BORDER PEDAGOGY: HOW WHITE TEACHERS CROSS INTELLECTUAL

BORDERS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN

RACIALLY HOMOGENEOUS, LOW POVERTY SPACES

A Dissertation

presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

At the University of Missouri – Columbia

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

_____

by

AMY E. KNOWLES

Dr. Kennedy Ongaga, Dissertation Supervisor

May 2022

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School,

Have examined the dissertation titled:

BORDER PEDAGOGY: HOW WHITE TEACHERS CROSS INTELLECTUAL

BORDERS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN

RACIALLY HOMOGENEOUS, LOW POVERTY SPACES

Presented by Amy E. Knowles,

A candidate for the degree of doctor of education,

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

_____

Dr. Kennedy Ongaga, Dissertation Chair

_____

Dr. Leslie Anderson, Committee Member

_____

Dr. Cynthia MacGregor, Committee Member

_____

Dr. Alan Tinkler, Committee Member

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Dr. Leslie Anderson, for serving on my dissertation committee. The conversations that we have had, the resources you have shared, and the generous comments that you left on my draft enriched my project. Your questions have stretched my thinking and learning and will continue to do so beyond this paper.

To my colleagues, Dr. Cathie English and Dr. Heidi Hadley: Thank you for cheering me on, taking an interest in my work, and for being the absolute best colleagues in the world. You are both incredible examples of scholar practitioners, and I am grateful to be in your presence daily.

To my Department Head, Dr. Linda Moser: Thank you for encouraging me to pursue this dream. You introduced me to the ELPA program, and your vote of confidence made me believe that I could do this. Thank you, too, for asking about my project when we would talk and for taking such an interest in my journey.

To Dr. Danielle Lillge: You were my first true mentor. I have learned so much from you – your knowledge about English education is vast, and I have learned as your student and as your colleague. I have also learned about ways of working and processes that were essential to completing this program while I worked and raised a family.

To Ms. Tracy Dalton: Thank you for sharing your technical writing superpowers with me to address my Achilles heel – formatting! The time that you spent with me was a gift.

To my dissertation support group: Keely Scott, Margo Griffith, and Elizabeth Reger, you three exceptional women were the best support that I could have had during this journey. You three were a text, phone call, or coffee date away – always. Thank you

for sharing your tips and tricks, for commiserating when thigs got tough, and for genuinely lifting one another up, as friends do.

To my participants: Thank you for agreeing to meet and talk and celebrate your good work. Thank you for what you do every day in your classrooms. Thank you for having difficult conversations and for intentionally loving those students who need to be loved. Thank you for engaging your students in cool, complex, and important thinking. Thank you for being the kind of colleagues who inspire others to take chances. Thank you for generously sharing your work with me.

To my parents, thank you for prioritizing education in our home. Mom, you were my first teacher. I remember tracing letters and numbers that you made from sandpaper before we began school. You always loved reading, and our lives were filled with books and educational experiences. Dad, even though I did not take your advice to "get as much education as I could before I started a family," it resonated with me. It may have taken me awhile, but look, I did it!

To my family, Jerry, Lizzie, and Nate: I love you. Jerry, thank you for always verbalizing how proud you are of me, my topic of study, and my work. I value your insights into this project and my life in general. You are my original life coach and my MVP. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue this dream. Dear Lizzie and Nate, follow your dreams and know that by taking difficult steps, working hard, and showing up, you can accomplish more than you thought you could. Always remember, "It is never too late to be who you might have been." – George Eliot

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This research addresses the challenges of engaging students in critical conversations about controversial topics in racially homogeneous settings. Data analysis from this qualitative, phenomenological study reveals how veteran high school teachers understand and experience their contexts and how they navigate the complex instructional strategies required by English language arts state learning standards yet may be challenged by community stakeholders. Findings suggest that teachers enjoy differing levels of freedom regarding content yet focus on building relationships and engaging students' thinking. This study offers a framework for critically engaging students while attending to distributive and relational aspects of justice-oriented teaching.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

A border maps limits: it keeps people in and out of an area; it marks the ending of a safe zone and the beginning of an unsafe zone. To confront a border and, more so, to cross a border presumes great risk.

