they

would in a physical school, the rigidity of an online environment did not always allow for students to experience the same freedom to work in groups, share ideas, or recognize and build on the skills they were acquiring in terms of building community and working collaboratively in quite the same manner. Nevertheless, as Marlene mentioned above, the intention was there, regardless of impact.

Sara's thoughts support this line of thinking when she says:

I hope you did see I mean I think that's something that speaks to the school's philosophy is the, the collaboration that goes on between the teachers is, and I've never experienced anything like that before. ever.

They of course do feel isolated in the remoteness because really the only people they see are on their team.

Both experiential education and social justice as pedagogical processes hold relationship and community building as a high value. Although we have offered a series of examples of the attempt to enact these values in the daily interactions of students and teachers, there still tends to be some work to be done in terms of lived experiences. As some teachers worked to deepen their understanding of experiential education praxis, others seemed challenged with how to enact and embody these philosophies in TLS. Marjory speaks to her perspective of teachers who appeared to her not to believe in the efficacy of experiential education philosophy and practices.

You have a lot of teachers who...believe in the theoretical mission and philosophy of TLS, and [yet] when it comes to practicing it in a practical way and showing up for it, *they don't know how to do it, they're not committed to it, and they don't believe in it.* And let's say not all of us at TLS are that way but we got a lot of us at TLS who are that way.... we

seem to keep attracting those kinds of people. I'm frequently frustrated and perplexed that teachers' who join the teaching staff after being vetted have no desire or interest in collaborative teaching and teaming. [emphasis added]

Marjory later was more explicit when discussing teachers who seek out TLS but seem to not believe in its mission. Having been at the school since its inception, Marjory has worked with several different teachers. She sees a consistent theme of teachers who are attracted to the “buzzwords” of TLS but are unwilling or unable to put in the work to enact these philosophies. She wonders “how is it that we keep ending up with teachers who don't believe in experiential education?” Sara sees the challenges Marjory describes somewhat differently.

Sara speaks to teachers having various perspectives and interpretations which they bring to their teaching, when she says:

Even within the faculty, we have people with different levels of comfort, that's not really.... with it, um... We did a professional development with an organization [that focuses on] anti-racism education. And there was some tension that came out of that. It was around Columbus Day, right and Indigenous People I mean, and some conversations about why we were teaching certain things so that was, that was very interesting in that regard. And we're human, right? So just because you say that you're all about social justice everything doesn't mean that you're not bringing your own viewpoint to it. And that's going to cause those tensions, so I've seen that occurring amongst the adults, on occasion.

This quote highlights an example of a concept we observed in similar situations when other teachers expressed or demonstrated notable incongruences between their theory and practice. Although there is a general sense (although somewhat superficial) of understanding of experiential education and social justice education are, there does not seem to be a deep knowledge of what can be gained by students and teachers alike if each is seen as siloed from each other and the content material being taught in that particular moment.

Marjory provided another example of these incongruences. She was quick to proclaim how her educational practice aligned with TLS and shared how her graduate work and academic experience prepared her to be an advocate for experiential education, social justice education, and other progressive pedagogies. However, in our observations she consistently upheld traditional educational norms, reinforced power hierarchies, and removed opportunities for student choice and autonomy. Although Marjory was quick to critique other teachers, she failed to show her ability to be self-reflective and acknowledge her own shortcomings and opportunities for growth in her teaching practices. As a teacher in a leadership position, during observations we noticed times when she shut down conversations that she did not deem relevant for the moment and yet could have been a wonderful teachable moment that shed light on the values of the school. An example of this listed earlier in this document included comments from other teachers such as “I don’t accept sorries that aren’t real”, “if you are not willing to have your cameras on in ASL club, there is no reason for you to be there.” “That question isn’t related to math, so we are just going to ignore it.” The final example suggests that Marjory viewed math class as academic instructional time versus during the community part of the day and was unable to see the connection that learning moment had to experiential education and social justice education. This is one example of the siloed nature inherent in many TLS classrooms. There is

the experiential education or social justice education time that only occurs at specific instances versus utilizing the philosophies and teachable moments throughout the day, which are so vital to both social justice education and experiential education.

Based on the comments above from the small pool of participants, the difference in what the school professes to value versus the lack of awareness, acceptance and/or accountability of some of the teachers is an area of continued growth. We would be interested in future studies to examine the prevalence of this gap in other grade levels and houses in TLS to determine if this is more of a house issue based on the fact a majority of the teachers in the house were new or if this is a broader structural tension that is school wide. The strain that occurs due to a lack of connection might also affect other aspects of teaching and learning at the school including the ways in which experiential education philosophy and methodologies encourage teachers and students in building community and collaborative learning spaces.

Sharon mentioned the challenges associated not only with engaging students in a curriculum that is based on experiential education but also the challenges associated with the community building aspect of experiential education. She says, “how you take and run with that information as a team because we say we're going to do it as a school but *we're not a school right now*, we are several groups of teachers teaching groups of kids” (emphasis added). She furthers this comment by saying:

Community building has slowed down in the past 12 weeks, mainly because our team dynamic has not been the greatest, and so that doesn't allow us time to consider what is going to be great for the house, and that impacts community dynamics.

Sharon sees the lack of team dynamics as vital to a positive and collaborative school culture and recognizes the potential loss opportunities for connection and community building that the school, claims to find valuable.

Cynthia is the third of the teachers who had something to say about collaboration and utilizing an experiential education philosophy in a limited capacity. She noted:

One thing that has initially been challenging is the collaboration piece. Because I'm used to just doing things on my own and having to do it that way. And so, it was a little harder to communicate what I needed. Also, I find that it's hard when I have an idea. But then it's like the veteran teachers, they kind of already have an idea of how you know they've done things in the past, and you know it worked for them in the past but you know I have this great idea that could work right now in this moment, or based on like what I see from the students so that has been that has been that has caused a little bit of bickering but not really a lot of tension because, because we have such a great team. We know we're able to talk those things out. But yeah, so the one thing I really had to work on was, advocating for, you know, what I needed, what I wanted.

Cynthia's words serve as another example of recognizing that sometimes, speaking words are easier than the actions associated with those words. We noticed this tension between lived versus espoused values in curriculum, collaboration, and community and relationship building as we began to determine themes from the research. There were certainly instances where teachers and students spoke about and operationalized the values we have discussed and there were also instances we observed or heard examples of the issues raised by Marjory, Cynthia, and Sharon. .

We appreciate the sense of agency Cynthia suggests and hope that with more time and intentional focus on these tensions, TLS will be able to bridge the gaps noted by these three participants and enter a space that is less performative.

The performance of these values, philosophies, and pedagogies is of strong interest to us as researchers. In our work in the adventure-based learning field, we utilize some of AEE's standards for accreditation. AEE requires those seeking accreditation to have consistency in what the programs write, say, and do in terms of living the principles of practice advocated by AEE. If we were to apply similar processes to TLS, we would find some of the participants coming short in their ability to consistently demonstrate and enact what the community says and does in terms of fulfilling the praxis of experiential education and social justice philosophies and pedagogies. Although we recognize this year has been challenging with online learning and a global pandemic, these tensions have existed throughout our involvement with TLS. Some TLS board members, administrators, and faculty have been aware of how challenging it is to implement the philosophy of the school with fidelity from the beginning of the school.

Traditional Achievement Orientation

As mentioned earlier, TLS has existed in an interesting position since the inception of the school where it is actively trying to set itself apart from the existing educational system, yet it must remain firmly connected to that existing power structure in many ways. Although TLS's physical space is open with flexible seating and open classrooms, it still looks like a school. Although the teachers and school philosophy talk at length about the importance of co-created spaces and student empowerment, we have described above how those philosophies are or are not enacted in some classrooms throughout the 5/6 and 7/8 houses. In observations teachers were generally responsible for content delivery and were most vocal, while students generally listened

quietly and received content. While these are not necessarily negative or challenging features, they do provide a tension point when faced with the experiential and justice-oriented philosophy of TLS.

One of the more surprising aspects we found was the achievement-based orientation of TLS teachers. This was specifically prevalent in the 7th/8th house where teachers frequently brought up test scores or future struggles in high school when discussing student progress. As an example, during one observation, teachers were discussing the results of a recent math MAP test. Immediately when results came up, students began commenting in the chat. One student was evidently nervous and asked, “when r we gonna have those”. The teachers responded that they were really trying to make sure students were prepared for 9th grade. Later in the class, the teachers brought back a strong focus on grades and academic performance. One teacher implored students to try hard and get “the grades you want for yourself, that your teachers want, that your parents want, that your executive director wants for you.” This focus on grades and task completion was persistent throughout observations and interviews, especially with the 7th/8th team. As the 8th grade students prepare to leave TLS and enter a new educational environment, this focus may be a way to prepare them for what they might experience in high school. However, it seems like a substantial shift away from the philosophy and approach of the lower grades. In discussing academic preparation, Marjory mentioned how she was nervous about students’ ability to perform in high school: “I’m very concerned about the eighth graders because I learned that they missed a whole year of seventh grade math. When they were sixth graders, they were strong in math, right, so they could mitigate against their own deficits.” Sharon, the teaching assistant for the 7th/8th house, went on to discuss this from her perspective. She said “I was at the board meeting, you know, where they were like, our math scores are bad. So, I’ve been

very stressed about that aspect, but the kids are killing it in geometry.” The stress that Sharon feels likely trickles down to the students she teaches in afterschool math tutoring.

Again, an achievement focus is not negative; it is natural for TLS teachers and students to aspire to high scores and content mastery. As discussed earlier, charters are still held to state standards set by the NC DPI. In North Carolina charters are reauthorized every five years. TLS needs to consider this as their time for reauthorization approaches. In that process, charter schools are expected to show growth and content mastery. What was particularly interesting for us to observe was the focus on achievement based largely on standardized tests as opposed or in addition to other forms of formative evaluative techniques, especially those commonly used in experiential education. The focus on achievement and academic success was not heard as frequently in the 5th/6th house. In the 7th/8th house, it seemed to be tied to external perceptions of student progress (the Board of Directors, parents, standardized tests, etc.). As TLS prepares to graduate its first class of 8th grade students, there could be underlying stress about how high schools in the community will judge TLS graduates. All these factors combine to make the 7th/8th teacher team much more focused on tasks, test scores, and content mastery. Cynthia touched on the challenges of reverting to traditional means of schooling when she said, “well yes we are teaching math it's still kind of like this curriculum like it's very structured the same, it feels a lot like traditional school.”

Throughout this section, we have worked to illustrate and examine the tensions and gaps present in the enacted pedagogies of TLS teachers. Some of the tensions and gaps we discussed in this chapter may be attributable largely to three challenges including the pandemic, espoused versus lived values and ways of teaching, and learning and concerns of traditional achievement orientation.

It is important for us to recognize the impact that the pandemic had on TLS teachers and students this year. Teaching and learning during a period of global disruption will undoubtedly challenge existing practices and complicate even the best of intentions. It is also essential for us to acknowledge tensions caused by those teachers doing what they recognize and define as experiential education in this unique context and the rub of those who did not define and enact experiential education practices in similar ways. We observed teachers who were able to live the philosophies and values of TLS in deeper and more poignant ways while others struggled to connect the ‘saying’ of those philosophies with the ‘doing’ of them in ways that were authentic versus performative. Finally, the consideration of traditional achievement orientations was somewhat surprising to both of us. Although we understand the concern for the need to know the code and follow the steps necessary to move students into the next phases of their educational journeys, the specific focus on grades in the 7/8 house was a challenge we did not anticipate.

CHAPTER VI: EXTEND

‘Extend,’ for us, speaks to the potential and future-focused nature of this work. In Connect, we looked at past experiences and what TLS espouses to do and is doing. In ‘Challenge,’ we examined the tension points as we delved deeper into the implementation difficulties of the school’s stated philosophy, including what is said, written, and enacted (or not). This tension is caused in no small part by the pandemic and subsequent disruption of the educational system, but it is also inherent in trying to create a new educational model within the existing framework of power.

Re-Imaging Teaching and Learning

In Extend, we enter into musings on the imaginative and transformative potential of experiential education, social justice, and critical pedagogy into what we are calling ‘critical experiential education.’ Extend seeks to take our data and themes and put them in conversation with the broader world of education. TLS seeks to be a distinct and unique school, providing students with opportunities they could not get elsewhere. However, the school exists within all the trappings of ‘traditional’ education: hierarchical power, grades, formal assessments, etc. noted in chapter 3, as public charter, TLS is exempt from some state standards and requirements but is still held accountable for state standards around operations, outcomes, and performance. These requirements can lead to a wicked problem: can the philosophies of a school like TLS exist within the standards and expectations of a state regulator? Can TLS be a model for transformative education? What would it look like for TLS’s model to be implemented in other schools?

Throughout this section, we will raise questions and probe into new territory as we examine the future of a new frame of critical experiential education. Some of these questions

came from the words of our participants, others came from our observations and data analysis and still others came through our analysis of the tension between the espoused and lived values at TLS. Experiential education as a philosophy is always future-oriented and encourages participants to move towards action. The themes in this chapter ask us to consider the ways in which experiential education might be enacted with a more critical lens. The questions we raised above in addition to ideas of future visioning calls us to consider Freire's idea of critical hope and means that we must challenge the status quo so that substantive and lasting change to occur. The themes below (traditional school and teacher preparation, teacher/peer mentorship, operationalizing experiential education, operationalizing social justice education, and facilitative education) invite educators to engage in grappling with what they need to know and understand to authentically enact teaching and learning in this non-traditional context.

'Traditional' School and Teacher Preparation

A theme we heard frequently from students and teachers alike was how different TLS is from 'traditional' schools. While this is not surprising, given TLS's desire to set itself apart as a different educational environment, it can provide opportunities for us to explore how other schools can take lessons from TLS. More importantly, it can provide a window through which to view teacher preparation. To transform educational spaces, teacher preparation and training programs must also be changed.

Marjory spoke at length about the distinctions between her experience teaching at a traditional school as compared to TLS. In her previous schools, Marjory expressed a lack of connection and a desire to "find a critical community" that could support her. Bettez (2011) operationalizes critical communities as spaces for participants to move freely, acknowledge power and identity, and support each other through critical questioning. The development of

these communities takes, as we have discussed previously, intentional steps towards vulnerability and risk. In an educational setting, Bettez encourages critical community building to encourage social responsibility between teachers and students. She envisions a “web of connections between the various students, as well as strands from students to teachers” (Bettez, 2011, p. 7). She echoes Renner’s (2009) point that this work towards building critical communities in education must begin in teacher preparation programs and in schools of education. For Marjory, the critical community she sought was one that welcomed and valued her perspective as a Black woman. Since she had felt excluded and ignored in previous schools based on her identity, she sought a critical community which could provide her with a group of individuals who recognized power and how to best navigate oppressive structures. Marjory continued to search for this community and shared with us that she felt supported by an outside research seminar. She recognized the value of critical communities, and she believes this is important to build with for and with students. Every critical community will look and operate differently based on the needs of those within it. Teachers can enact critical communities in their schools and classrooms using a variety of methods possibly including critical experiential education.

Critical experiential education centers around the effective use of critical communities. In our experience at TLS, teachers consistently displayed an ability to articulate important topics and buzzwords within social justice education and experiential education. However, they struggled to enact these topics in significant and meaningful ways. Occasionally, however, teachers shared examples from other experiences they had that helped to highlight the ways in which critical experiential education could be enacted at TLS. Marjory shared one such story when talking about a critical community while teaching at a public high school. She took on the

role of mentoring students to co-create a Black student organization. Through conversations with those students, she created a community where they felt comfortable talking about the challenges of the school environment. As Marjory explains, “they confided in me that they saw, they called their in-school suspension program, the BIP, which you know theoretically stands for behavioral improvement program. They called it Blacks in Prison”. Much has been written about the disproportionate levels of discipline leveled at Black students, especially boys, in public schools (e.g., Bell, 2020; Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2017; Losen et al., 2015; Noguera, 2003; Wallace et al., 2008). That Marjory was able to foster a space where her students felt comfortable expressing their frustrations about the school’s discipline to a member of the school faculty speaks to the power of critical communities within education. Marjory’s students were aware of her positional power over them and yet still felt comfortable navigating that power dynamic to express their thoughts. Although this experience was not at TLS, Marjory shared it as an example of the ways that she wished TLS could develop and implement critical communities. Interestingly she did not mention starting this herself, even after sharing the powerful experience she had at a previous school. We feel this is another example of the inconsistencies within her own pedagogical practice. Marjory’s students participated in a change of power whereby they were able to navigate the power dynamic between them and Marjory to further their conversations about school discipline policies.

Developing critical communities in education shifts the relationship between teacher and student. Rather than relying on a power-based hierarchical structure, teachers and students can engage as co-creators of knowledge and experience. This shifting encourages and models vulnerability and critical question-posing to find meaning. A shared sense of identity between teacher and student certainly establishes a sense of common experience and connection.

However, critical communities are effective even across differences in identity, background, or context. Establishing a critical community acknowledges, values, and appreciates those differences and views them as crucial to the development of a mutually beneficial relationship. These relationships are porously bordered, have no script, and members may or may not remain with the community for a significant period of time, similar to Marjory's students. Marjory found tensions with hard lines of demarcation in teaching and learning in other situations including formalized curriculum.

Teachers at TLS expressed frustration with the routine and pre-established curriculum they taught at more traditional schools. As curriculum becomes more scripted, teachers can lose autonomy and flexibility in their efforts to create learning moments that are child-centered, context-specific, and adaptive. Marjory explicitly articulated this challenge when she was teaching science at a public high school. She was asked by her school administration to alter her teaching style and focus more on the curriculum the other faculty were using. While Marjory had developed a curriculum that was effective for her students, the administration instead developed a "scripted biology workbook" that they utilized, "rather than allowing teachers to teach with autonomy." Cynthia shared a similar experience and discussed how she felt at a previous school, especially as compared to TLS:

And I even got in trouble [at my previous school] because I wasn't following a certain specific lesson, but I had created something that I felt was best for the students. At TLS, I feel like I really have that ability to run an idea by my teammates and they're on board. [My team is] able to collaborate or add in, you know, [and see if] other teammates have ideas. So yeah, those are some of the things that have drawn me to TLS.

Providing teachers with flexibility and autonomy on curricular implementation can lead to more engaging and interactive lessons. Teachers, especially those we interviewed, sought to develop curriculum that was student-centered and personal, rather than utilizing a boxed curriculum that might have little relevance to their students. Cynthia and Marjory help to showcase the importance of allowing teachers the ability to break out of the ‘traditional’ mold. As methodologies, experiential education and social justice education provides inherent flexibility to teachers. TLS embraces the pedagogical flexibility and the inherent flexibility that charter schools are given to provide teachers the opportunities to develop innovative lesson plans and assignments. Using the world as a classroom and developing a child-centered curriculum as TLS does requires a shift away from scripted curriculum and towards learning that is contextualized and relevant to students, while still addressing curricular standards. Embodying child-centered learning means that teachers get to know their students in ways that make it more effective to teach, as they know about student interests, home language, or culture. They are then able to select curriculum pieces that reflects a student’s identity. As Cynthia points out, teachers generally operate with the best interests of their students at heart. Allowing them flexibility in the curriculum increases the potential for student engagement and mastery of content.

As a current undergraduate student finishing her teacher preparation program, Laurie spoke extensively about the challenges she has faced as a pre-service teacher. She has been interning at TLS for this academic year and has been able to see a different side of education than in her previous internship sites. She compared her experience to those of her cohort members, saying that many of her peers were:

extremely frustrated, even the people in my cohort who are...who are more ‘by the book’ with teaching, who prefer being more ‘by the book’, even

they are frustrated with how they are being forced to teach, and, and what they are and aren't allowed to talk about with students and the materials that are given to students. It's been a very hard experience on them.

Laurie's comments point to a larger issue with the training that pre-service teachers receive. While some schools of education at colleges or universities discuss progressive education or ways to incorporate social justice into the curriculum, Laurie's comments show that it can be challenging for pre-service teachers to implement them. Laurie shared that she had some slight exposure to progressive pedagogies in her teacher preparation program but was generally unfamiliar with how to implement them prior to interning at TLS.

Marjory highlights this dissonance by saying “teacher education programs generally have these really smart people who publish all these great articles and books about what you should do in practice. And then their students don't do it right. They [teacher education faculty] believe in silo teaching and thinking.” Marjory's comments also point out the structural and systemic issues at play—individual faculty may be progressive, but they exist in a system that is largely traditional. As pre-service teachers are learning in these largely traditional environments, their student teaching is then an opportunity to either reinforce or challenge that idea of traditional teaching and learning. While in their student teaching placement, pre-service teachers follow the philosophy and guidelines set by their cooperating teachers. For Laurie, her experience working with her cooperating teacher at TLS allowed her to rethink what education could be for students and teachers alike. Laurie's undergraduate classes emphasized a very teacher-centric model of education. Her time at TLS exposed her to educational philosophies that rethink the teacher-student relationship and engage students as active participants in their own educational journey.

Introducing pre-service teachers to new forms of teaching and learning begins early in their undergraduate journey. Laurie told us about one of the classes that helped her realize she wanted to be a teacher. In this class, she was introduced to a new way of thinking about history and the world around her. This experience helped her realize that she wanted to provide this realization for students. As she says,

I think what is going to make me the teacher that I ultimately want to become was social studies, our social studies methods course that we took was huge into that area of teaching. [We learned] what actually happened, instead of what white people want everybody to know. And that was really cool, and teaching that in a way that is not just, 'here's the textbook'. It's like using artifacts from history like taking pictures and analyzing them and looking deeper into them and then saying like, 'why is it this way?' Like whose story is being told here whose story isn't being told, why is that. So that was really cool. But I would say the majority of my classes weren't like that.

Laurie recognized that her experience as an undergraduate teacher education major did not fully prepare her to teach in an environment like TLS. While she was able to adapt, many others would likely struggle with the dissonance between what they learned as a teacher education student and what they are seeing as a student teacher. However, by introducing her to 'what really happened' (as Laurie says) and to other forms of teaching, Laurie was able to combine both her undergraduate student experience with her student teaching to effectively prepare her to enter her own classroom. As we will discuss, she was successful in this largely because of the mentorship she experienced from her clinical teacher.

Teacher/Peer Mentorship

Central to the development of both beginning and experienced teachers is the ability to be guided and mentored by their peers. Peer mentorship has long been shown to be important for the ongoing professional development of teachers at all levels of experience and provides teachers with opportunities to examine new pedagogical techniques and classroom management strategies (Chitpin, 2010; Heider, 2005; Rhodes and Beneicke, 2002; Stillwell, 2009). Through formal or informal mentorship programs, teachers can interact with colleagues, observe their classrooms, and share elements of good practice.

For teachers at TLS, mentorship was important both to reinforce the progressive pedagogies of the school and to help teachers navigate their identities in the school. Cynthia discussed the importance of mentorship in helping her realize that TLS was an option for her in the first place. She talked about the importance of relationships and mentorship from her own teachers while she was in school, which helped her realize that education was a career field of interest:

I come from [a small county] which is a very rural and impoverished county and I think about the educators who really pushed me to succeed and to take initiative to, you know, towards my own education and it ended up leading me to get like a full-ride scholarship so I kind of want to give back in a way that was given back to me.

Other teachers at TLS spoke about the importance of mentorship within the school. Laurie, the student-teacher, discussed the mentorship she felt from her clinical teacher, Marlene. As mentioned previously, Laurie recognized the student teaching experience she was getting at TLS was different from other members of her cohort. She also recognized that her interactions

with Marlene were likely different from other clinical teachers. During one observation, Laurie was teaching a lesson and frequently paused to ask Marlene for feedback or suggestions on how to best wrap up a piece of content. At the end of the observation, we reached out to them both to ask about this interaction. We were curious to know if that was an intentionally modeled reflective moment, as it was an excellent opportunity for the students to observe the experiential learning cycle in action. Both Laurie and Marlene acknowledged that modeling was an important part of their process. However, both also spoke about the importance of the mentoring relationship that a student-teacher and clinical teacher should have. Marlene described that interaction as indicative of the mentoring relationship she has with Laurie:

Laurie does that often--I establish that expectation early on with my students and anyone that I am coaching that asking for help when we need it helps us grow. While that is something I have always encouraged my mentees to do, it isn't often something that is done with the same grace and willingness as Laurie is able to use it.

While mentorship is crucially important for students and beginning teachers, it is also a vital way for experienced teachers to learn, grow, and develop. A mentoring relationship requires vulnerability, trust, and the 'grace and willingness' that Laurie demonstrated in her interactions with Marlene. As a school built around those foundations, TLS is uniquely positioned to encourage teachers to foster and utilize mentorship throughout the school. Although the challenges of virtual education this year make establishing relationships of any kind more difficult, we have both seen evidence of the mentorship that exists when TLS teachers are in their building and working alongside each other. Generally, teachers in the same house collaborate frequently on assignments, lesson plans, and student development. During this

collaboration, teachers can learn from each other and incorporate new ideas into their teaching. Mentorship can be task-oriented (focusing on a specific lesson plan, for example), and it can also extend to conversations around identity, purpose, and passion.

Of course, any relationship built on vulnerability, trust, and authenticity has the potential for challenge and tension. Cynthia articulated some of the difficulties with a mentoring relationship while discussing how it can be challenging for her to make her ideas heard within her team.

Okay, so beginning teachers get a mentor. And I think for me, I would prefer to have known a little bit about potential mentors and then chosen one. But instead, one was chosen for me. And they're a colleague, so I work with them every day and that kind of hinders me from sometimes saying exactly what I need, or saying what's wrong, or, you know, if there's a problem, or if I'm finding any challenges because this is somebody that I work with. And actually, because of that, or at least one of the reasons I am going to be splitting off and doing my own homeroom, so I'll be running morning leading integrative studies, and I think that is a piece that I've missed, is that time alone with my classroom really gets to know them one on one. Yeah, and I feel like I kind of took a backseat.

Cynthia appreciated having a mentor to help guide her, but she acknowledged the challenges that come when a mentor relationship is also a collegial relationship. Rather than being able to choose a mentor that best fit her needs, identity, and interests, Cynthia was assigned an experienced teacher on her same house team. As a beginning teacher and as someone new to TLS, Cynthia was navigating complicated waters with overlapping relationships. For her,

the relationship she has with this person as a colleague outweighed the potential benefits she could gain from a mentoring relationship as she was not able to say exactly what she needed. In a school like TLS, where teachers work so closely on curriculum and planning, it seems logical to provide beginning teachers with mentors on their house teams. However, Cynthia's experience suggests that teachers might gain more from a mentor with whom they are not working closely.

In North Carolina, local educational agencies and charter schools follow a set process to ensure that beginning teachers have adequate support and mentorship. As part of this, the state Department of Public Instruction has an established mentor training curriculum designed to support teachers in the first five years of their career. Beginning teachers are assigned a mentor to help them navigate their school and district as well as the intricacies of their teaching responsibilities. Appendix H provides the North Carolina DPI mentor standards. At TLS, mentors are assigned to each beginning teacher. Generally, attempts are made to ensure that mentors are not from the teacher's house. However, the number of new teachers sometimes outnumber the number of experienced teachers. As Cynthia pointed out earlier, having a mentoring relationship with a close colleague in the same house can be difficult. As an example, NC DPI's mentor curriculum says that mentor teachers should help beginning teachers reflect on their practice through observing in their classrooms and helping establish a culture of self-reflection within the beginning teacher. This reflection can lead to tension when mentor and beginning teachers conceptualize and enact philosophies differently. As we examined earlier in Chapter 4, some teachers in the middle school houses struggled to critically reflect on their own practice in relation to the espoused values of TLS. This lack of self-awareness, especially in a mentor teacher, can lead to some of the difficulties and frustrations Cynthia articulated. The

mentorship process is further complicated when a difference in identities makes establishing the trust and vulnerability necessary to have effective mentoring conversations difficult.

Operationalizing Experiential Education

Experiential education is one of TLS' foundational principles and is a philosophy that undergirds much of the curriculum development at the school. However, as we discussed in Challenge, experiential education is operationalized in different ways at TLS, with varying degrees of effectiveness within the middle school houses we studied. In this section, we will highlight some of the ways that experiential education is utilized at TLS and ways that critical experiential education could be emphasized.

Experiential education is a broad and varied philosophy, with many different pedagogical forms. It can be challenging to find a general framework for the entire field. The Association for Experiential Education's (AEE) Principles of Practice offers a series of suggestions for ways to incorporate experiential education in a variety of contexts. The principles are included in Appendix F.

As AEE says, these principles are listed in no particular order and are meant to be applicable across fields like service-learning, global engagement, adventure-based learning, and other forms of experiential education. Importantly, the principles provide a common language and a foundation for operationalizing experiential education. Although the terms 'learner' and 'educator' are used here, AEE recognizes that these are not formal terms and that anyone can be a learner or an educator. De-centering knowledge production away from a formal educator/teacher is an important part of experiential education and the words used to describe the field reinforce that goal.

At TLS, teachers are introduced to these principles during professional development sessions and are provided resources to help implement them into their curriculum planning. In many ways, experiential education requires a shift in teaching philosophy, rather than just an adjustment in lesson planning or assignments. Teachers need to be comfortable with a democratized learning process, want to empower students to be active participants in their own learning, and recognize the value in shifting the power relationships in the classroom in order to fully harness the power of experiential education. Marjory articulated her ideals about this philosophy by describing how she sees herself interacting with her students.

I just enjoy learning from young people. Just seeing that all beings have value, seeing that there's humanity in everyone, and that everyone can be transformed, if they have the opportunity to learn and grow through their experiences. That's a deeply personal teaching topic for me.

This 'deeply personal' topic illustrates how Marjory aims to see her students as producers of knowledge, rather than as passive recipients of the information. By seeking to learn from her students, Marjory is highlighting Dewey's child-centered learning ideal and experiential education's goal to de-center the teacher as the head or leader of the classroom. Marjory also spoke to other important aspects of experiential education, including the importance of reflection and the potential for future transformation. As we've discussed previously, Marjory is able to articulate these values and beliefs and yet does not enact them in clear and consistent ways in her classroom.

A significant part of experiential education is the ability for learners to take initiative and enact choice in their learning. Students should have the opportunity to choose their level of engagement and, potentially, even what content they learn. Choice allows students to feel

engaged and empowered in their learning. Providing students with choice does not mean that teachers lose control of the classroom. The TLS teachers we observed were able to facilitate student choice in a well-managed and authentic way. Christopher spoke to how important choice was for him by saying “they gave us more choice [than what he experienced at a previous school]. And what we wanted to do, as class.” To Christopher, choice was a significant experience at TLS. Other students shared examples of the autonomy and responsibility they felt at TLS, but Christopher articulated it most clearly. Providing students with choice fosters a democratic environment and the opportunity to develop life-long skills that will carry forward after school. All too often, students are not provided with opportunities throughout their schooling journey to develop and practice skills around making effective choices. Experiential education offers an opportunity for teachers and students alike to infuse real, meaningful, and authentic choice in education. As with many of the elements of progressive pedagogies, implementation depends on the commitment of the school leadership. Sara, the executive director, commented on her experience with student choice. She spoke to an experience at a previous school that enabled her to shift her thinking around involving student voice and choice. Through an introduction to experiential education, Sara shifted her thinking so that “the students, they had a voice, they were empowered, they got to make choices about certain things that would impact their time in the building.” When asked to describe her teaching and leadership philosophy, Sara articulated how crucial student choice is to her:

I feel that experiential education fully aligns with my philosophy that children learn best when they get to be actually part of the process, where they are not expected to regurgitate something back. When they get to possibly make choices in how they approach their subject matter, when

they have a say in what the final product will be....that fully aligns with my philosophy.

This highlights the importance of leadership at the school level. In order to fully operationalize and harness the value of experiential education, teachers need to be supported by the school leadership. Shifting perspective, de-centering knowledge, and providing student choice can be seen as a subversive act or as threatening the authority of the teacher and can be challenging for teachers to enact in an individual classroom. Sara's leadership at TLS, along with the foundational theories of the school, provides teachers with administrative leadership and modeling around these values.

Central to experiential education is the need to build and reflect on previous experiences in order to inform future action. Operationalizing reflection occurs in many ways throughout education, as the curriculum is sequenced in ways that build on previous knowledge. Through observations, we noticed that the 5th/6th-grade house made this language common among their students. During class, teachers would frequently ask students if anyone wanted to "build on" to a previous answer and students had a corresponding hand motion they could do on the Zoom call to show that they had something to say. Building on an answer or on previous experiences helps to model the importance of reflection and the need to draw on past knowledge in order to inform future action. Teachers often commented on the importance of reflection for them and their students. Cynthia shared her experience and process with reflection in her own journey.

I think for me, it is all about the experience, like my experiences in school really shaped, you know, how I think and feel about learning. And I feel like if we can create, you know, these engaging experiences for the students, then they can also, you know, use their knowledge to kind of

build on and, you know, create their own learning space, if that makes sense.

As with other elements of experiential education, incorporating reflection authentically and holistically in a classroom can be challenging. We observed teachers asking students to reflect on content knowledge from previous experiences, but not expanding that reflective moment to other classes and subject matter. The reflections we observed were time-bound, limited, and specific to the content being discussed. For example, teachers would ask “Can you reflect about when we talked about this in math last week?” They often failed, however, to broaden reflection outside of the boundaries of academic disciplines. This is another example we observed of teachers knowing the words to say but not having the knowledge to fully enact them. Building a culture of reflection encourages a constant process of experience, reflection, and action. In our observations, we saw teachers paying cursory attention to the reflective process and, therefore, students were rarely able to articulate the importance of reflection (especially critical reflection) on their future lives. As we explore the development of critical experiential education, critical reflection becomes a useful and necessary tool. Fields like service-learning and global engagement have begun to explore critical reflection as a method to reflect on the experience that is informed by identity, culture, and context (Molee, Henry, Sessa, and McKinney-Prupis, 2011; Sanders, van Oss, McGeary, 2015; Seaman and Rheingold, 2013). Owen (2016) cites Jacoby when defining critical reflection as a “process of analyzing, reconsidering, and questioning one’s experiences within a broad context of issues and content knowledge” (Owen, 2016, p. 38). Critical reflection should be facilitated in a continuous, contextual, and interconnected manner to help students process experiences. Incorporating critical reflection into formal educational spaces like TLS provides teachers and students alike

opportunities to process more deeply and to understand how these experiences are intertwined with their identities and contexts. Other scholars have also explored various ways in which reflection can happen: reflective writing, multi-modal reflection, photovoice, etc. (e.g., Bennion, et. al., 2019; Heinrich and Green, 2020; Hubbs and Brand, 2005; Loeffler, 2005). While we observed reflection happening at TLS, we believe teachers can do more to intentionally and thoroughly integrate a culture of reflective practice across the middle school houses.

Reflecting deeply on an experience includes processing moments of discomfort. Experiential education recognizes that learning occurs during moments of discomfort--also referred to as the 'growth edge' or uncomfortableness. The pedagogical value of discomfort means that educators sometimes intentionally push students past their perceived comfort zone. These moments often involve some aspect of risk. Social, emotional, or physical risks are all important parts of experiential education. Risk enables a somatic and embodied experience with education, where students and teachers can experience consequences. Risky experiences are often the most memorable and impactful for students. Sharon shared a conversation with students where she asked them to reflect on a moment that stands out in the past year. They described a class with another teacher where they (in Sharon's words) were "setting fires in the parking lot". Sharon wasn't sure what the intended lesson was but was struck by how vividly the students remembered this class. In many schools, this lesson could be viewed as too dangerous and might not be allowed. However, TLS recognizes that well-managed risk is an important part of education. Risk also appears in many different forms. For some students, being asked to list their pronouns on their Zoom name may be uncomfortable or risky. For others, going on a field trip downtown to the public library may expose them to risks. As with choice, risks need to be appropriately sequenced, introduced and managed in order to reap the pedagogical value. The

AEE principles point out that risks are often valuable because the outcome is uncertain. Spontaneous and uncertain moments for learning can be risky for teachers to fully seize, as it requires flexibility and adaptability not often present with a scripted curriculum. However, students can feel the importance of these authentic moments and, often, they result in powerful learning.

Fully operationalizing experiential education in a formal education setting is challenging and multi-layered, even in an environment like TLS that is founded on the aims of experiential education. As we shift towards a frame of critical experiential education, we draw on our experience at TLS to critique dominant narratives around power and hierarchy in education. De-centering knowledge from the teacher, shifting the relationship between teacher and student, and encouraging a democratic environment in a classroom can be difficult for a single teacher to enact—although we certainly saw examples of TLS teachers making strides towards these goals. To illustrate, we refer back to the 5th/6th house morning meeting we discussed in the ‘Connect’ section. Teachers invited students to co-create that morning meeting through inventive Zoom names, individualized greetings to each student, an emphasis on names, and encouraging their own unique social presence. While this example might seem minor, it showcases the ways that teachers can implement experiential and democratic education through small pedagogical shifts.