—*Alejandro Morales, Fiction Past, Present, Future Perfect*

Background

My first experience crossing an intellectual border (JanMohamed, 1993) where my thinking was challenged as I encountered additional information was as a new teacher in Springfield, MO. I had not considered why my English language arts (ELA) classes were racially homogeneous; they mirrored the community in which I lived. However, in 1996, in observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, I attended a march on the square in Springfield, MO and learned that in 1906 three innocent Black youths were lynched there, prompting a mass exodus of a large, thriving Black community. The lack of diversity in my classroom was not coincidental; it was a result of violence toward Black Springfieldians that resulted in a demographic shift from an approximately 20 percent Black population to 2 percent within a decade (Wilson, 2010).

Similar incidents happened across Southwest Missouri during the early 20th Century. While Springfield has experienced growth and has become more racially diverse over the last few decades, the surrounding communities remain racially homogeneous. This experience required me to approach the border of my ignorance and acknowledge what Huber and Whelan (1999) term "positional" power: of sameness and distance, of arrogance, judgment and silence, to understand the underlying causes of the racial demographic makeup of Southwest Missouri and implications for teachers and students.

One of my personal objectives is to guide teacher candidates with whom I work into new *borderlands* of understanding when considering emotive social issues.

A decade later, the importance of this border knowledge again surfaced as a teacher educator. I shared concern with student teachers who reported "sticking points" to equitable teaching that they encountered in racially homogeneous classrooms in the mid-sized schools surrounding Springfield (Lillge & Knowles, 2019). While visiting these classrooms, I also began to hear rhetorically violent language ignored by typical, White teachers. For example, while reading the opening chapter of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* students were tasked with drawing the town square as depicted in the text. One student included a lynching post, and commented, "We need to bring lynching back." No one in the classroom, including the teacher, challenged this comment. I also noticed pedagogical choices that glossed over or even reinforced systemic inequities and prevented border crossing (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001). This knowledge required that I adjust my teaching to provide the space for students to talk about these issues and rehearse possibilities for action, which became a pedagogical staple in our discussions.

Just as my students encounter dissonance when entering schools, I too, cross an intellectual border from the university to school contexts. Within the past year, a principal called to see if I approved an assignment given by a student teacher that asked students to consider aspects of their own identity. This was problematic to him because areas they were invited to consider in personal reflection included socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and gender identity. A parent had called to complain, and the principal reminded me that his was a politically conservative district, and social issues were not the purview of the public school, but rather the responsibility of parents. He was narrating

3

what Apple (2005) called an "enhanced parental voice" (p. 274) in conservative politics that seeks to move collective decision-making from the public to private sector. Additionally, a neo-conservative educational ideology calls for a 'return' to morality as defined by the dominant culture and a fear of the 'Other' (Apple, 2005). Thus, I realized the prodigious wall between the two borderlands.

Finally, this semester, a student in my Intro to English education course emailed to undeclare her major. Although her courses challenged her, she was "firm on where she stands." She "is not for encouraging and empowering every student regardless of gender, sex, religion, etc." and needs to be "real with herself and others." This example illustrates the complexity of the issues inherent in the work of high school ELA teachers who seek to engage students critically as well as the challenge that teacher education programs (TEPs) face as they strive to embed culturally responsive and equitable pedagogy into teacher preparation and development. These experiences and more have caused me to reflect on the dilemma facing teachers who believe in the democratic ideals of justice for all and who want to engage with the rich social issues found in literature but who find themselves at odds with their school districts, their students, or their own identities grounded in their current knowledge and conflicting values.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher preparation programs center culturally responsive teaching to prepare teachers to enter diverse settings and teach equitably so that all students can reach their academic potential (Gay, 2018; Henning, 2013; Matteson & Boyd, 2017), and current literature focuses on culturally responsive teaching in diverse schools (Ahmed, 2020;

Cho, 2017; Chubbuck, 2010; Conklin & Hughes, 2016; Hytten & Bettez, 2011; North, 2006).