Providing teachers interested in this philosophy with a supportive school environment and leadership enables the systemic culture change necessary to enact experiential education. While many schools are not established with experiential education as a foundational philosophy, they can implement it by providing students with opportunities for meaningful choice, developing an authentic culture of reflection, and recognizing the value of well-managed risks in an educational environment.

Operationalizing Social Justice Education

Another of TLS's foundational philosophies is social justice education. Like experiential education, social justice education is enacted in different ways and is dependent on the culture of the school and classroom. TLS is different from many schools in that it intentionally and transparently discusses social justice education. Also, like experiential education, it can be difficult to provide a universal framework or guidebook for how to enact social justice education. Social justice education is meant to be an experiential and embodied set of practices. One of the reasons why we were attracted to TLS as a research site is how the school works to articulate and embody social justice education in their marketing materials and throughout the curriculum. Through engaging with social justice education, students can “develop awareness, knowledge, and processes to examine issues of justice/injustice in their personal lives, communities, institutions, and broader society” (Bell, 2016, p. 4). A significant focus of social justice education at TLS is the need to pair analysis with action and the need to inspire future change. Adams (2016) emphasizes the importance of pedagogical choices that social justice educators make so that “*what* participants are learning and *how* they are learning are congruent” (p. 27, emphasis in original).

Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) is a US-based organization that provides training and resources for K-12 teachers looking to infuse social justice into their classrooms. Part of these resources is the Social Justice Standards (see Appendix G) which TLS uses in their curriculum. At TLS, the Standards are a foundational part of the curriculum and a cornerstone on which the school is built. These standards provide age-appropriate, sequenced curriculum ideas for teachers to infuse conversations around identity, justice, or diversity into the K-12 curriculum. “Teachers can use them to guide curriculum development and administrators

can use them to make schools more just, equitable, and safe” (Learning for Justice, 2018). Social justice education is an interdisciplinary framework, and the standards address curricular aspects of diversity, identity, justice, and equity across all academic areas. The 20 anchor standards are explored further and broken out into grade-level outcomes and scenarios. These Standards provide educators of all types with a resource to infuse social justice education in their classrooms in an effective and authentic way.

Social justice is operationalized in a variety of ways at TLS. Much like experiential education, teachers are provided with initial and ongoing training on social justice education and resources to use as they build out lesson plans and assignments. Since it is perhaps easier to visualize how social justice education ties into more formal educational subjects, we found teachers were more easily able to explain and identify ways that social justice aligned with their teaching style. Teachers and students alike shared definitions and examples of the ways that social justice was enacted at TLS and the impact on them. Marjory articulated this well by saying “we don't believe in being an ally, we taught them that we believe in being a co-conspirator or an accomplice; to show them differentials of agency and movement, and motion. [How to] be in the world to really be about justice.” This shift in language from allyship to co-conspirator is indicative of Marjory’s deep understanding of social justice and how power operates in the world. She is seeking to inspire students to be change agents, who can identify issues in the world, and who want to ‘be about justice’ throughout their lives. This is a higher-level conceptualization of social justice that is appropriate for 7th and 8th-grade students. Marjory also shared a curriculum series about Afrofuturism that the 7th/8th house had been exploring all year. This further illustrates how deeply embedded social justice is in Marjory’s teaching style. As a contextualized and deeply personal pedagogy, social justice education depends on the identity,

culture, and context of the community in which it is used. Marjory is one of a team of four 7th/8th house teachers, all of whom are Black women. A significant portion of their students are Black. For the teachers, Afrofuturism was both a way to center the identity of them and their students and a way to integrate social justice education more thoroughly throughout the curriculum. These two examples help to showcase the versatility of the Social Justice Standards. Although the Standards are divided into four sections, they cannot exist in a vacuum and are most effective when they interplay and intertwine. Marjory and the 7th/8th house teachers are asking students to think deeply about their identity while putting that into a broader context and ultimately motivating them towards future action.

Teachers identified pedagogical shifts they utilized to bring social justice education more fully into their classroom. Marjory mentioned how the 7th/8th house had discussed with students “how they can choose to be a person who calls in, right or a person who calls out with love. And so we shifted their thinking to calling-in culture versus call-out culture.” This shift is impactful for students and models life-long skills for them. Sharon, the teaching assistant on the 7th/8th house team, recognized what social justice looks like for her. As the one White woman on a team of Black women, Sharon finds herself in positions where she is asked to speak for others on her team (students or teachers). As someone who holds dominant identities in a space with others who do not, Sharon must navigate how and when she is able to use her voice to advocate for others. As she says, “I want to always make sure that others have their own voice but also are not consistently doing all the work.” She shares a deep awareness of the need to not overburden communities who have been minoritized, due to an assemblage of identity, by asking them to explain their experience constantly.

Cynthia furthered the discussion on how social justice is infused by explaining the ways it shows up in her lesson planning. “Social justice is literally a part of every day, every lesson we're incorporating it in some way. I just didn't always get that, you know, from prescriptive lessons that I was required to teach or even the school culture.” As Cynthia points out, infusing social justice into education requires a shift in school culture, curriculum development, and lesson planning. Individual teachers utilize a multitude of resources to integrate social justice into their classrooms. However, systemic change takes leadership and engagement from both students and teachers. As we've discussed previously, TLS provides students with different forms of assessment and grading. Melanie, a 7th-grade student, explains how her thinking around social justice had changed since being at TLS:

First of all I don't... I don't think I knew what social justice was when I came [to TLS], I mean I was only like nine, but I don't think I knew. So I learned a lot about that and like, and we actually got, I don't know if they still did this but I remember getting like, we get like in our report card at TLS, we get like graded on social justice instead of just like in math, you get an 'A'. And, they also do like sections, it's like in this area you get that grade in this area of math, you get this grade. That was different from other schools because it was just like a general like grade, yeah.

This structural incorporation of social justice into all aspects of the school, including grading, is one of the many things that make TLS a unique educational environment. Grayson discussed one of the assignments that stood out to him in thinking about ways social justice appears in the curriculum. For this assignment, students were asked to investigate and explore the history of the city that TLS is in. As Grayson says,

Yeah, last year, um, in third and fourth grade, we have this [history] project where we chose a historic thing about [the downtown area], then we actually went out and saw those kinds of things like we went on a big scavenger hunt kind of thing of a walk and got to see all of those things so we learn about those things and then we researched them, and then ended up showing that research in a project of our choice, like some people did stop motion videos, some people did comic books. People just chose something that they...that they really enjoyed, and then made it into... made that project into what they enjoy doing.

Designing assignments with a place-based component helps students to connect how curricular learning can interact with culture, context, and history. In the assignment Grayson discusses, the teachers were able to incorporate elements of embodied learning, place-based learning, experiential education, and social justice education into a project that was memorable for the students. When students are able to explore topics related to their local communities or identities, they are likely to be more engaged in the learning process. As seen with the Social Justice Standards, these seemingly disparate pedagogical methods are easily able to be connected. Incorporating experiential education and social justice education, for example, provides learning that is contextualized, embodied, authentic, and connected to a student's past experience. Cynthia spoke about the connection between these two fields when she said that she hoped TLS could provide an environment that centered the identities and experiences of every member:

[I hope we can] use experiential education to really change the mindset of those students who maybe already have a negative mindset about school,

or those minority students who already kind of feel marginalized. How can we encourage them to participate more and to feel more part of the learning environment?

Incorporating any progressive pedagogy invites opportunities for dissent, frustration, and challenge. Adding a social justice lens onto a curriculum asks students, teachers, and parents to think more deeply about their identities and how they interact with the world. Teachers and leaders at TLS identified parent/family involvement as a challenge to more fully integrating social justice and other progressive pedagogies. Even though social justice is prominently listed as a foundational principle of the school, some parents and families seemed to be less enthusiastic about how it was used in the curriculum. Sharon talked about her frustration with parents that espoused a desire to have their kids at TLS but then balked at the social justice content:

And so there are times that I worry that the social justice aspect is almost going to be disregarded to some parents and some students and some people that just don't get it. And they come to the school looking for something that they don't find and then leave. I hate the idea that those parents and those students are going to go away and be like "they were hacks, they were just worried about social justice and didn't care about math, didn't care about all the other things", because that's not it at all.

The feeling that parents would view social justice as separate from the 'actual' content of the school was shared by other teachers. As with experiential education, social justice education can be perceived to be a distraction from the formal curriculum, rather than an important addition to it. Sara echoed this feeling by detailing conversations she has had with her parents. As the

Executive Director, Sara frequently interacts with parents who have questions or concerns about TLS.

I've struggled with some of the dealings I have had with some parents expressing concerns over the subject matter. Like “why are we discussing Black Lives Matter” and “it's been going on too long”, like, why are we still talking about it like it was just very interesting to me. And it made me realize that a lot of people are selective in their social justice right so it's okay for you to teach my child about this, but it's not okay for you to teach my child about this. So, I've struggled with ways to better educate our new families as they come in. This is what you are signing up for here: your child is going to hear about different kinds of families, your child is going to hear about Black Lives Matter, *your child is going to hear about all of these things.* [emphasis added]

Incorporating social justice education into a classroom or school encourages students and teachers to be vulnerable and embrace the discomfort of challenging conversations. Learning about social justice can challenge an individual's perception. During observations, we noticed an interaction in the 7th/8th house that centered on the pronouns a student shared. The 7th/8th house teachers began every trimester with asking students to share their name and pronouns (unlike the 5th/6th team who asked students to list them on their Zoom name daily). One student shared that they used hy/hym pronouns. About 20 minutes later, another student put a question in the chat asking what 'hy' means and why the student chose to identify that way. In a conversation afterwards, Sharon spoke about how this example illustrated her philosophy around social justice education. For her, both sides of this were evidence of the impact of social justice education.

That students feel comfortable using pronouns that are authentic to them and also asking questions to better understand identity was, to Sharon, a sign that social justice education was effective in the 7th/8th house. She goes on to explain:

We're not always gonna have a Diana, but we're always gonna have someone who's not sure who they are. We have Diana, who is a currently transitioning student. And so, Diana's pronouns have changed this year. And that's wild for some of these kids, it really is even the ones who swear they understand it. I mean, myself included, it still is really wild for them, and I think that that is really important in them understanding, too, that they're allowed to develop and they're allowed to change and I don't know what your pronouns are now but they might not be the same in a month from now, or six months from now and I just want them to have that opportunity.

For Sharon, social justice education provides the space for students to feel comfortable expressing their identity. It also provides a space for questions around identity. As discussed earlier, utilizing these open spaces is a difficult process for teachers to facilitate and for students to engage. These spaces also provide opportunities for pedagogical choices around the questions that arise. In this example, the teachers responded firmly when the question was raised in the chat. By the time that the student raised the question about 'hy' pronouns, the teachers had moved on to another topic in class and one of them responded "That question isn't related to math so we're going to ignore it." So much of social justice education depends on how the process and community is facilitated. In this moment, one teacher within the team chose to shut down a question publicly rather than engage with it or invite the student to an off-line

conversation. To remain ‘on task’, are they truly inviting students to engage with the content? Bell, Goodman, and Ouellett discuss the importance of facilitation in social justice education. While many teachers are skilled at teaching content, they can struggle with facilitating process. Encouraging teachers to adapt more of a facilitative role can encourage students to be more engaged in the process.

Facilitative Education

While facilitation and teaching have similar goals, the methods used are quite different. Bolger and Killermann (2016) explain that the difference centers on agency and active participation. Teaching requires “that the learner has buy-in, that the educator is ever conscious of the learners’ wants and needs, and the educator gives the learner opportunities for clarification, redirection, or a deeper understanding of a particular idea” (Bolger and Killermann, 2016, p. 18-19). Rather than viewing teaching as a traditional, top-down, banking method style of instruction, Bolger and Killermann view teaching as a middle ground where both educator and learner have the same level of agency. Facilitation de-centers the educator as the hub of knowledge and frees the process to be one that is useful to everyone in the room. “Facilitation requires an incredible amount of focus, intention, and engagement from the facilitator--even if they aren’t doing most of the talking” (Bolger and Killermann, 2016, p. 20). At TLS, we observed teachers who generally fell on the “teacher” end of Bolger and Killermann’s continuum. They worked to share agency with students and yet still ultimately held the power in the classroom through controlling the conversation, pace of the lesson, and content taught.

Encouraging TLS teachers to adapt more of a facilitation style, especially in social justice conversations, means that they focus more on the process rather than the outcome. Facilitators are concerned about the journey--the destination is up to the group. In our experience, the

teachers we observed generally were hesitant to utilize a facilitative style, as it shifts the balance of power in the classroom. However, for social justice education to be effective, teachers need to shift away from hierarchical power structures and dominant systems that are present in the classroom. Adapting a facilitation approach means that teachers pay greater attention to how things are happening, rather than just what is happening. We recognize that switching from teaching to facilitating is challenging and may not be useful in every setting. Teachers that are able to, however, will see a change in the engagement and buy-in from their students. “The better the facilitator is at creating and sustaining an inclusive climate [...], the more likely participants will be able to express and explore unexamined beliefs and values, and learn” (Bell, Goodman, and Ouellett, 2016, p. 67).

Incorporating social justice education at the classroom or school level takes investment, dedication, and support from teachers, parents, students, and administrators. Social justice education intentionally centers topics of equity, justice, power, oppression, and identity. These can be vulnerable, difficult, and emotionally-fraught conversations with the potential to cause substantial harm if not sequenced and managed appropriately. When social justice education is used intentionally and as part of the curriculum, the school community is transformed. Sara spoke at length about how important social justice education is for her personally and for TLS as an institution. Sara recognizes that parents often hear social justice education as a ‘liberal brainwashing’ or a way to force certain ideologies on their students. However, if students engage with the process, they can take away tremendous benefits that will last long after their time at TLS. Sara says:

We're not trying to tell them how to think or to be liberal or to do this or that or the other to love everybody, you don't have to love everybody. But

you have to be respectful of everyone. And so you have to at least try to put yourself in those shoes or have a perspective outside of your own. I think the social justice part of it, I would say that's probably something that I've been more cognizant about in the last four years, um that it's important for students to... not just students all people like we need to know there's not just one side to a story, there's another side and that side is just as important for us to hear. When my eldest went off to college, like she would just come back and talk about these things that like...just blew my mind away. Like, I didn't grow up in a time where you talked about things in that way or you were concerned about what another person's background was. I mean, it just wasn't in my wheelhouse at all. So now I would say, social justice education is just as important as learning, two times more important than learning your multiplication tables. That part of what TLS is doing is just so important, like we need that now more than ever, we need our children to grow up and understand all of these different facets of our world, so that they can help make us move forward and not go backwards.

Sara speaks to the future-orientation and action-focused aspects of TLS in this quote. She recognizes the power that the school has to benefit students long after they leave TLS. While TLS ensures that students learn academic content, the school also ensures that they understand the deeper meaning of how to live in community with others and interact with those who are different from you. Sara and the middle school house teachers saw the value of their actions on

student mindsets and behaviors and recognized the broad impact students can have, even far outside of TLS.

Discussion: Connect, Challenge, Extend

Our hope in using Connect, Challenge, and Extend was to invite a furthering of Frank's 'What, So What, Now What' questions. As reflective tools, these questions provide space for participants and learners to examine their past experience, determine the relevance of their current experience, and establish what meaning those experiences will hold for the future. While we appreciate the simplicity of these questions, we find their applicability somewhat limited in a broader context. We believe Connect, Challenge, and Extend offer opportunities for a deeper and more thorough examination of experiences in ways that motivate and encourage future action. In our experience as facilitators, we notice that participants generally struggle to fully enact the 'So What' and 'Now What' questions, as those require a more critical dive into the meaning made from our experiences. Therefore, we sought to provide an illustration of how Challenge might be a useful lens through which we can openly discuss tensions and difficulties present in our lived experience. Extend, then, helps us recognize the educative value those tensions provide for our future actions.

Central to our data analysis throughout these three chapters was the tension present between the espoused values (individually, structurally at TLS, and systematically in education writ large) and the values present in the lived experiences of teachers and students. The tension exists both internally and externally to TLS, especially since TLS exists within and is answerable to external dominant power structures of state regulatory agencies with their standards and curriculum mandates. Internally, this tension played out as individual teachers struggled to fully enact the progressive pedagogies upon which TLS is built.

TLS aspires to be a unique educative community grounded in restorative justice, social justice, experiential education, and other ideals. While these philosophies are intertwined and interrelated, we often found that teachers and students viewed them in silos and disconnected from both each other and academic content. As TLS looks to the future, the development and adoption of critical experiential education can provide the opportunity to knit together critical pedagogy, social justice, and experiential education into a cohesive, holistic, and collective pedagogical frame.

CHAPTER VII: CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION FRAME

In this chapter, we seek to further the conversation raised in Chapter 2 about limitations in the current frameworks of experiential education and the liminal spaces that exist when exploring the potential for intersections between social justice education, experiential education, and critical pedagogy. In exploring the development of critical experiential education, we reflect on the experience and knowledge we gained through the constructivist grounded theory approach of our study, data collection, analysis, and our own experience we have conducted into other educative spaces where the focus is on experiential education.

Throughout this section, we use the term 'frame' as a placeholder. As we propose creating a new way of thinking, we recognize that terms like 'theory,' 'model,' or 'paradigm' can limit how we or others approach this work. As discussed in Chapter 3, Saldaña and Omasta's metaphor of a camera is important in viewing ourselves as researchers. Our use of 'frame' furthers this metaphor by implying that critical experiential education is a lens through which to view and interact with the world, rather than a filter that interposes on our actions. Using this framing as critical experiential education helps us fully understand this as a philosophical approach rather than a prescriptive set of methods or behaviors.

What's the Point of Reimagining?

The Association for Experiential Education, the governing body for the field, has made strides towards including social justice and diversity wording and work into their website. They have begun to include workshops and calls for articles focusing on these topics for the Journal for Experiential Education. While these are meaningful steps, we do not believe AEE is positioned to thoroughly interrogate and grapple with the proleptic moment in which we find ourselves. As previously mentioned, a few scholars have recently posited the need for a critical

experiential education framework. While these scholars acknowledge the need for a reconstructed and re-envisioned way of conceptualizing experiential education, they stop short of suggesting what specifics should inform this new vision. We hope to begin to address the gaps they acknowledge by posing answers to questions we have asked. In seeking to combine social justice education, critical pedagogy, and experiential education elements, we aim to enact a pedagogical framework that fully includes examinations of identity, access, equity, context, and history. Previous conceptualizations of experiential education have failed to include an intentional focus on the importance of these conceptual layers. The recognition that diversity education and social justice education are not synonymous is a crucial factor here.