Yet there is a gap in knowledge about how teachers enter racially homogeneous settings and become "critical helpers" (Brookfield, 1987). Critical helpers guide others across intellectual borders. They engage issues from multiple perspectives and facilitate the complex thinking and dialogue that is required to do so. Current research details the challenges inherent in such endeavors (Ahmed, 2020; Dover, 2013; Henning, 2013) without providing insight into pedagogical moves teachers can make to support students' critical thinking efforts. In these settings, "multicultural education is generally seen to be about the 'Other' and taught in ways in which the 'dominating aspects of white culture are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of struggle is muted'" (Giroux, 1992/2005, p. 101).

This shortfall perpetuates a system in which the dominant narrative is the only narrative (Freire, 1968/2018; Gorski, 2016). Additionally, there is an ongoing conflict arising from distinctly different views about democracy in schools and communities. This conflict is grounded in a sense of loss of traditional White American values and morality, a decline of Euro-centric canonical curriculum, and a scrutiny of teachers' actions (Apple, 2018). As a result, little is known about how White high school ELA teachers in public, mid-sized, racially homogeneous schools engage students in critical thinking about social issues that may be controversial.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the courageous practices that experienced White high school ELA teachers use to engage students in critically

5

considering perspectives from non-White cultures. Specifically, I will explore the experiences of high school ELA teachers who are teaching in racially homogeneous schools in order to understand how they engage students critically in a particular context. It must be acknowledged that this work can be divisive in districts that do not have a stated equity and diversity initiative, and border pedagogy may provide a bridge that teachers and students can utilize to cross into new ways of knowing. According to Elbaz-Luwisch (2001), "hooks (1994) lamented the fact that we often have no concrete examples of individuals who actually occupy different locations within structures, sharing ideas with one another, mapping out terrains of commonality, connection and shared concern" (p. 83).

The purpose of this study was to provide concrete examples of such teaching. Apple (2018) cautioned not to "be satisfied with simplistic slogans that may be effective for rallying opposition but are much less effective at determining tactics and spaces of possibility" (p. 76). Racially homogeneous schools where students are predominantly White have not been the focus of socially just teaching practices, yet they are rich spaces of possibility for crossing intellectual borders in search of improving students' sense of agency.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are: In racially homogeneous low poverty schools, what are White veteran high school ELA teachers' experiences of:

a. The school context?

b. How knowledge is received?

c. How knowledge is produced?

d. How knowledge is negotiated?

Knowledge, according to Giroux (2005), is how language is used to instill a sense of political, ethical, economic, and social responsibility in students. Knowledge allows students to speak "*with* rather than exclusively *for* others" (p. 21) about social issues, to think critically about their own cultural capital and place in the world, and to understand their own identities (Giroux, 2005). Knowledge includes the skills students need not just to climb the socioeconomic ladder, but to imagine a future that is better than the present and to be cultural producers of that future (Giroux, 2005). Knowledge encompasses a discourse of possibility.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

My personal and professional experience has prompted me to theorize about the dilemma facing teachers who espouse a commitment to socially just teaching and then enter a context where that commitment feels obsolete or even discouraged due to a perceived lack of diversity. Although previous research provides some insight into how White teachers can respond thoughtfully to the diversity present in classrooms that appear to be integrated, it is limited by not addressing how teachers can enter racially homogeneous classrooms and engage in the important work of socially just teaching with

students who look alike. Culturally responsive teaching requires that both difference and power be addressed (Gay, 2018). Limiting socially just teaching practices to schools with a racially diverse student population significantly limits the efficacy of such initiatives. As an entry into this work, I relied on the state teaching and learning standards, the habits of mind and pedagogy required to enact those standards, and a framework for thinking about how a racially homogeneous classroom might engage in equitable teaching and learning practices.