In Chapter 5 we explored how TLS did not fully realize their espoused progressive values across the middle-grade houses. We feel part of this tension exists because teachers enact experiential education as a siloed part of the day instead of part of their educational philosophy. We observed teachers continuing these silos through the day as they often focused on math, then language arts, and so on. Experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy provide guideposts for teaching rather than a set standard curriculum or a unified set of best practices. As we explored in chapter 2, the fields are often viewed and operationalize individually rather than informing each other. In each of these circumstances, the layering of social justice and experiential education were either tangential or non-existent. CEE would provide a more consistent frame to intertwine educational philosophy, experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy.

We considered CEE earlier to be a philosophy of education. Practitioners engaging in this philosophy are interested in disrupting power dynamics within schooling environments, whether in a traditional classroom setting, a service-learning experience, an adventure-based leadership

program, or a plethora of other educative spaces. The pedagogies used to enact this philosophy are as wide-ranging as the educational spaces used by practitioners. The choices made by practitioners are inspired by their own identities and lived experiences and those of the students themselves. The co-creation of educational experiences, the enactment of those experiences, and the resulting reflection/reflexivity of those experiences yield meaning-making and a call to action that requires risk and courage to transform and transcend as individuals and communities into more equitable and just people and spaces. CEE offers the co-creative space, enactment of experiences, reflection, and call to action, pushing this frame forward.

We recognize that TLS is a unique educational environment. It is not common to have schools grounded in foundational principles like restorative justice, experiential education, and social justice education. As Laurie pointed out in our interview, her teacher preparation program did not include extensive discussion of the philosophies nor structured training that gave her the confidence to enact these philosophies and ways of teaching in her classroom. CEE offers a cohesive frame that provides teachers the opportunity to explore and expand a set of principles of practice. The principles offered below are our attempt to organize the basic principles of CEE as a conceptual layer from which to view teaching and learning at TLS.

To begin to describe this new frame, it seems important to describe the language we are using. Amongst ourselves and in our classes throughout our PhD program, we have discussed how many of the books and articles we have read from across a spectrum of fields. These readings are often written in such a way as to discourage or disengage a reader (who does not have experience with the vocabulary of that field) from the work of reading and understanding the material presented. As we consider CEE, we wish to disrupt this type of power from the beginning of our conversation. Recognizing that these terms often have multiple meanings

depending on the authors discussed, we want to clarify how we approach and define terms used to develop the CEE frame. We have a simplified version listed below. Please see the complete list and context in Appendix A.

Table 4. Definitions

Term	Definition
<i>Reflection/Reflexion</i>	We define <i>reflection</i> as an individual’s ability to examine and learn from their past actions, experiences, and growth to influence future learning and action. We define <i>reflexion</i> as the ability to reflect critically on the structures and systems (both constructed and lived) as they impact the lives of individuals <i>who live in community with one another</i> .
<i>Critical Consciousness</i>	“A process by which any person works to disembody themselves from the norms, values, and expectations of their immediate cultural, social, and political environments via engaging in critical analysis and dialogue. It also requires those persons taking active efforts to reconstruct both their own place in that environment and the environment itself (Mustakova- Possardt, 1998, p. 19).
<i>Democracy</i>	“A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1954, p. 153)
<i>Embodied Practice</i>	We define embodied practice as learners and educators engaging both intellectually and culturally, soulfully, philosophically, physically, kinesthetically, emotionally, and socially.
<i>Justice</i>	Individuals have the ability to participate “without supports or accommodations because the cause(s) of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed” (Early Learning Alliance, 2021).
<i>Rhizome</i>	We consider critical pedagogy, experiential education, and social justice education to be connected theoretically and practically. They are intertwined and share outcomes and goals.
<i>Immanence</i>	The examination of what is in relation to what should be (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2007, p.16). Villaverde (2003) furthers this by maintaining that “critical theory helps us ‘retain a vision of the not yet’” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 53).

<i>Dialogical Pedagogy</i>	A philosophy where the teacher starts with student experience-student responses to themes, texts, and problems” (Kincheloe, 2008, p.88).
<i>Indeterminate Zones of Practice</i>	“used to signify the uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, and contested nature of any practice. In its complexity, the critical notion of educational practice avoids universal rules about how to do it correctly. There are as many brilliant forms of practice as there are brilliant practitioners” (Kincheloe, 2008, p.116).
<i>Facilitation</i>	Teachers as facilitators embrace the productive potential of moments of discomfort. “Learning that the ways we have come to make sense of the world does not always work can be disorienting, which helps to explain the signs of frustration, confusion, and anxiety among so many of your students (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 29).
<i>Crisis</i>	“a state of emotional discomfort and disorientation that calls on students to make some change. When in crisis, students feel that they have just learned something that requires a response. . . .to change their thinking in ways that work against oppression, students need a learning process that helps them to <i>work through</i> their crisis” (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 30).
<i>Critical Pedagogue</i>	“the ability to recognize in those whom you are teaching the complexity of their emotional and psychological investments in the various institutional arrangements that support a worldview that might or might not provide them with a sense of security, belonging, and identity” (McLauren & Kincheloe, 2007, p. 67).
<i>Communities/Groups</i>	“Critical pedagogy is dedicated to addressing and embodying these affective, emotional, and lived dimensions of everyday life in a way that connects students to people in groups and as individuals” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 11).
<i>Assemblage</i>	An “increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions. . . There are only lines” (Puar, 2007, p.21).

How Did We Get Here?

Through our research, we explored the ways in which teaching and learning are enacted at TLS. The school is somewhat unique in that it is based intentionally around experiential education, social justice education, and other progressive pedagogies. In our observations and interviews, we learned about how teachers employed these pedagogies to help students learn. As

discussed in Chapter 4, some middle school teachers struggled to integrate experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy thoroughly throughout their teaching practices. As we developed the frame of critical experiential education, we sought to explore what these three fields can offer towards a new vision of an educational frame.

The table below lists and summarizes the key themes and issues present in the fields of critical pedagogy, experiential education, and social justice education. These themes were drawn out to aid in the development of critical experiential education in general. The degree to which each includes the component is described and is in no particular order. The list is not exhaustive, it is merely the beginning of our attempt to articulate our lived experiences as researchers and experiential education practitioners. The areas of focus we chose to highlight below build on a distillation of the three fields that we have researched. In combination, we believe them to represent the conceptual layers of CEE in its formative stage.

Table 5. Key Areas of Focus

Key Areas of Focus	Social Justice Education	Experiential Education	Critical Pedagogy
Awareness that power is central to our relationship with the world and each other	Focus on an individual as part of a larger system (Impact on the system)		Focus on systems of which are made of individuals (impact on individual)
History is crucial to understanding the world and the world	Yes (individual and systemic)		Yes (history of structures and systems)
Context is crucial to understanding	Yes (individual and systemic)	Yes (an individual's experience only)	Yes
Risk/Crisis	Yes (implicit but not named)	Yes (central to the framework)	
Commitment to justice as a process and outcome	Yes		Yes
Deep Connection to the Natural World		Yes, used as classroom and restoration	The connection to the natural world - nucleus from which knowledge is created
Recognition that accesses of all kinds limits who can engage	Yes	Yes	Yes, systemic barriers
Assemblages of identity inform an individual's interactions with the world	Yes		Yes
The goal is emancipation from oppression	Yes		Yes
Creative play/imagination as part of life-long development		Yes	Yes
Embodied practice	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reflection key aspect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reflexion key aspect	Yes		Yes
Facilitation of initiatives/ experiences the key mode of implementation	Yes	Yes	

To clarify the chart above, we chose to articulate the information in terms of the goals of each, what they offer, what they lack, and how CEE can potentially fill those voids.

Experiential education is what we consider an operational process based on content and context. According to AEE, the goal is to "purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities" (AEE, n.d.). What experiential education offers to the formation of CEE is a focus on reflection, intentionally designed and sequenced experience, and the utilization of risk and the feeling of uncomfortable-ness within these experiences.

Facilitator competence, skill, and the art of facilitation are key components that separate experiential education from social justice education and critical pedagogy. Experiential education lacks an articulated theory grounded in an understanding and action towards justice, privilege, equity, and the alleviation of human suffering. There is a field-wide challenge with facilitating complex topics (although physical discomfort and risk are considered integral to the experiences of the field), including a consistent failure to specifically name aspects like power and identity (that are prevalent but not explicit). Experiential education traditionally claims connection to the places, spaces, and experiences that engage participants in the moment. Nevertheless, practitioners historically have lacked conscious conversations that neither engage facilitators and participants in their positionality nor acknowledge on whose land these experiences occur. The understanding that certain places may bring up generational trauma dealing with oppression and harm for some participants and then the skill and ability to facilitate those discussions and traumatic responses is also lacking in most experiential education facilitator training.

Experiential educators, as we've described, generally are skilled in designing, facilitating, and reflecting on a variety of educational programs. An experiential educator looking to grow and develop these skills might turn to CEE for a greater understanding of issues around power, privilege, and oppression that social justice education provides. That same educator might also utilize CEE to enhance their knowledge around the systemic issues at play in the broader society. Experiential educators looking to utilize CEE would become more holistic facilitators, able to design and reflect with a deeper understanding of power, privilege, and justice.

Social justice education is considered to be a goal, process, and outcome. Adams, Bell, Goodman, and Joshi suggest that the goal is "full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (Adams, Bell, Goodman, and Joshi, 2016, p. 3). Although AEE includes more specific actions in the description of experiential education's goal, we believe there is an inherent connection between the two goals, that being the participation of experience designed to meet participants' needs. Adams et al. further state that the process of social justice education "should be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, and inclusive and affirming of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change" (Adams, Bell, Goodman, and Joshi, 2016, p. 3). Although practitioners and scholars of experiential education have not explicitly used the exact wording as these authors, the inference we find is that based on experiential education's focus on clarification of individual participant values, which lead to positive contributions to their communities, the two processes are synergistic. Social justice education lacks an intentional focus on skill development around facilitation and the challenge of an individual's ability to prepare for and process risks.

Social justice education and experiential education are connected already in fairly significant ways. Social justice educators often do their work through facilitating experiential programming and leading reflections on content. For social justice educators looking to utilize CEE to deepen their work, the frame offers a more thorough integration of experiential education and critical pedagogy. Experiential education can provide these practitioner-scholars with a more nuanced skillset around facilitation, risk management, and reflection. Experiential education also helps in the design and selection of programming options that are most suitable to achieve certain outcomes. Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, offers social justice educators with a broader, more systemic understanding of structures of power within society. Social justice education tends to focus on the lived experience of the individual, where critical pedagogy zooms out to provide a more globally complex perspective.

Critical pedagogy is based on critical theory whereby students are encouraged to become aware of and challenge existing social power and status quo in systems. It offers the academic backbone and theory to support CEE. Critical theory offers participants of CEE the idea that the process of learning is consistently being negotiated and influenced by individual and social power and resistance to that power. The challenge is that often participants and facilitators of experiential education are not aware of their positionality, power, or the underlying processes (hidden curriculum or agendas) within an experiential education experience and how these affect the unfolding of growth and change in themselves. This is a key contribution to CEE as critical pedagogues work to instigate questioning the individual, collective, and genealogical histories of place and experience.

Critical pedagogues can both learn from and contribute to CEE. If they are interested in utilizing the model, they can deepen their understanding and connection to place, history, and

context. As a methodology, experiential education is inherently place-based and so provides critical pedagogues with the opportunity to delve more into historical and pedagogical connections to the land itself. Experiential education also offers these scholars skills around facilitation, reflection, and program design. As discussed above, critical pedagogy and social justice education share similar views and values. Social justice education provides critical pedagogues with a more individualized approach and perspective on issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Social justice education also provides a more enacted view of critical pedagogy's aims, as social justice education includes a strong focus on experiential facilitation.

The ability for facilitators and participants alike to sit with discomfort, crisis, and conflict is vital to a complex understanding of what is being negotiated in terms of what is being learned and co-created and from whose perspective. CEE facilitators must be intimately aware of these challenges and design experiences that engage participants in practice using their awareness, experiences, imaginations, creativity, and problem-solving. Otherwise, the experiences offered run the risk of perpetuating the very power, oppression, harm, and alienation CEE proclaim to work against. Kincheloe reminds us that critical pedagogy focuses on emancipation from oppression through the development of critical consciousness (Kincheloe, 2008). Critical pedagogy provides a conceptual framework for engaging with criticality in the lived experiences of individuals while considering the systems within which those individuals live. Critical pedagogy lacks methods of operationalizing the framework in a manner that is beneficial to educators and students from various spaces and perspectives.

Do We Need Social Justice Education and Critical Pedagogy Since Social Justice Education is Built on Critical Pedagogy? Why or why not?

Although social justice education was born out of critical pedagogy, we find both fields offer a unique set of lenses through which to view this work. We acknowledge that critical pedagogy's framework and focus on systems is crucial to social justice education's more individualized approach. Combining them with CEE allows for the most efficacious framework.

What is the Reason Social Justice Education and Critical Pedagogy Need Experiential Education?

We adhere to Bell and Adam's definition of social justice as both a process and a goal. Critical pedagogues have extensively and consistently called on educators to engage in a critical pedagogy theory. Critical pedagogy offers this criticality yet offers little in terms of actionable ways of engaging the pedagogy consistently and in the lived experiences of educators. Experiential education offers a way to enact the call to action both social justice education and critical pedagogy ask of educators.

CEE: In the Service of Who?

Our hope in Chapter 4 was to present and examine the tension between the espoused and the lived values of TLS. Although the school has foundational principles of social justice education, experiential education, and critical pedagogy. We found that educators struggled to integrate these concepts consistently and meaningfully into their daily interactions with students. In this chapter we seek to propose a frame that TLS and other educators can use to guide their work. Above all, we recognize that the work we propose exists in an academic context that can limit the audience to people with access to JSTOR, JEE, or databases and other scholarly articles. The scholarly terminology and language used in these contexts can be limiting to those without academic study in critical pedagogy or social justice education.

Additionally, this may be limiting for those who do not see themselves as part of a formal education system (either K-12 or higher education). However, we desire to have this accessible to all in the education field (formal or informal), including practitioners who may be utilizing this content in practical versus theoretical ways. We align ourselves with the Association for Experiential Education's definition of 'educator' in explaining that "there is no single word that encompasses all of the roles" that an educator can have within experiential education (AEE, n.d). We use 'educator' to mean those who either formally or informally consider themselves practitioners of education, including but not limited to teachers, counselors, administrators, mentors, community leaders, parents, and students.

CEE: In the Service of What?

We have had numerous discussions about the re-imagination and re-vision of experiential education with a more critical lens. As we have considered developing a CEE theoretical frame, the questions below provided insight into our thought process. These answers are our initial contributions to the larger conversation around the potential future of experiential education. Riding the current of recent articles in the *Journal of Experiential Education*, we hope our initial frame contributes to the language and enactment of the field.

Our research questions ask how the transformation of the widely used experiential education model intentionally can include spaces for critical framing. The intermingling of experiential education, critical pedagogy, and social justice education offers just such a space. As we have processed the knowledge we have co-created during this research process, we have concluded that many gaps in one siloed field can be filled by interlacing each of the others. As the result of knitting experiential education, critical pedagogy, and social justice education together, we believe CEE serves to offer the theory and critical thinking of critical pedagogy, the

facilitation and intentional experiences of experiential education, and the focus on outcomes of outcomes social justice education. CEE, in this context, is the space in which a more rich and rigorous engagement of experiences can be the catalyst towards transforming our communities.

What are the Goals of Our Work?

Our first goal is to prompt and encourage educators towards recognizing the potential interconnectedness of the disciplines/fields (experiential education, critical pedagogy, and social justice education). The value of knitting the philosophies, theories, and practices of each is to offer the opportunities to collaboratively reconceptualize how and what we learn about ourselves and others to co-create a more equitable and just world. The articulation of a clear understanding of what each offers and lacks provides educators space to act as border dwellers whereby they can reconstruct/co-create ways of producing knowledge, ways of being in the world, and ways of "reading" the world. Transformational opportunities abound if scholars and practitioners from across experiential education, critical pedagogy, and social justice education work in tandem with one another to reconstruct the siloed, non-porous ways of being and creating knowledge we have for too long languished in. We believe we are at yet another crossroads where the chance to integrate knowledge production with action in more equitable ways presents itself. The political, educational, economic, and health issues we face from a micro to a macro scale are unprecedented in this early part of the century. Now is the time to consider once again how we might as educators decenter and prompt alternative ways of knowing and being in ourselves and our spheres of influence.

Our second goal is to articulate ways to fulfill or operationalize the calls to action experiential education, critical pedagogy, and social justice education asks of practitioners and academics alike. Kincheloe warns educators and scholars of the dangers of performance on a

theoretical level without experiencing and deeply connecting theory to practice. He suggests this performance removes "us from and anesthetize[s] us to human pain and suffering" (Kincheloe, 2008, p.12).

What is the Purpose of the Frame?

The purpose of our critical experiential education frame is to provide a rhizomatic reconceptualization of theory, practice, and research from a multitude of sources and disciplines to help educators fulfill the call to action/praxis these fields individually call for. We have chosen to use "principles of practice" to explain the ways that critical experiential education can be enacted. To us, this term represents educational spaces that are ambiguous, constantly evolving, and contextually relevant to the specific needs of those within them. Through our work and academic studies, our experience has been that prescriptive, overly structured models/frameworks do not (and should not) work with the same level of success in every context.

Critical Experiential Education

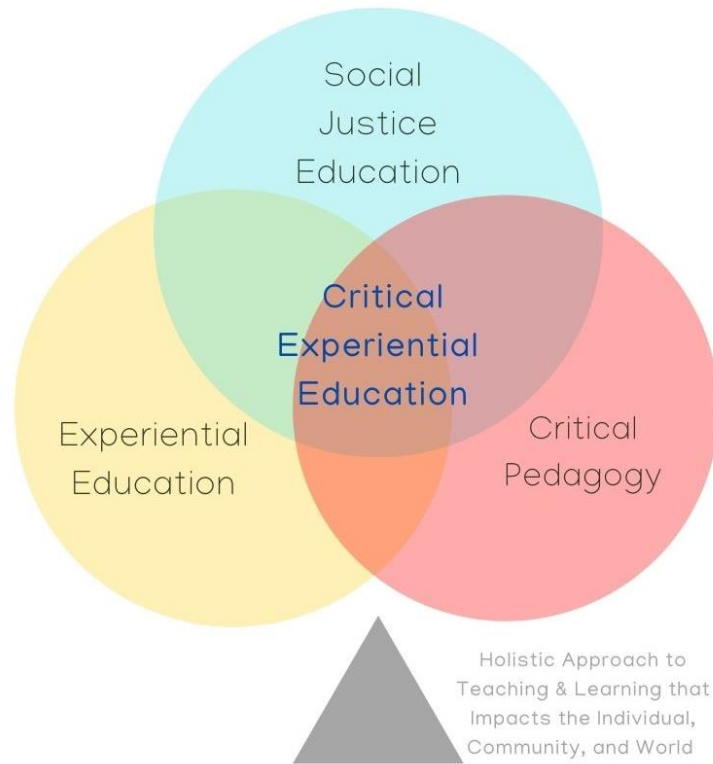
As a framework, critical experiential education combines elements of experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy. The goal, therefore, of critical experiential education is to integrate and operationalize a philosophy of experiential education that is intentionally grounded in aspects of power, oppression, justice, context, history, and identity to recognize and encourage future action towards the alleviation of oppression in all its forms.

Critical experiential education borrows aspects from these three fields to provide a unique set of benefits and opportunities to educators and students alike. We see critical experiential education as a holistic approach to teaching and learning--one that focuses on: reflection and

reflexion; intentionally designed experiences; facilitator competence and skills; well-managed and appropriately sequenced risks; grounded in theory and the contextualized lived experience; understanding of systemic influences and how to enact change within them; micro/meso/macro examination of power, privilege, and oppression as it impacts the individual, community, and world.

Figure 4. Frame of Critical Experiential Education

Critical Experiential Education Frame



Intersection of CP and EE

- grounded in theory and the contextualized lived experience

The Intersection of SJE and CP

- understanding of systemic influences and how to enact change within them
- micro/meso/macro examination of power, privilege, and oppression

The Intersection of SJE and EE

- reflection and reflexion
- intentionally designed experiences
- facilitator competence and skills
- well-managed and appropriately sequenced risk

Critical Experiential Education

- Holistic Approach to Teaching & Learning that Impacts the Individual, Community, and World

Critical Experiential Education Frame

Through this section, we hope to explicate certain sections of the chart we utilized above. By examining the interplay between social justice education, critical pedagogy, and experiential education related to four themes, we aim to showcase the pedagogical value more thoroughly in combining elements from these three fields into critical experiential education. We chose these four sections below intentionally as they are opportunities to examine where one field or the other is lacking in some way and a potential to explore elements like risk, nature, access, and facilitation that are not commonly discussed across these fields. As facilitators and educators, we see these fields as connected and intertwined. The discussion below centers on these four examples not as an exhaustive list but as an illustrative way to examine how the development of critical experiential education can incorporate elements of each field. We define then critical experiential education as a broad philosophy of education whose practitioners seek to challenge and disrupt power dynamics as they appear in educational settings. We believe in CEE's power to center educators' and learners' identities and lived experiences. We believe the meaning made through structured reflection on experiences can inspire critical reflexivity. We believe critical reflexivity and the resulting call to action differentiates CEE from experiential education.

CEE Principles of Practice

Based on the AEE principles of practice and the challenges to students Paulo Freire poses when considering the 'banking system' of education, we propose the Key Areas of Focus and Principles of Practice of Critical Experiential Education listed below. We in no way consider these principles to be a final articulation of CEE, merely a way of beginning a conversation that fuses experiential education with a more critical lens. We have taken each principle shared by AEE as a beginning point and amended it as we see fit to tie in more consistently with what we

imagine and envision CEE to become. We fully believe and encourage conversation and discourse about these principles and hope to change them as new voices are included in the discussion. The chart below provides a list of the CEE principles of practice mapped back to the intersections for the three fields discussed above and as we see most relevant. For examples of how these principles might be enacted, please see Appendix B.

Table 6. Critical Experiential Education: Key Areas of Focus and Principles of Practice

The Intersection of SJE and EE

- Risk/Crisis
- Creative Play/Imagination as Part of Life-Long Development
- Facilitation of Initiatives/Experiences is the key Mode of Implementation
- Reflection is a Key Aspect
- Embodied Practice

The Intersection of SJE and CP

- Awareness that Power is Central to our Relationship to the World and Each Other
- History is Crucial to Understanding the Word and the World
- Commitment to Justice as a Process and an Outcome
- The Goal is Emancipation from Oppression
- Reflexion is a Key Aspect

The Intersection of CP and EE

- Assemblages of Identity Inform an Individual's Interaction with the World
- Context Undergirds Understanding
- Deep Connection to Place and Space

Next Steps for Critical Experiential Education

As we look towards the future and the various ways in which this CEE frame can be operationalized, we are cognizant of the complexities present in this work. Throughout this chapter, we have worked to provide an overview and general description of critical experiential education and what it can offer to educators, practitioners, and scholars. We have consciously not provided a 'how-to' manual or a step-by-step guide for implementing this frame, as we know that context, facilitator experience, and potential participant demographics vary so widely.

Critical experiential education as described above is intentionally broad—we want educators to be able to apply it to their specific context, without the frame feeling prescriptive.

That said, we see several potential avenues for the future of the frame. As described earlier, practitioner-scholars who find themselves aligned more with social justice education, critical pedagogy, or experiential education have a tremendous amount to gain from utilizing CEE within their work. While we provided some general thoughts on the benefits of CEE to each of these fields, one next step would be developing a practitioner guide that would provide more details and information on ways to implement CEE within a specific frame of reference. Again, we would need to strike a balance of resources and flexibility, so that this guide does not become a ‘checkbox’ mentality. This resource guide could include a curated list of readings and references from each of the fields as well as prompts to promote a critically reflexive practice. As evidenced by Marjory’s comments in Chapter 5, it can be challenging for practitioners to reflect on their own practice and alignment with their beliefs. The CEE resource guide could include reflection activities and prompts designed to foster a culture of reflection and feedback that can help guide improvement.

One other avenue for next steps would be to create an implementation guide for institutions, schools, or programs to utilize. In the creation of this document, we would aim to follow Jay Roberts’ model. Roberts’ book *Experiential Education in the College Context* was cited extensively in our literature review and provides a framework for implementing experiential education (in all its forms) within higher education. Roberts does not provide a checklist or formal structure. Instead, he offers a series of best practices, highlighted through case studies, that showcase the benefits and outcomes of a well-designed program. He then leaves it up to the reader to determine the best course of action for their specific goals and

context. We would seek to meet similar aims. An implementation guide for CEE would provide a more in-depth look at the specific aspects and elements of each field and, more importantly, what an integrated frame could look like if utilized in elementary school, a nonprofit environmental education center, or a community-based youth development program (among many other contexts). Highlighting case studies and stories of educators or institutions who already implement elements of CEE would provide others with guides and ideas on where to begin as they seek to implement their own programs.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have explained the foundation, structure, and ways that critical experiential education can be implemented. We discussed the various definitions that we used in the formulation of critical experiential education and then examined what CEE could look like by developing a series of principles of practice. As discussed above, these principles are by no means exhaustive. However, they provide an opportunity to explore what CEE could look like in schools. We recognize that all teachers, classrooms, and students are different, so these principles are not meant to be prescriptive. Instead, they serve as a guide and encouragement for the many ways that teachers (and students) can implement CEE in their educational spaces.

Although the impetus to develop this model came from our observations and data analysis, we hope that critical experiential education provides a frame that teachers can use to ground their work more intentionally in a philosophy informed by social justice, experiential education, and critical pedagogy. In our observations at TLS, we noticed that teachers often incorporated elements of social justice or experiential education in a very bifurcated manner. This silo-ing means that students are less able to see how social justice and experiential

education can integrate into their content lessons or into the 'real world' outside of school. In proposing this new frame of critical experiential education, we aim to provide teachers at TLS with a way to infuse this frame intentionally and meaningfully across their teaching practice. We will explore how these (and other) changes can be made at TLS in the next chapter as we seek opportunities to deepen the teaching and learning experience at TLS.

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Experiential education invites educators and students alike to partner in creating educational spaces that are just, co-created, and democratic. Throughout this project, we have examined the ways in which experiential education can disrupt educational systems and transform learning for students and teachers. Through our experience at TLS, we examined the ways in which experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy can combine to foster an educational environment that allows for critical framing and critical praxis.

This chapter aims to provide a reflective look at the research process as well as an opportunity to examine the next steps and the call to action we offer to the experiential education field. As educators and researchers, we model and live experiential education and so place a heavy emphasis on a reflective practice. One of the benefits of a co-authored dissertation is the ability for us to reflect individually and collectively throughout the research. After each interview or observation, we took time to evaluate our effectiveness and noted the ways in which our process could have been improved. As facilitators, we are comfortable examining our interactions with participants. Through our training as facilitators, we were able to more critically reflect on our interactions with research participants, our ability to develop a rapport in an interview, and how to sequence towards deeper questions. Our individual reflections tie into the purpose of this chapter--a critically reflective look at our research process.

Research Questions

Our research was framed around two central questions, both of which guided our research design and implementation. These two questions and our answers are below.

1. How can the transformation of the widely utilized experiential education model intentionally include spaces for critical framing?

Question 1 opens the possibility that the long-standing model of experiential education has gaps that can be filled with a critical framing. Through discussing the history of experiential education and the ways in which it is currently used, we have outlined some of these gaps and it is clear to us that these gaps need to be addressed to further the development of the field of experiential education. It became apparent to us through the research at TLS that a major gap that exists in the current model of experiential education is a lack of criticality. We have suggested filling these gaps by incorporating conceptual layers of social justice education and critical pedagogy. Combining aspects from experiential education, social justice education, and critical pedagogy together creates a frame that is embodied, contextual, and reflective.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, we explored the themes we learned from observations and interviews conducted with teachers, administrators, and students at TLS. These experiences help to showcase the ways in which experiential education is enacted at TLS and, importantly, the opportunities that critical experiential education presents to address identified gaps in current practice. Throughout Chapter 4, we examined the ways that experiential education connected to the prior experience of students and teachers, challenged existing norms both within and outside of the school, and extended to a future full of possibility for a new educational approach.

Experiential education as pedagogy and philosophy has many strengths: it is human-centered, focuses on making meaning from experience, is future-focused, and develops skills around facilitation. However, the field fails to adequately and thoroughly address issues of justice, power, oppression, and identity. Addressing the gaps that exist provide us the

opportunity to examine what a new framework might be. Question 2 introduces the potential of this new frame of critical experiential education.

Critical experiential education combines these various conceptual layers to provide practitioners with a framework that grounds experiential education in social justice education and critical pedagogy in order to recognize and encourage future action towards the alleviation of human suffering. Critical experiential education challenges participants to re-envision and re-imagine the future towards one that is more just and equitable for all. Critical experiential education encourages action that is motivated towards the alleviation of human suffering, facilitated and informed by principles of experiential education, critical pedagogy, and social justice education. As we saw in our interviews and observations, this new frame of critical experiential education would benefit the holistic approach to teaching and learning practices at TLS by providing an integrated vision for enacting experiential education grounded in social justice and critical pedagogy.

2. How do the middle grades at The Loden School enact tenets of critical experiential education within their teaching, learning, and praxis to implement the foundational principles of the school?

Question 2 provided an opportunity to examine the lived experience of teachers, students, and administrators at TLS. Through a constructivist grounded theory approach, we explored how the espoused values of progressive pedagogies that undergird TLS impacted teaching and learning at the school. Recognizing the unique factors of this year and how education has changed during a global pandemic, our data collection revealed gaps in the enacted pedagogies and philosophies at TLS. When designing this study, we intentionally utilized language and frameworks that were present at TLS, such as restorative justice, Carver's ABCs (1994), and

democratic education. We found that teachers across the middle school house enacted TLS's foundational principles in widely-varied ways. Some teachers espoused a philosophical alignment with these principles and yet lacked the critical self-awareness to consistently challenge their own teaching practices grounded in dominant educational norms. We found that teachers (and students) viewed experiential education and social justice education as separate from the *real* content instruction and put these pedagogies in silos distinct from academic content. Rather than providing students with opportunities to integrate cross-disciplinary knowledge and experiences, teachers in our observations of virtual learning seemed to lack the knowledge, preparation, experience, and confidence to utilize the transformative power of these pedagogies more fully.

Chapter 7 discussed the creation of a new frame of critical experiential education. As we look towards the future, critical experiential education provides an opportunity to broaden the pedagogy to include space for aspects of integrating social justice education and critical pedagogy with experiential education. Through our work at TLS and our experience with various forms of experiential education, we noticed that educators typically rely on the experience itself as the educative moment. While an experience is certainly valuable, it must be contextualized within the individual and community perceptions in order for them to draw the most meaning from it. Borrowing from social justice education and critical pedagogy, critical experiential education offers an intentional focus on the individual's experience contextualized within a larger system. Explicitly naming aspects of power, privilege, context, and oppression enables critical experiential education to aid learners in recognizing and undoing these systems. The frame discussed in Chapter 7 is not meant to be prescriptive. Instead, critical experiential education can and should appear differently according to the space and needs of participants. As

with social justice education and critical pedagogy, culture, identity, and context are vital aspects for determining how critical experiential education can be implemented.

Collective Reflection on the Research Process

Our collective reflection on this process centers on our ability to co-author a dissertation. As we initially thought about co-authoring, we were informed that there had not been a co-authored dissertation in the Ph.D. in Educational Studies program at UNC Greensboro before. Being the first is both exciting and nerve-wracking. We had to navigate a variety of hurdles throughout the process from accounting for our work and shared labor, to proving that the final product would have an equal representation from both of us. We are grateful for our committee and especially our chair for advocating for this project and this method. We believe that a co-authored project exemplifies the principles of critical experiential education and are excited to blaze a trail for others to follow in the future.

A hallmark of experiential education and, by extension, critical experiential education, is the importance of co-created knowledge. In this project, we co-created knowledge with input from our participants. Having a second researcher to check perspectives, challenge perceptions, and help broaden views was vital to this project. Both of us conceptualized this research similarly but we knew the other has a unique viewpoint and set of skills. We were able to play off of each other throughout the project and were confident in our relationship to challenge the other. We saw our working together as a way to actualize content and discussions from classes. We see this as a disruption of traditional educational norms and a way to subvert the dominant system.

A potential concern we had initially was the backyard research component of this project. Although we do not work at TLS and are not embedded in their community full time, we have

worked with the school since its inception and are familiar with the teachers, students, and community. There were times that this familiarity was certainly beneficial: we were able to more easily understand how classes operated and how teachers used TLS guiding frameworks, for example. Our familiarity initially allowed us access to the research site, especially in a challenging year. We had conversations with Sara (the Executive Director) about this research before submitting our application to the TLS research board and gaining formal approval to conduct research. Increased understanding and access are some of the positive aspects of backyard research. As we progressed through the project, we recognized that some of the negative aspects were influencing our work.

As we've mentioned previously, our participant numbers were significantly lower than anticipated. While there are several factors that can explain this (the pandemic, concern about time, etc), we can't exclude the potential of the perceived power dynamics that teachers felt between us and Sara. School leaders have invited us into faculty meetings, professional development sessions, and family nights to facilitate various trainings for the school over the last few years. It is possible that teachers saw us as connected to administrators including Sara and were hesitant to participate in case we told Sara what they said. While we made every effort to distance ourselves from school leadership and present ourselves as outside researchers, we can't change the perception that some teachers might have had.

We have discussed the challenges of researching during a global pandemic throughout--it bears discussion again. Conducting any form of research during a period of global disruption, fear, and chaos is bound to be extremely challenging. For us, all of that was compounded by doing school-based research. We entered TLS in their third semester of virtual teaching. While teachers and students were more experienced with virtual methodologies, they were also

exhausted. Spring 2021 was a turning point in the pandemic, surrounded by a global context of racial reckoning and economic disruption. These collective traumas have impacted all of us in the past 18 months. We saw the trauma-based responses in both us and in our participants, which made it hard to focus on the research. During interviews, we heard about participants who had sick family members, some who were worried about income, and other “real-world” concerns that became part of our research.

Another significant part of this research centers on the methodology we chose to employ. Constructivist grounded theory required us to consider our initial beliefs as a starting point and to let the process lead us where it may. Rather than research being a top-down, researcher-driven approach, we sought to adopt an approach that focused on the community of participants and the context in which they work. We found that to be comforting as we progressed through the research phase and even into the writing process. The ability to be flexible and adaptable as a facilitator connects beautifully with the research and writing processes we experienced. We may not have slowed down enough to recognize or appreciate this connection to experiential education had we not had the experiences associated with the unique challenges of the last 18 months. We were excited to utilize constructivist grounded theory as it has an iterative coding process that mirrors the co-creative and fluid process of experiential education. During our initial and secondary coding phases, we again depended on each other’s perspectives as co-researchers. We independently coded data and then came together to talk through themes that we found. We were able to challenge each other’s perspective and offer new ideas for codes and themes in the same data set.

As mentioned before, conducting research on experiential education and other embodied practices is challenging in the best cases, much less when learning happens virtually. Virtual

experiential education is just in the beginning stages and the research on this as a methodology is lacking. As the world pivoted to an online environment in spring of 2020, experiential education practitioners scrambled to adapt their programming to an online model. We imagine that the pandemic will provide a rich research opportunity for those looking to formalize and operationalize experiential education virtually. As it stands, the online environment was what we had to work with and we and those who chose to participate in the research did the best we could in the process. We are grateful for those of our participants who chose to engage in the research, especially as we added yet another Zoom meeting, yet another bit of time in front of a screen, yet more time away from family, friends, or the chance to engage in some self-care.

Frannie's Reflection

Evan and I, for several years, had extensive conversations about our research interests, how closely those interests aligned, and how we might enact experiential education practices as we completed our dissertations. The ability to complete this research and dissertation as a co-authored process was invaluable to me as a student and practitioner. I have learned a great deal about patience, flexibility, and adaptability (hallmarks of a good facilitator used in a different space), and what collaboration can truly look like. I believe we were able to put into action the principles of critical experiential education even as we were in the process of determining what those principles were...flying the plane as we built it. This process aligned well to the process of constructivist grounded theory. It felt good to be able to see these process in action versus talking about them theoretically in a classroom. The real-world application gave me a much better understanding of what I have been exposed to in our classes and I now have the confidence to continue working on my research skills.

Evan's Reflection

Embarking on this project, I was slightly apprehensive about designing and conducting a research project. I now feel much more confident and comfortable with the research process. I enjoyed the opportunities to expand and shift focus as the data pointed us in different directions. In particular, I found using a constructivist grounded theory approach to be a natural and comfortable fit. Constructivist grounded theory has similarities to experiential education in that it shifts knowledge creation away from the sole purview of the researcher. A continual data analysis process provides an inherent agility to the research.