This study utilized border theory (Giroux,1992/2005) which conceptualizes the place of culture and society withing structures of power to understand how teachers can engage students in the complex thinking that state teaching and learning standards require. Bloom's Taxonomy outlines six cognitive skill levels that move from simple to complex with analysis and evaluation identified as complex thinking skills (Krathwohl, 2002). A revised version of the taxonomy included a metacognitive knowledge category as research continued to demonstrate the importance of awareness of metacognitive ability and being able to adapt ways of thinking (Krathwohl, 2002). The Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Framework illustrates the structures present in the thinking process and the behaviors required for critical thinking including self-assessment (Elder & Paul, 2007). Behaviors essential to the critical thinking process include considering one's own point of view, checking assumptions, raising questions, and gathering relevant data (Merriam & Bierema, 2017; Brookfield, 1987).

The Missouri Learning Standards (2016) that guide ELA instruction require that

> students respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives including those
>
> presented in diverse media; synthesize claims made on all sides of an

issue, and when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and

understanding and make new connections in light of evidence and

reasoning presented. (Missouri Learning Standards, 2016, p. 18)

Additionally, the first Missouri Teaching Standards require that teachers "understand the

central concepts, structures, and tools of inquiry of the discipline(s) and create learning

experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful and engaging for all

students" with a quality indicator of "diverse social and cultural perspectives" (Missouri

Teacher Standards, 2013, p. 3) The fourth standard requires that "the teacher uses a

variety of instructional strategies and resources to encourage students' critical thinking,

problem solving, and performance skills" (Missouri Teacher Standards, 2013, p 5).

With border theory as a lens, this study will investigate how border pedagogy might

support teachers' efforts to engage students in the critical thinking required by state

standards.

> Crossing borders of knowledge, and entering into '*borderlands*,' where
>
> existing patterns of thought, relationship, and identity are called into
>
> question and juxtaposed with alternative ways of knowing and being,
>
> provides the opportunity for creative and oppositional reconstructions of
>
> self, knowledge, and culture. (Giroux, 1992/1995, p. 34)

Paulo Freire encouraged the study of one's existence and the power relations

inherent in identity. To do so requires intellectual humility in that one must identify with

another and adopt a position from which to "critique and distance oneself from one's

'own' subject position," and rather than complete disidentification with oneself, "[from]

affiliations with other positions, of defining equivalences and constructing alliances"

(JanMohamed, 1993, p. 111). Freire's work was with the oppressed, or peasants, and encouraged those who were in the non-dominant group to reimagine themselves as border crossers into new ways of thinking and knowing. However, this study will investigate how those in the dominant culture might do the same intellectual crossing of borders to engage in the critical thinking process in defense of a more equitable and democratic educational experience. This looks like a typical White teacher in a homogeneous classroom leading a collective and intentional effort to cross a border.

Border pedagogy may provide a framework for teachers and students in racially homogeneous classrooms to cross borders of understanding in order to consider complex and emotive issues such as race, diversity, equity, inclusion, and identity. Entering this borderland, students can question existing patterns of thought, engage in dialogue with others, experiment, create, and imagine possibilities (Giroux, 1992/2005).

The concept of border pedagogy grows out of the work of Freire (1968/2018) and speaks clearly to issues of social justice and equality among groups divided in very concrete ways by the powerful but often invisible borders of race, social and economic class, gender and, in this case, ethnic/national identity. (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001, p. 83)

What makes border crossing possible is a border pedagogy framework grounded in critical thinking skills and habits of mind that usher students into a critical learning community which hooks (1989) characterized as a "space of radical openness" (p. 19). The graphic in Figure 1 illustrates the ways in which teachers can invite students to cross intellectual borders in the ELA classroom.