One of the more interesting points of this project for me was the recognition of all the connections between researcher and facilitator. I have been a facilitator (in various senses) for most of my professional career and have therefore honed skills in reflective conversations, building relationships, and making participants feel comfortable. In previous projects, I saw that these skills were useful in conducting interviews, but it was through this research that I saw how all the skills I have developed make me a more effective researcher. This was especially important as we conducted virtual interviews with participants we had never met before. Our ability to facilitate the process, ensure they felt comfortable, and guide our questions helped those conversations to be more effective.

Limitations

Conducting school-based research during the height of a pandemic that disrupted educational systems around the world led to a series of limitations on this research. Initially, our research had been planned to take place in person with interviews, focus groups, and observations conducted in the school. Switching to a virtual format presented benefits in a reduction of costs and time needed to travel to interviews and ensuring that any interested

participant was able to be engaged. However, the combination of Zoom fatigue, burnout from the year, and the challenges of an already busy academic calendar combined to make participant turnout lower than anticipated. While we had planned to involve over 20 teachers and students as participants, our final number was much smaller. We were cognizant of the many stressors and competing factors at play for both teachers and students during the pandemic and were aware that our interview request could be seen as a burdensome addition that some were not willing to take on. We worked to lessen the time requirement and sought to be as flexible as possible to encourage interested participants to join. We heard from several that they would like to join but did not have the time to participate. We were frustrated that some seemed to choose not to participate without a full understanding of the time involvement required. We feel as though we could have had additional participants if they had been willing to talk with us to learn more about the project and their involvement.

Virtual research brings with it several unique challenges, especially for us as researchers who are used to in-person facilitations, teaching, and interactions. The virtual environment was made challenging when attempting to form a relationship with participants in order to encourage them to be open and honest in interviews. We had known some participants from our prior work with TLS but others we met for the first time via Zoom. As with facilitation, interviewing depends on the relationship that the interviewer is able to establish with the participant. This relationship encourages vulnerability and authenticity while establishing mutual trust. Our virtual interviews tended to be shorter and more focused on task completion, rather than relationship development. We found, perhaps unsurprisingly, those participants that we knew beforehand were more willing to share deeper and more vulnerable statements and their interviews tended to be longer. Participants who we met via Zoom tended to have shorter, more direct answers.

Our smaller-than-anticipated group of participants led us to modify our data collection methods. While we planned on conducting focus groups to learn from the dialogue and interplay between participants, we were unable to do so. In considering focus groups, we were cognizant of hierarchical relationships and power dynamics and sought to design focus groups where participants felt comfortable speaking openly. Our original plan was to keep 5th/6th house and 7th/8th house participants together so they could better speak to their cohort experience. The smaller participant numbers of both teachers and students led us to remove focus groups from our research plan, as we felt the group would have been too small to foster good conversation. Instead, we were able to conduct more observations and were able to observe in a variety of settings--morning meetings, content lessons, and after-school tutoring assistance sessions.

Conducting research during this time meant that we worked with teachers who had never taught inside the TLS building and students who had not experienced an in-person class in over a year. Consequently, we found that many of the espoused values of TLS were incorporated in a limited fashion. Many of the teachers were new to the school and were, understandably, focused on navigating this complex and ever-changing year. It is hard to overstate the limitations caused by the global pandemic, both on the participants and on us as researchers. A participant pool with limited experience, a TLS environment that is different from the norm, and challenges in data collection meant that we were unable to fully explore our research questions.

As we've discussed, both of us have been involved with TLS for a number of years. As such, we are familiar with the school leadership, parents, and teachers. We are also familiar with the 'normal' operations of the school, as well as the power dynamics within it. This familiarity is both an asset and a challenge, as it meant that we entered into research with an implicit expectation of what teaching and learning looked like at TLS. We remained open to what the

data showed, and we both worked to check our assumptions of what we thought we would see. Although we made every effort to separate ourselves from that past involvement with TLS and focus on our role as researchers, we still found participants asking us for advice or suggestions after a class observation. We also observed a hesitance from teachers as we asked deeper and more critical questions. As we have experience with both the school leadership and board of directors, we assumed this hesitance stemmed from a concern that their answers might have a negative impact.

The limitations described above impacted our ability to answer our research questions, specifically 2.A focusing on Carver's (1994) ABC framework. While we found indications of agency and belonging especially among students, we did not find widespread use of this model. We chose to incorporate Carver's model as it is a foundational idea for TLS. However, based on our research questions and methodology, participants never directly or indirectly spoke to the ABCs. Following a constructivist grounded theory approach, we included the absence in our data analysis but did not explore further through interviews and observations. In an idealized research environment (in-person, a larger participant pool, etc), we would have more fully explored how Carver's model is utilized within TLS.

A final limitation was seen in the language we used. Experiential education is a broad and evolving field of study that encompasses service-learning, global engagement, internships, outdoor education, project-based learning, practicums, and many other disparate fields. All these fields have their own research base, foundational theories, and definitions. Although these are grounded in experiential education, the language used across fields can vary widely. In our conceptualization of experiential education, these (and other) fields are connected and intertwined. However, that connection is lacking in the literature.

Recommendations for TLS

In this section, we offer suggestions and recommendations for TLS as a school. Given the gaps that we noticed specific to the middle school house at TLS and discussed in Chapter 4, our recommendations center on ways that the school, leadership, and teachers can more intentionally and thoroughly integrate critical experiential education.

CEE Coach

We recommend that TLS look to expand the existing curriculum facilitator roles by creating a position that focuses on facilitating and implementing CEE. Once created and funded (which we recognize is no easy feat), hire an experienced master teacher with a deep background in experiential education and social justice education. Different from the existing curriculum facilitators, the CEE coach would not be assigned to teach any regular classes and would be dedicated fully to supporting other faculty in the school. This person would be tasked with working across the school to help teachers infuse CEE in their lesson plans, assignments, and classroom culture. Initially, the CEE coach would be responsible for deepening the professional development provided to the team of curriculum facilitators. As the champion and advocate for CEE at the school, this person would also provide leadership to the school culture and structure. We noted in our data analysis that experiential education, social justice education, and academic content are often viewed as disparate silos at TLS. Our hope is that this position would aid teachers to tie these together to form a consistent and meaningful student experience. We recognize that the creation of new positions is challenging, not least due to the ongoing teacher shortage and finding teachers with the right experience and licensing. We believe that devoting funding to this position would greatly aid TLS in enacting its foundational values. In the event that additional funding is not possible, we recommend repurposing an existing curriculum

facilitator position into this CEE coach role. We also believe that a CEE coach would enable TLS to repurpose professional development funds that are currently used to hire external consultants or facilitators and instead use those funds to support new positions and initiatives within the school.

Extensive Professional Development

Teachers, both beginning and returning, need to be provided with initial and ongoing professional development. This development needs to be intentionally sequenced and structured so as to provide relevant and timely skills they can adopt in their classrooms. Time needs to be devoted during the summer, before school starts, and at least once each trimester to gather teachers together. We recognize that devoting time means sacrificing time spent on other important professional development. Time also means devoting money—we strongly advocate for a budget allocation to support deep and consistent professional development. Of course, professional development can and should happen in full staff and house meetings. We believe that setting aside time specifically for PD around CEE helps teachers view this as important. We would also recommend creating “tracks” in these PD sessions for both new and returning teachers to TLS. The returning teachers can and should act as mentors, adopting a “train-the-trainer” model where they provide support and guidance to beginning teachers.

Parent/Family Involvement

As part of the critical community supporting students at TLS, we recommend strengthening the parent/family orientation process. TLS is growing in popularity and so is attracting students and families who are unfamiliar (but interested) in its pedagogies. This orientation process should prepare families with knowledge about the pedagogies used at TLS so that they can continue the student learning at home. When we have provided such sessions in the

past, families have been confused about what their student “is actually learning” and how to measure growth. Since TLS is different from other schools, these families are understandably confused when they see students working on projects, co-creating knowledge with their teacher, or demonstrating the workings of a democratic classroom. We recognize that enhancing a family orientation takes time and funding. TLS families work different schedules, speak different languages, and might have various accessibility needs. An enhanced orientation would build on existing systems at place in TLS. Redesigning and reimagining this programming following the principles of CEE would showcase and enact this frame in the early days of a student’s interactions with TLS. We recommend tasking the CEE coach with designing and delivering this enhanced orientation programming.

We recommend creating an orientation process that unfolds in several ways:

- the CEE coach helping parents understand the theory and philosophy behind CEE.
- teachers sharing information about their pedagogy and helping parents connect the dots between what happens in class and the learning that occurs.
- school leadership sharing information about culture, logistics, and systems in place to support learning.

Connecting to the EE Community

While TLS is a unique educational environment, given its foundational principles, it does not exist in a vacuum. The Independent School Experiential Education Network (ISEEN) and other national organizations provide leadership to schools looking to enact experiential education and social justice. We recommend, for example, that TLS look to send teachers annually to the

ISEEN content institutes, where they can network with teachers in similar schools across the country and get ideas for ways to adapt lesson plans, assignments, and classroom cultures.

Student Curriculum Advisory Board

In order to fully co-create knowledge and culture at TLS, student voices need to be welcomed and appreciated. The creation of an advisory board would allow students to provide feedback and insight on curriculum content development and other school-wide culture needs. We see this as a particularly relevant opportunity for 8th grade students, who have been at TLS the longest and have gained a deep understanding of its methods. This board would provide a significant leadership experience for these students, especially as they prepare to transition out of TLS and into another environment for high school.

Supporting Pre-Service Teachers

As TLS continues to deepen partnerships with nearby universities, they will continue to host pre-service teachers as they complete their student teaching practicums. In Chapter 4, we discussed Laurie's feeling of dissonance when she realized TLS was different from what she learned in her teacher education program. We recommend TLS create structures to better inform and assist future student teachers in navigating this dissonance. A recent edition (spring 2021) of the *Journal of Experiential Education* focused on experiential education as utilized in teacher education programs. In the editor's note for this edition, the authors describe why changing teacher education is so crucial. They say that providing teachers with new ways to teach has "the potential to bridge the gap between schools and streets [and are] the means by which all our students can be both challenged and supported, be seen and heard, and be leaders and world changers" (Glazier, Bolick, and Jonas, 2021, p. 4). These authors go on to explain that there "are too few examples of what transformative experiential education looks like when centered in K-

12 classrooms and the preparation of teachers” (Glazier, Bolick, and Jonas, 2021, p. 4). TLS cooperating teachers can work to help pre-service teachers reflect on their educational journey and their emerging educational philosophy. Through this reflection, pre-service teachers can adopt a critical reflective practice that encourages an awareness of the context of their surroundings. As Glazier, Bolick, and Jonas (2021) discuss, this reflective practice highlights “the reality that a social justice orientation in experiential education practice is not an outcome to achieve, but an *ongoing unearthing* through a lived reflective experience in the world” (p. 8, emphasis added).

Future Research Avenues

At the conclusion of this project and as we shift away from a focus on TLS and toward the broader field of experiential education, we are excited to continue developing critical experiential education and integrating it into our personal and professional practice. As we have progressed through this work, we have discovered two specific examples in which a critical experiential education frame would be a benefit to our field and the many ways in which it happens.

Bettez (2020, 2011) and others discuss the importance of fostering a critical community within a classroom environment. Within experiential education, Project Adventure and other leaders have been discussing terms like a ‘Full Value Contract’, which originated in 1976 as a way to develop group norms and expectations before engaging in an experiential or adventure-based activity (Project Adventure, 1976). Full Value Contracts, community contracts, group norms, and other similar terms are frequently used in experiential education today at the outset of an experience. Critical experiential education provides the opportunity and framework to integrate Bettez’s concept of community commitments (a group-driven approach grounded in

justice and identity) with Project Adventure's Full Value Contract (a facilitator-driven approach grounded in accountability and responsibility) into a new framework. This re-envisioned group formation concept could encourage groups and facilitators to intentionally address the learning community they co-create together.

Meg Bolger and Sam Killerman (2016) are practitioners in experiential education who discuss the ways that facilitator training and development needs to be grounded in a social justice education approach. While their work begins an important and necessary conversation about the intersection of experiential education and social justice education, it continues to bifurcate the fields and present facilitation as a siloed skillset. Critical experiential education provides an opportunity to integrate social justice education, critical pedagogy, and experiential education truly and thoroughly into a facilitator training process that is holistic and better prepares facilitators for the often difficult and challenging conversations that come about in experiential education settings. These fields, as we have previously noted, are inter-related and interdependent from our perspective. Just as social justice is informed by and dependent on facilitation for its effectiveness, critical pedagogy is distinct from and yet integrally related to experiential education.

Experiential education provides critical pedagogy with the future-focused and action-based orientation that enables what Freire called 'critical hope' for a better world. Kincheloe (2008) offers an idea of how critical pedagogy can be used to reconceptualize education. The educational vision viewed in a critical pedagogy lens must include a thorough rethinking of aspects such as the relationship between community and schooling, the role of the social, cultural, and political factors that shape human identity, the way power operates in schools and how power does not serve the best interests of students, and how the structure and organization

of schooling dictates the relationship between teachers and students (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 6). While this vision demands a rethinking, Kincheloe does not provide a guide on how to enact this change. Rather than a universal approach or set of best practices, Kincheloe and other critical pedagogues encourage a contextually appropriate and situated response. CEE borrows this from critical pedagogy and encourages teachers, administrators, students, and parents to enact it in ways that are most suited for their environment.

Call to Action

Education provides a valuable opportunity for students to develop a variety of skills and behaviors. Education can serve to prepare students for a future career, to be productive members of a larger society, and to critically examine their position within that society. Through the development of the modern system of education, the system has unfortunately shifted away from grandiose visions of affecting change in the world. Instead, students are educated following a factory model—listening to a single source of authority, directed by bells, and sitting in straight lines. While that is the current system, there is hope for a change.

Critical experiential education provides opportunities for students to co-create knowledge, de-center learning away from the ‘sage on the stage, and connect their knowledge(s) to the world around them. All of these concepts are interrelated and combine to disrupt normative education paradigms. Combining critical experiential education with concepts like community building will provide an opportunity to examine how this multi-faceted approach to education is so radically different from normative educational models. This research seeks to uncover the outcomes of that disruption and its impact on students. TLS provided an opportunity to examine an educational system that intentionally incorporates experiential education, social justice, restorative justice, and other progressive pedagogies. As mentioned earlier, we see CEE

as a benefit to a variety of fields, including formal education. Our hope is that this frame will be adopted by other experiential educators, regardless of their setting. Our goal by introducing the frame of critical experiential education is to provide a starting point for educators looking to expand their educational philosophy. By learning in an educational experience that is intentionally designed around critical experiential education, students are ideally being prepared to develop and maintain critical communities and enter the world prepared to engage as democratic citizens.

By proposing a new frame of critical experiential education, we are inviting further research into the limitations of the existing models and the potential that critical experiential education provides. There is unlimited potential for additional research into various modalities of experiential education and curricular ties into a variety of subjects. We hope that future research will continue to examine the intersections of social justice, critical pedagogy, and experiential education. While our research focused on grades 5-8, there is potential for continued research into primary and secondary education (elementary, middle and high school), ESL, special education/diverse learners, and arts-based subjects like music, dance, and theatre. Additionally, while experiential education has been well-studied in higher education, there is a need for a critical examination of practices at community colleges, 4-year institutions, and universities.

As we conclude this project and the process of co-creating knowledge, we have come to better understand the necessity of a critical experiential education frame and the benefits it provides to teaching and learning. We also recognize the value of a creating a bridge between a theoretical process and its practical applications. That bridge demands future action in significant and meaningful ways. As we embody a “prac-academic” mindset in the future, we are stronger

than ever in our belief in the value of critical experiential education to re-imagine educative spaces and enhance student learning.

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APPENDIX A: CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION DEFINITIONS

Reflection/Reflexion

We have been involved in various training sessions where the term “reflection” is used. Reflection is an integral part of experiential education and John Dewey has quite a lot to say about reflection as he states:

If the suggestion that occurs is at once accepted, we have uncritical thinking, the minimum of reflection. To turn the thing over in mind, to reflect, means to hunt for additional evidence, for new data, that will develop the suggestion, and will either, as we say, bear it out or else make obvious its absurdity and irrelevance... Reflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance.

Reflective thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiry; and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful... To maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry — these are the essentials of thinking (Dewey, 1910, p. 9).

From our perspective, reflection encourages growth in an individual. The growth that we consider in this context is personal and private although the outcomes may be shared with others during discussion or written works. We define reflection as an individual’s ability to examine and learn from their past actions, experiences, and growth to influence future learning and action. The act of reflecting can take many different forms including, writing poetry, songs, or in journals, having discussions and processing with others, drawing or other art forms, and so on.

While reflection may include aspects of culture, systems, or structures, it is based on the lived experience of the individual.

In her discussion of feminist research analysis, Villaverde defines reflexivity as “critical awareness of the researcher’s engagement or participation in the inquiry process and of her or his epistemological choices in the research design, implementation, and articulation” (Villaverde, 2008, p.104). We consider much of what we do as informal research and therefore tie her definition to the processes and acts of recognizing biases, emotional reactions we bring to any context, as well as the influences we have on each other and the educational environment. We define reflexion as the ability to reflect critically on the structures and systems (both constructed and lived) as they impact the lives of individuals *who live in community with one another*.

Reflexion includes the ability to reflect on an individual’s role in the larger structures in social systems and to then articulate and implement a call to action. The two key differences between reflection and reflexion are:

- Reflection is focused more on the individual versus the collective.
- Reflexion more clearly than reflection articulates and instigates collective calls to action and considers the influences of structures and systems of power .

The disconnect we see is between movement in the calls to action from the individual to the collective. We believe, as do others such as Keating and Anzaldúa that “by changing ourselves, we change the world...believe that it entails simultaneous two-way movement, that by changing ourselves (by changing myself), we/I can change the world” (Keating, 2002, p. 522).

Our insistence upon the articulated difference and incorporation of reflection *and* reflexion is a vital element of what we see as a co-creative, multi-movement process.

Critical Consciousness

The term critical consciousness comes to mind as we consider Freire's influence on what we ponder what CEE is to be. We consider the necessity of understanding the process versus a result. For our purposes here, we use Mustakova-Possardt's description which says,

Taken in this wider sense, then, critical consciousness is a process by which any person works to disembody themselves from the norms, values, and expectations of their immediate cultural, social, and political environments via engaging in critical analysis and dialogue. It also requires those persons taking active efforts to reconstruct both their own place in that environment and the environment itself (Mustakova-Possardt, 1998, p. 19).