Figure 1
Instructional Choices to Engage Students in Critical Thinking
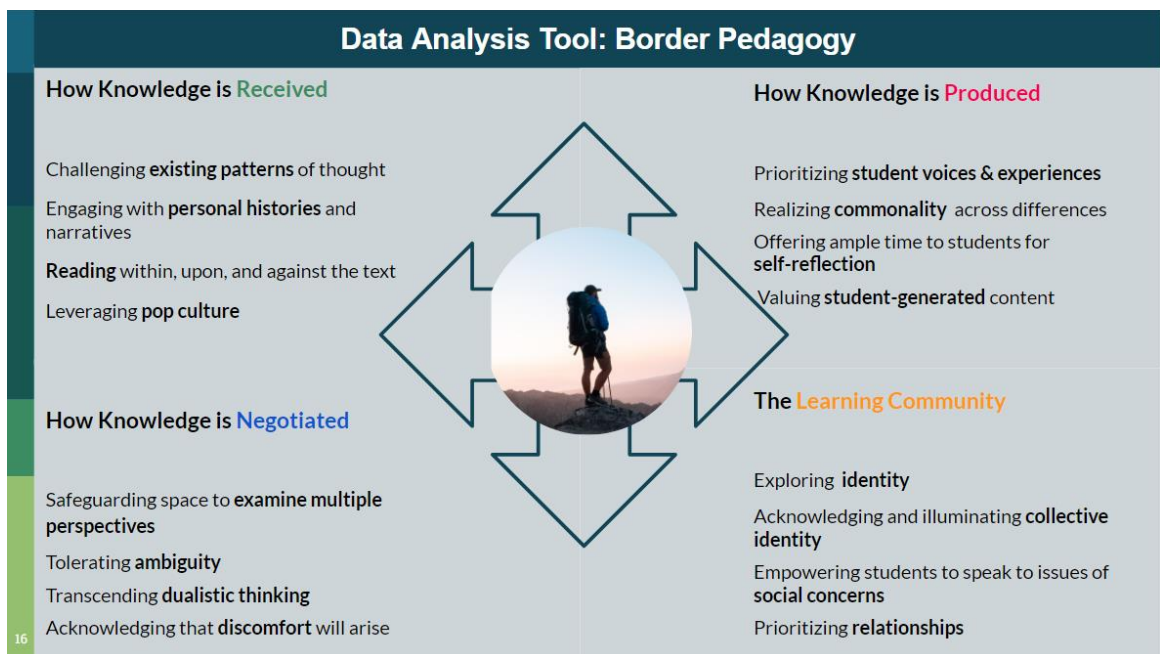
Note. This figure represents ways in which teachers might use border pedagogy to engage students critically. In ELA classrooms that utilize critical literacy, knowledge is defined as student agency through language use (Giroux, 1992/2005).

Design of the Study

The present study focused on two aspects of justice-oriented teaching in racially homogeneous schools to augment the existing gaps in literature. The first was to understand the experiences of teachers in these contexts. In other words, how does the context provide opportunities for teachers to invite students to cross intellectual borders, or how does the context foreclose opportunities for teachers and students to become

border crossers? Second, what are the participants doing as a result? That is, how social justice issues and different dimensions of diversity, including those that are detectable, delicately subtle, and those that are invisible negotiated in these classrooms? As an educational issue, diversity is an integral element that enhances the learning, development, and career development of all students. Diversity enriches the quality of students' educational experience by exposing them to multiple perspectives and different approaches to what is being learned and how it is being learned.

A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, not much has been written about justice-oriented teaching practices in racially homogeneous settings, and so existing theories about socially just teaching do not apply (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, while I utilized the framework of border pedagogy (Giroux, 1992/2005), I drew on findings that emerged from initial interviews and focus groups to build toward an understanding about what was possible in these contexts, and therefore the study was inductive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, a primary motive for this study was to understand the experiences of and subsequent actions that participants made in order to develop categories for action that lead to intellectual border crossing (Charmaz, 2014).

The study utilized a phenomenological approach to describe the experiences of White high school ELA teachers in mid-sized, racially homogeneous schools who engage students in critical thinking about social issues that may be uncomfortable for some students. According to Mertens (2019), phenomenology is used to "describe an event from the view of the participant" (p. 255). In this study, the culture of the school was central to teachers' experiences, and so focus groups and individual interviews were

12

utilized to understand the interaction between the teachers and the community as well as instructional choices that teachers made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study utilized the stories participants told to glean meaning (Creswell, 2016), and the narrative strove to "convince an audience that the researcher had 'been there' and they could have been there, too" (Sikes, 2005, p. 79). The aim of this study was twofold: first, to uncover the contextual factors that underlie these experiences in order to understand them, and to develop a framework for action that went beyond theory.