Democracy

"A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1954, p. 153).

Embodied Practice

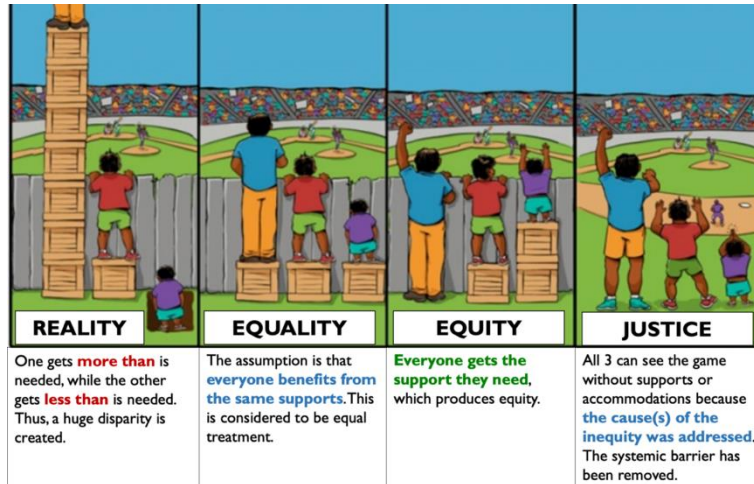
We define embodied practice as learners and educators engaging not only intellectually, but also culturally, emotionally, soulfully, philosophically, physically, kinesthetically, emotionally, and socially.

Education, in general, cannot be separated from action. In experiential education, this action is often tied to physicality or a holistic embodied experience. As we explore critical experiential education, we recognize that sharpening our focus on the embodied nature of learning remains a crucial aspect.

Embodied practices work in harmony with reflection/reflexion due to multiple ways of knowing and being associated with growth and awareness of self and ultimately growth and awareness of others. It is impossible for either of us to consider reflection/reflexion to be separated from engagement that negates any of the ways described above.

Justice

Scholarly articles and book chapters abound with varying definitions of justice. John Dewey continues to be a significant figure in experiential education and social justice education specifically. His belief in democratic schools is prefaced by his perspective of what justice means. To him, “the creation of a just society requires the active participation of all society’s members in the democratic process” (Boyles, Carusi, and Attick, 2009, p.35). We see a connection here with critical pedagogy scholars’ push not only to engage the intellect of students but to also engage them as active members of their communities and world. Bell and Griffin (2016) describes justice using words such as fair and equitable distribution of resources, social processes and recognition, and respect for marginalized groups of people. The Early Learning Alliance offers the graphic representation below to distinguish between some words that are commonly used and interchanged with one another. Considering the context in which we are writing and grappling, we choose to follow the definition of justice used below. In our context and from our perspective, justice is having the ability to participate “without supports or accommodations because the cause(s) of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed” (Early Learning Alliance, 2021).



Rhizome

The simplest description of a rhizome is a root that both feeds and connects an item to a larger body. The roots of a stand of Aspen trees, for example, is one large organism that, aboveground, appears as separate units, disconnected from one another. Underground, however, the roots are interconnected into one massive system. Rhizomes are frequently used as metaphors for connections between ideas, academic disciplines, and fields of interest and inquiry. We consider critical pedagogy, experiential education, and social justice education to be connected theoretically and practically in similar ways to rhizomes in that on the surface, scholars and practitioners may find their similarities and relatedness to be somewhat forced. We suspect, the deeper we dig, the more obvious they will intertwine producing a way of grappling with the challenges presented by critical pedagogy, experiential education, and social justice education such that the outcome becomes what we are terming critical experiential education.

Immanence

The examination of what is in relation to what should be (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2007, p.16). Kincheloe (2008) cites Villaverde (2003) who adds to this by saying that “critical theory helps us retain a vision of the not yet” (p. 53).

Dialogical Pedagogy

Ira Shor suggests teaching where “the teacher starts with student experience-student responses to themes, texts, and problems” (Kincheloe, 2008, p.88).

Indeterminate Zones of Practice

Kincheloe cites Donald Schon (1995) when discussing indeterminate zones of practice, which are “used to signify the uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness, and contested nature of any practice. In its complexity, the critical notion of educational practice avoids universal rules about how to do it correctly. There are as many brilliant forms of practice as there are brilliant practitioners” (Kincheloe, 2008, p.116).

Facilitation

Kumashiro states, “these oftentimes subconscious feelings of desire and resistance are central to the process of learning...they should become part of the very things that students study” (Kumashiro, 2015, p.36). It is not our lack of knowledge but our resistance to knowledge and our desire for ignorance that often prevents us from changing the oppressive status quo” (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 27).

What is significant here is the recognition that challenging oppression does not consist solely of changing the ways that individuals think and feel. Challenging oppression requires addressing the broader social context in which we live” (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 28).

Learning that the ways we have come to make sense of the world does not always work can be disorienting, which helps to explain the signs of frustration, confusion, and anxiety among so many of your students (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 29).

Crisis

Means “as a state of emotional discomfort and disorientation that calls on students to make some change. When in crisis, students feel that they have just learned something that requires a response.” “to change their thinking in ways that work against oppression, students need a learning process that helps them to *work through* their crisis” (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 30).

When students are in a state of crisis, teachers need to structure experiences that can help students to work through it” (Kumashiro, 2015, p. 31).

Learning involves *looking beyond* what students already know, what teachers already know, and what both are only now coming to know ...”(Kumashiro, 2015, p. 32, emphasis added).

Half Education

Adorno described this as “the way mainstream education perpetuates students’ alienation from knowledge of the social and the self. In this process, the possibility of agency, of self-direction is lost in a sea of social confusion” (McLauren & Kincheloe, 2007, p. 25).

Critical Pedagogue

The most important aspect of being an effective critical pedagogue, however, is the ability to recognize in those whom you are teaching the complexity of their emotional and psychological investments in the various institutional arrangements that support a worldview that might or might not provide them with a sense of security, belonging, and identity (McLauren & Kincheloe, 2007, p. 67).

Communities/Groups

“Critical pedagogy is dedicated to addressing and embodying these affective, emotional, and lived dimensions of everyday life in a way that connects students to people in groups and as individuals” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 11).

Assemblage

“An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions. . . . There are only lines” (Puar, 2007, p.21).

APPENDIX B: CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

Awareness that power is central to our relationship with the world and each other

- Critical experiential education occurs when intentionally chosen experiences are supported by reflection, reflexion, critical analysis (including analysis of power, oppression, context, and identity,) and synthesis.
- Relationships are central to learning and must be developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others and learner to the world at large.
- CEE must include an individual and collective call to action that motivates further knowledge, encourages a broad impact, and inspires future reflection.

History is crucial to understanding the word and the world

- CEE demands an understanding, appreciation for, and incorporation of the socio-cultural histories (those told and left untold) of people, place, context, and content in any learning environment.
- Facilitators should recognize their responsibility to critically examine histories in order to examine the voices that are left out.

Context undergirds understanding

- Knowledge creation occurs best when the learner feels supported, understood, valued, and can fully participate, co-create knowledge, and make meaning of experiences.

Risk/Crisis

- Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- The educator and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of experience cannot totally be predicted.
- The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes, and successes.

Commitment to justice as a process and outcome

- CEE adopts the definition of justice as both present and future focused while recognizing the underlying need to address systemic barriers that prohibit individual's full democratic participation in society.

Deep Connection to the Place and Space

- CEE encourages the development of a sense of landfullness. Baker states landfullness “necessitates that we move beyond an inevitable awareness or a convenient consciousness of the land. It requires experiencing the land in its entirety through all the senses, including the emotional/affective--not only as it is today, but as it was in the past and will be in the future” (Baker, 2005, p.270).

Assemblages of identity inform an individual's interactions with the world.

- CEE acknowledges that the prior failure to recognize those assemblages of identity has historically limited access to who is able to engage in experiential education.
- CEE compels practitioners and participants to engage in experiences that involve those whose voices, bodies, or beliefs, have not traditionally or historically felt comfortable, safe, or able to engage in these experiences.

The goal is emancipation from oppression

- CEE recognizes the inherent power dynamics within lived experiences of participants and facilitators alike.
- CEE offers opportunities to name and mitigate oppressive experiences in experiential education environments. These experiences stand on their own and also act as metaphors for more challenging experiences and conversations in other environments.
- CEE's motivation towards future action is inherently liberatory and encourages participants to take action to eliminate oppression.

Creative play/imagination as part of life-long development

- CEE recognizes the value and importance of creative and unstructured play, both as a way to increase democratic skills and as a creative and imaginative outlet for knowledge creation.

- CEE requires an active and continual commitment from both learners and facilitators.

Introducing elements of play and imagination provide opportunities for learning in new and exciting ways.

Embodied practice

- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a learning task that is authentic, relevant, and meaningful.

Reflection is a key aspect

- CEE defines reflection as reflection as an individual's ability to examine and learn from their past actions, experiences, and growth to influence future learning and action.
- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.
- CEE Reflection is timely, relevant, and focused on future actions and decisions of the individual

Reflexion is a key aspect

- Reflexion in the CEE context articulates and instigates collective calls to action and considers the influences of structures and systems.

Facilitation of initiatives/experiences is the key mode of implementation

- The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, ensuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process. In addition to this AEE principle of practice, we include as a CEE educator's role to include the recognition of the facilitator's own positionality as it relates to the learning environment. To be most effective for all students and participants, facilitators must be cognizant of their assemblages of identities, how those identities affect their engagement with students, and student's engagement with the content.
- The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning especially when those opportunities stray from the formal curriculum or plan for the experience. Co-created knowledge requires flexibility, adaptability, as well as a decentering from what the facilitator believes students need to learn in that moment. This is the moment when power becomes shared and learning occurs.

APPENDIX C: ADULT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Reimagining the Future: Critical Experiential Education's Role in Fostering Co-Created and Democratic Learning Environments

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor: Frannie Varker and Evan Small (Faculty Advisor Leila Villaverde)

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary.

You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. This research seeks to address questions around the development of critical experiential education, the various ways in which it might be used, and the potential impact this pedagogy has on student development. More specifically, this research seeks to examine the ways that critical experiential education methodologies can disrupt normative educational systems to foster collaborative and more socially just educative spaces that encourage the development of democratic values necessary to live equitably in communion with each other. Finally, we will examine the ways that CEE furthers the development of critical skills including social, emotional, and academic and how these skills will continue to impact students and teachers long term. We are interested in examining the impact TLS has on teachers and students.

Why are you asking me?

As a member of the TLS community, your input is essential to understanding this research. We want to hear about your experience with the curriculum, structure, and philosophy at TLS. We know that TLS is different from other schools and we are interested in hearing from as many points of view as possible to more thoroughly understand this difference.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

If you agree to join this study, you will be asked to participate in up to three individual interviews with the researchers, each lasting up to an hour. These will be scheduled at your convenience and will happen via Zoom. In these interviews, we'll ask you a series of questions about your prior teaching experience, what led you to join TLS, and your experience with the school thus far. We'd encourage your open and honest answers so that we can more fully understand the pedagogical impact of TLS.

For teachers: You may also be asked to join a focus group with 4-5 of your peers, lasting no more than an hour. Just like the individual interview, we'll ask a series of questions and we're interested in your collective answers.

For teachers: We are also planning to conduct no more than 3 observations of you and your students throughout the semester. Each observation would occur during a regularly scheduled class meeting and will last the duration of your class. During an observation, we are interested in your teaching style, your interactions with students, and the classroom community you've formed.

This study will take place in the spring semester of 2021 and will not extend past June. As we conclude the study and write our results, you might be asked for another brief interview to confirm details or help clarify any questions that may arise.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Interviews and focus groups will take place via Zoom and will be recorded, using Zoom's record feature. This will include both video and audio. Because your voice and image will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below.

All electronic data will be stored in a cloud-based Box folder that only the researchers can access. Any hard-copy data or notes will be stored in locked cabinets in the researcher's offices. The Box folder will be password protected and each researcher's computer is password (DUO) protected. The cabinets are locked and are stored behind locked office doors that only the researcher accesses.

What are the risks to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Confidentiality in the focus group cannot be guaranteed due to the format, but we will request that participants do not speak about the focus group discussion outside the focus group setting.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Frannie Varker (fgvarker@uncg.edu) or Evan Small (ensmall@uncg.edu) with any questions. You can also email our faculty advisor Leila Villaverde (levillav@uncg.edu).

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

We hope that your answers will help us provide information to other schools who are looking to be more like TLS. Understanding, complexifying, and co-generating space for critique, growth, and transformation through experiential education informs and helps to re-imagine education in ways that are more equitable. A more equitable educational system calls for transforming our world into one that is more generous, liberatory, kind, engaged, and appreciative of difference.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All electronic data will be stored in a cloud-based Box folder that only the researchers can access.

Any hard-copy data or notes will be stored in locked cabinets in the researcher's offices. The Box folder will be password protected and each researcher's computer is password (DUO) protected. The cabinets are locked and are stored behind locked office doors that only the researcher accesses.

All data will be de-identified and pseudonyms will be used throughout any published work resulting from this study.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

Will my de-identified data be used in future studies?

Your de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by Frannie Varker and Evan Small.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: PARENT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: Reimagining the Future: Critical Experiential Education's Role in Fostering Co-Created and Democratic Learning Environments

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor: Frannie Varker and Evan Small (Faculty Advisor Leila Villaverde)

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study. Your child's participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose for your child not to join, or you may withdraw your consent for them to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to your child for being in the research study.

There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose for your child not to be in the study or you choose for your child to leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship or your child's relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about your child being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any

time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

This is a research project. Your child's participation in this project is voluntary. This research seeks to address questions around the development of critical experiential education, the various ways in which it might be used, and the potential impact this teaching style has on student development. We will examine the ways that CEE furthers the development of 21st century skills including social, emotional, and academic and how these skills impact teachers and students.

Why are you asking my child?

As a member of the TLS community, your child's input is essential to understanding this research. We want to hear about their experience with the curriculum, structure, and philosophy at TLS. We know that TLS is different from other schools and we are interested in hearing from as many points of view as possible to more thoroughly understand this difference.

What will you ask my child to do if I agree to let him or her be in the study?

If you agree for your child to join this study, they will be asked to participate in up to three individual interviews with the researchers, lasting no more than an hour each. In these interviews, we'll ask your child a series of questions about their experience with TLS, the curriculum, and philosophy. We'd encourage your child's open and honest answers so that we can more fully understand the pedagogical impact of TLS.

They may also be asked to join a focus group with 4-5 of their peers, lasting no more than an hour. Just like the individual interview, we'll ask a series of questions and we're interested in their collective answers.

We will also be observing your child's classroom up to 3 times throughout the semester. During an observation, we're interested in the teacher's interactions with the students, the classroom community, and how students work together. Observations will occur during a regularly scheduled lesson.

All of these interactions will be scheduled during the school day and will happen via TLS's Zoom.

This study will take place in the spring semester of 2021 and will not extend past June.

If you choose not to allow your child to participate, no data will be collected from or about them.

Is there any audio/video recording of my child?

Interviews and focus groups will take place via TLS's Zoom and will be recorded, using Zoom's record feature. This will include both video and audio. Because your child's voice and image will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, their confidentiality for things they say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below. Teachers will not have access to these recordings and so will not know what your child says.

All electronic data will be stored in a cloud-based Box folder that only the researchers can access. Any hard-copy data or notes will be stored in locked cabinets in the researcher's offices. The Box folder will be password protected and each researcher's computer is password (DUO) protected. The cabinets are locked and are stored behind locked office doors that only the researcher accesses.

What are the dangers to my child?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Confidentiality in the focus group cannot be guaranteed due to the format, but we will request that participants do not speak about the focus group discussion outside the focus group setting.

The researchers will make every effort (in collaboration with TLS teachers) to ensure that any student who participates in this study does not miss instructional time.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Frannie Varker (fgvarker@uncg.edu) or Evan Small (ensmall@uncg.edu) with any questions. You can also email our faculty advisor Leila Villaverde (levillav@uncg.edu).

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of my child taking part in this research?

We hope that your child's answers will help us provide information to other schools who are looking to be more like TLS. Understanding, and generating space for critique, growth, and transformation through experiential education informs and helps to re-imagine education in ways that are more equitable. A more equitable educational system calls for transforming our world into one that is more generous, kind, engaged, and appreciative of difference.

Are there any benefits to *my child* as a result of participation in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

Will my child get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything for my kid to be in this study?

There are no costs to you or payments to you or your child as a result of participation in this study.

How will my child's information be kept confidential?

All electronic data will be stored in a cloud-based Box folder that only the researchers can access. Any hard-copy data or notes will be stored in locked cabinets in the researcher's offices. The Box folder will be password protected and each researcher's computer is password (DUO) protected. The cabinets are locked and are stored behind locked office doors that only the researcher accesses.

All data will be de-identified and pseudonyms will be used throughout any published work resulting from this study.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

Will my child's de-identified data be used in future studies?

Your child's de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent or your child's additional consent.

What if my child wants to leave the study or I want him/her to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to allow your child to participate or to withdraw him or her at any time, without penalty. If your child does withdraw, it will not affect you or your child in any way. If you or your child chooses to withdraw, you may request that any data which has been

collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your child's participation at any time. This could be because your child has had an unexpected reaction, has failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to allow your child to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read it or it has been read to you, you fully understand the contents of this document and consent to your child taking part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child who wishes to participate in this study described to you by Frannie Varker and Evan Small.

Participant's Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature

Date

APPENDIX E: STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Assent Form for Student Participants

Study Title: Reimagining the Future: Critical Experiential Education's Role in Fostering Co-Created and Democratic Learning Environments

Our names are Frannie Varker and Evan Small.

What is this about?

I would like to talk to you about your experience at TLS. We're interested in learning about how TLS is different from other schools and what it's like to be a student at TLS.

Did my parents say it was ok?

Your parent(s) said it was ok for you to be in this study and have signed a form like this one. Any time we're going to talk with you, it'll be during school hours.

Why me?

We would like you to take part because you have an unique perspective on your experience at TLS. We want to know what students think about the teachers, classwork, and structure of TLS. We're interested in talking with students to learn more about their experience and so we encourage you to be honest and open with us.

What if I want to stop?

You do not have to be part of this project. It is up to you. You can even say okay now, but change your mind later. All you have to do is tell us. No one will be mad at you if you change your mind.

What will I have to do?

We'll want to talk with you up to 3 times to learn about your experience at TLS. Each time will last no more than an hour and we'll just ask you some questions. Again, we ask that

you provide us with your open and honest answers--there are no wrong answers here. You might be asked to participate in a focus group, which is a group conversation with a few of your peers. This focus group will take no more than an hour. We will also be observing your classroom during a regular school day. In an observation, we're interested in how your class works together and how your teacher interacts with you. All of these conversations will happen on the TLS Zoom account, just like you use for class.

Will anything bad happen to me?

We don't anticipate anything bad happening to you as part of this study. Your teachers won't know what you've said and so there won't be any impact on your grades.

Will anything good happen to me?

There aren't any rewards for participation in this study. We want to hear from your perspective and so your answers can help TLS improve. We also hope that your answers will help us provide information to other schools who are looking to be more like TLS.

Do I get anything for being in this study?

There are no incentives or prizes given for being part of the study.

What if I have questions?

We encourage you to ask questions at any time.

If you understand this study and want to be in it, please write your name below.

Signature of child

Date

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

School Leadership

Interview 1 Questions

1. Tell us a little about yourself. How long have you been at TLS?
2. What made you interested in education as a career path?
3. Are there any formative moments in your own educational journey that helped you decide that you wanted to be an educational administrator?
4. What prompted you to apply to TLS?
 - a. What made you want to lead a school that emphasizes experiential education and social justice?
5. Tell us about your previous experiences with social justice and/or experiential education prior to coming to TLS?
6. What were some of the main aspects that stood out to you in preparation for your current role at TLS? How did you feel as you began your role here?
7. How do you see experiential education aligning with your educational philosophy?
8. How do you see social justice aligning with your educational philosophy?
9. Throughout your experience with experiential education at TLS, what have you struggled with?
10. Throughout your experience with social justice education at TLS, what have you struggled with?
11. What benefits to students do you think experiential education and social justice provide?

Interview 2 Questions

1. What are some of the major differences between TLS and other school(s) where you've taught?
 - a. How are students different?
 - b. How is your leadership different?
2. Some of TLS core values are experiential education and social justice. How do you see those in action at the school? How do you enact them as a leader?
3. Experiential education is about co-creating knowledge and democratic learning spaces. How do you see these implemented across the school?
4. We are especially interested in the intersection of experiential education and social justice. How do you feel like these intersect in the curriculum compass? Across the school as a whole?
5. What do you think are the benefits of combining experiential education and social justice? For teachers? For students?
6. As you prepare students to leave TLS and enter high school elsewhere, what do you think they will struggle most with? What might they thrive at?
7. Given that we are interested in understanding the benefits and challenges of the intersection of social justice and experiential education, is there anything else you want to add that we might not have thought to ask?

Teachers

Interview 1 Questions

1. Tell us a little about yourself. How long have you been at TLS?

2. What made you interested in education as a career path?
3. Are there any formative moments in your own educational journey that helped you decide that you wanted to be a teacher?
4. What prompted you to apply to TLS?
 - a. What made you want to teach experiential education and social justice?
5. What experiences and opportunities have encouraged you to stay in your position at TLS?
6. Tell us about your previous experiences with social justice and/or experiential education prior to coming to TLS.
7. What were some of the main aspects that stood out to you in preparation for your current role at TLS? How did you feel as you began your role here?
 - a. What do you feel was left out of your preparation in order to be successful at TLS?
8. How do you see experiential education aligning with your educational philosophy?
9. How do you see social justice aligning with your educational philosophy?
10. Throughout your experience with experiential education at TLS, what have you struggled with?
11. What benefits to students do you think experiential education and social justice provide?
12. If you've taught elsewhere, what are some of the major differences between TLS and that other school?
 - a. How are students different? How is your teaching different?

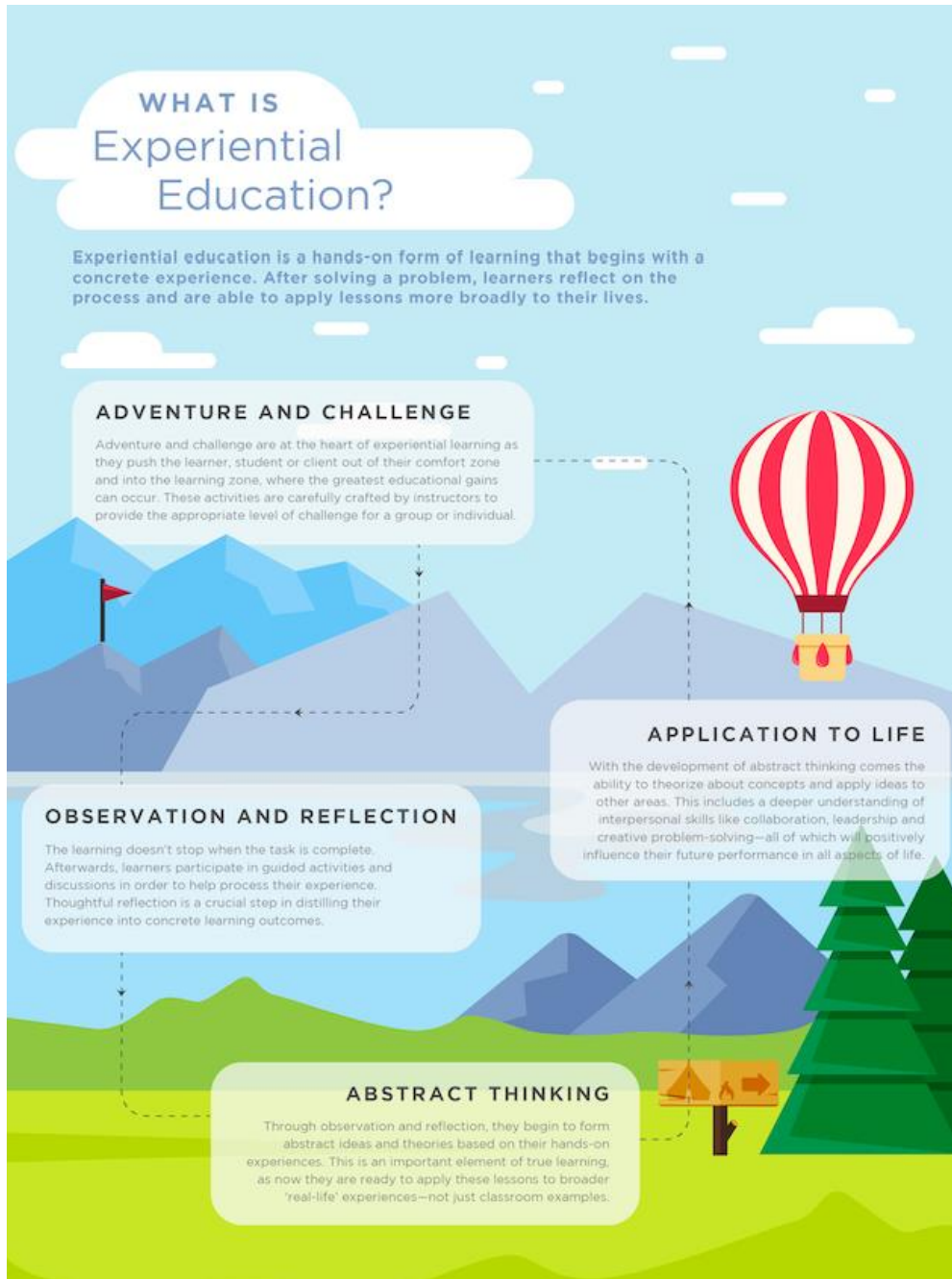
Students

Interview 1 Questions

1. Tell us a little about yourself. How long have you been at TLS?
2. How does TLS compare to other school(s) you've attended?
 - a. What attracted you to TLS?
3. Describe a typical day in your previous school(s). What did your classroom look like?
How did your teacher teach?
4. Describe a typical day at TLS. What does your classroom look like? How does your teacher teach?
5. What have you learned about social justice at TLS?
 - a. From how teachers teach?
 - b. Curriculum?
 - c. Other ways?
6. Was social justice talked about in other school(s) you attended? In what ways? If not, why do you think they didn't talk about it?
7. What does experiential education mean to you? What about the teaching is experiential?
8. We are especially interested in the ways, the places, and how experiential education and social justice come together at TLS. Do you feel like they do come together?
How? Follow up probes:
 - a. in the teaching
 - b. the curriculum (what is taught, what you study, etc)
 - c. your learning

APPENDIX G: ASSOCIATION FOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

“PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE”



Experiential Education: The Principles¹ of Practice

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner² is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Relationships are developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others and learner to the world at large.
- The educator³ and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of experience cannot totally be predicted.
- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.
- The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
- The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
- Educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments and pre-conceptions, and how

these influence the learner.

- The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes.
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1) The priority or order in which each professional places these principles may vary.

2) There is no single term that encompasses all the roles of the participant within experiential education. Therefore, the term "learner" is meant to include student, client, trainee, participant, etc.

3) There is no single term that encompasses all the roles of the professional within experiential education. Therefore, the term "educator" is meant to include therapist, facilitator, teacher, trainer, practitioner, counselor, etc.

Anchor Standards and Domains

IDENTITY

1. Students will develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society.
2. Students will develop language and historical and cultural knowledge that affirm and accurately describe their membership in multiple identity groups.
3. Students will recognize that people’s multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals.
4. Students will express pride, confidence and healthy self-esteem without denying the value and dignity of other people.
5. Students will recognize traits of the dominant culture, their home culture and other cultures and understand how they negotiate their own identity in multiple spaces.

DIVERSITY

6. Students will express comfort with people who are both similar to and different from them and engage respectfully with all people.
7. Students will develop language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people (including themselves) are both similar to and different from each other and others in their identity groups.
8. Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.
9. Students will respond to diversity by building empathy, respect, understanding and connection.
10. Students will examine diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified.

JUSTICE

11. Students will recognize stereotypes and relate to people as individuals rather than representatives of groups.
12. Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).
13. Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today.
14. Students will recognize that power and privilege influence relationships on interpersonal, intergroup and institutional levels and consider how they have been affected by those dynamics.
15. Students will identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world.

ACTION

16. Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.
17. Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.
18. Students will speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias.
19. Students will make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer or group pressure.
20. Students will plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world and will evaluate what strategies are most effective.

APPENDIX I: NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION MENTOR

STANDARDS

North Carolina Mentor Standards Overview

Standard 1: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Demonstrate Leadership – Mentors utilize effective communication skills to establish quality professional and confidential relationships with beginning teachers to impart knowledge of ethical standards, instructional best practice, and leadership opportunities. Key elements of the standard include building trusting relationships and coaching, promoting leadership, facilitating communication and collaboration, sharing best practices, imparting ethical standards and advocating for beginning teachers and their students.

Standard 2: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students – Mentors support beginning teachers to develop strong relationships with all learners, their parents or guardians, and the community through reflective practice on issues of equity and diversity. Key elements of the standard include supporting relationships with students, families, peers and the community, honoring and respecting diversity, creating classroom environments that optimize learning, and reaching students of all learning needs.

Standard 3: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Know the Content They Teach – Mentors have strong knowledge of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) and 21st century goals and assist beginning teachers in the utilization of these tools to promote student achievement. Key elements of the standard include imparting and utilizing the NCSCOS and 21st century goals into beginning teacher practice.

Standard 4: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Facilitate Learning for Their Students: Mentors support beginning teachers in their understanding and use of student assessment tools to drive student achievement. Mentors also support beginning teachers to understand their professional licensure obligations and pursue professional growth. Key elements of the standard include developing and improving instructional and professional practice and understanding and analyzing student assessment data.

Standard 5: Mentors Support Beginning Teachers to Reflect on Their Practice - Mentors continually work on improving their mentoring and observation skills to improve their effectiveness with beginning teacher support. Key elements of the standard include allocating and using time with beginning teachers, developing reflective practitioners and gathering data on beginning teacher practice.

Mentor Standard 1: Mentors support beginning teachers to demonstrate leadership.

1a Trusting Relationship and Coaching

- Mentors establish and maintain confidential relationships with beginning teachers.
- Mentors develop a range of coaching skills to support beginning teachers.
- Mentors adapt their use of coaching skills and strategies to effectively support beginning teachers.

1b Leadership

- Mentors ensure that beginning teachers are aware of leadership opportunities.
- Mentors encourage and support beginning teachers to engage in leadership at the school and district levels.
- Mentors guide beginning teacher's reflection on leadership experiences to promote leadership development.

1c Communication and Collaboration

- Mentors utilize effective communication skills with beginning teachers.
- Mentors support beginning teachers to develop effective communication skills in collaborative interactions with colleagues and administration.
- Mentors support beginning teachers to engage in collaborative dialogue to improve professional practice and school effectiveness.

1d Best Practices

- Mentors possess knowledge of best practices with a primary focus on student learning.
- Mentors provide resources for and modeling of best practices for beginning teachers.
- Mentors support beginning teachers' implementation of best practices.

1e Ethical Standards

- Mentors are knowledgeable about the ethical and professional standards.
- Mentors demonstrate ethical and professional behavior in interactions with beginning teachers, staff, administration, community members and students.
- Mentors initiate collaborative dialogue with beginning teachers regarding ethical and professional behavior

1f Advocacy for Beginning Teachers and Students

- Mentors advocate for beginning teachers to ensure they have appropriate instructional resources and supportive working conditions.
- Mentors coach beginning teachers on methods of advocacy for themselves and their students.
- Mentors advocate for initiatives and policies to improve education for all students and promote positive change practices.

Mentor Standard 2: Mentors support beginning teachers to establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students.

2a Relationships with Students

- o Mentors support beginning teachers to be aware of the importance of building strong relationships with their students and share ways to get to know them.
- o Mentors provide beginning teachers with strategies and methods to communicate effectively with students in a variety of settings and situations.
- o Mentors collaborate with beginning teachers to assess the effectiveness of communications and interactions with students and their impact on relationships and learning.

2b Relationships with Families

- o Mentors support beginning teachers to develop relationships with families and significant adults in the lives of their students
- o Mentors collaborate with beginning teachers to design and implement effective ways of connecting and communicating with parents and guardians in formal and informal settings.
- o Mentors facilitate the beginning teacher's development of methods to support inclusion of families in the on-going process of identifying and improving student achievement.

2c Relationships at School and in Community

- o Mentors assist beginning teachers in learning about the context of the school and community.
- o Mentors support beginning teachers to meet and engage with school colleagues and partners in the community.
- o Mentors support beginning teachers to develop activities that foster positive collaboration between school and community.

2d Honor and Respect for Diversity

- o Mentors support beginning teachers to know the cultural, ethnic, gender and socioeconomic characteristics of their classroom, the school and the community.
- o Mentors collaborate with beginning teachers to expand self-awareness regarding issues of diversity as they impact teaching and learning.
- o Mentors support beginning teachers to expand their awareness of culturally inclusive practices and to include them in planning, implementing, and reflecting on lessons.

2e Classroom Environments that Optimize Learning

- o Mentors possess a broad knowledge of systems and techniques for classroom management.
- o Mentors support beginning teachers in developing effective designs for classroom management to create and maintain a respectful inviting classroom community.

- o Mentors support beginning teachers to better understand the specific behaviors of their students and ways to adjust strategies to meet student needs and maintain engagement in learning.

2f Reaching Students of all Learning Needs

- o Mentors engage in dialogue with beginning teachers regarding the individual learning needs of their students and corresponding labels that might be assigned to them.
- o Mentors support beginning teachers' understandings of diversity and appropriate instructional strategies to meet individual learning needs.
- o Mentors collaborate with beginning teachers to implement and assess differentiated lessons designed to meet learning needs and promote student success.

Mentor Standard 3: Mentors support beginning teachers to know the content they teach.

3a NCSCOS and 21st Century Goals

- o Mentors demonstrate strong knowledge of NCSCOS for own grade levels/subjects and support beginning teachers to become knowledgeable of NCSCOS for their grade levels/subjects.
- o Mentors demonstrate vertical alignment of NCSCOS so can understand where came from
- o Mentors support beginning teachers to design lessons that integrate 21st century goals and skill development with NCSCOS and to reflect on implementation.
- o Mentors support beginning teachers' participation in professional learning communities focused on full implementation of NCSCOS and achievement of 21st century goals.

3b Content and Curriculum

- o Mentors ensure that beginning teachers receive necessary NCSCOS and state/district curriculum resources.
- o Mentors assist beginning teachers in the use and implementation of NCSCOS and required curriculum.
- o Mentors collaborate with beginning teachers to develop standards-based short and long term curriculum plans that show application of content and connections to the lives of students.

Mentor Standard 4: Mentors support beginning teachers to facilitate learning for their students.

4a Instructional Practice

- Mentors support the planning, implementation and assessment efforts of beginning teachers.
- Mentors collaborate with beginning teachers to improve instruction and learning.
- Mentors provide additional assistance and professional development to beginning teachers in areas of need.

4b Professional Practice

- Mentors ensure that beginning teachers are fully aware of professional licensure requirements.
- Mentors model behaviors that demonstrate professional practice and support beginning teachers to pursue professional growth and to maintain professional practice.
- Mentors facilitate on-going dialogue with beginning teachers to reflect on and enhance professional practice.

4c Student Assessment

- Mentors support beginning teachers to have and use required student assessments.
- Mentors assist beginning teachers in the analysis of student assessment data from a variety of sources and to make adjustments in instructional delivery based on results.
- Mentors support beginning teachers to design and use student assessment tools to inform the planning of differentiated lessons that are responsive to identified student needs.

Mentor Standard 5: Mentors support beginning teachers to reflect on their practice.

5a Allocation and Use of Time with Beginning Teachers

- o Mentors initiate making connections with beginning teachers and learning about their needs before or near the start of school or at the time of hire if later in the year.
- o Mentors support beginning teachers to attend a program orientation and support clarification of program information.
- o Mentors meet regularly with beginning teachers and focus their efforts on effective coaching and time management to meet individual needs.

5b Reflective Practice

- o Mentors become highly skilled in the use of instructive, collaborative and facilitative approaches to coaching.
- o Mentors support beginning teachers to reflect on practice and self identify their instructional strengths and challenges.
- o Mentors collaborate with beginning teachers in the on-going improvement of teaching and learning through reflection.

5c Mentor Data Collection

- o Mentors observe in beginning teachers' classrooms to gather data and reflect on instructional practice.
- o Mentors expand their repertoire of observation tools to be responsive to the needs and interests of beginning teachers.
- o Mentors collaborate with beginning teachers to select a focus for data collection, to reflect on results, and plan next steps.