A social constructivist, qualitative approach allowed the participants' experiences and "complexity of views" to inform the research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Social constructivist research is characterized by a desire to listen carefully to what participants say and do to make sense of and interpret meaning from such actions (Creswell, 2016). Because one of the goals of the study was to address how this work might be done, I used the constructs found in the border pedagogy framework to analyze the participants' practices.

The audiences for the study were teachers and teacher educators who desire to explore the social issues found in literature and in our communities but are unsure how to navigate the pedagogical tensions and contradictions of social justice in some districts. It is informative to understand both the experiences of teachers currently working in these settings as well as their instructional choices. Focus group, interview, and artifact data were collected to understand the "lived realities encountered in the field setting" (Creswell, 2009, p. 13).

The Setting

The study explored the instructional practices of local public high school ELA teachers. Participants were employed full-time in mid-sized and racially non-diverse districts with more than 87% White students that border a more urban and slightly more diverse city in the Midwest. These schools do not have a stated equity and diversity initiative, and they are "standards-driven" districts that are characterized by high academic achievement. The study explored demographic data for each district including student characteristics, free and reduced lunch rates, and graduation rates. The district commonalities as well as differences were indicated.

The Participants

I sought the participation of six White, veteran high school ELA teachers. Participants in the study were veteran teachers who had acquired tenure according to the Missouri Tenure Act (Revisor of Missouri, 2005). Participants were current high school ELA teachers whose experience ranged from nine to twenty years and who taught in districts that are racially homogeneous with more than 87% White students. I used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2009) to identify White high school ELA teachers who courageously engaged mostly White students in critical thinking about social issues and incorporated perspectives from non-dominant cultures.

In my current position as an ELA student teaching supervisor, I visit classrooms that student teachers are placed in to observe the candidate teach and provide feedback. I supervise, on average, 12 student teachers each semester, and I visit each five times. Thus, for over a decade, I have been in classrooms in the Midwest several times a week. The relationship between the cooperating teacher, student teacher, and the university is

extremely important to the candidate's professional growth, and I prioritize building these relationships in my work. As a result, I have learned about cooperating teachers' instructional strategies, teaching philosophies, and interactions with students.

I have worked with each of the participants in this study as a cooperating teacher. I have been in their classrooms on multiple occasions and have observed the ways that their interactions with students and their content aligns with their values and ethic of teaching for justice. I have also heard anecdotal evidence from their student teachers and colleagues about the ways in which they engage students critically.

I contacted each participant via email to schedule a time to visit. During the visit, I explained the purpose of the study as well as why they were chosen. I provided them with a one-page outline that explained the purpose, process and intended outcome of the study (Appendix A). If they agreed to participate, I sent the informed consent (see Appendix B) via email (see Appendix C) for them to read in advance of the first focus group. I had paper copies at the focus group and obtained signatures before we began. If a participant joined the focus group via Zoom, I requested that a signed copy be emailed in advance of the initial focus group. After the initial focus group, I met individually with each participant for both interviews and convened as a group again for a final focus group.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Data was collected from three sources: focus groups, interviews, and instructional artifacts. Data was collected over the course of three months. The first data collection point was a focus group where six participants were introduced to border theory and border pedagogy (Giroux 1992/2005) and explored the intersection of theory and practice

by noting opportunities for border crossing in the state learning standards. Participants heard stories of my own intellectual border crossings and were invited to share stories of their own intellectual border crossings within their contexts. According to Kruger and Casey (2015), the purpose of a focus group is to understand participants' experiences with an issue or topic. Participants were chosen because they have something in common that relates to a topic. The focus group utilized non-directive questions (see Appendix D) which allowed participants to share both experiences as well as attitudes (Kruger & Casey, 2015).

Patton (2020) predicted that the researcher gets close to the participants because of time spent together, shared social experiences, empathy, and confidentiality. "Learning through empathy" (p. 51) is a phrase that guided my research. When I was a teacher, I recall the wariness I would feel when an outsider who did not know my students or my context came to offer professional development. Because I am no longer a K-12 classroom teacher, I positioned the participants as the teaching experts. I began the focus group by sharing what I am hoping to learn from their experiences, and that my role was to gather and curate their insights and practices to communicate to others what we collectively learned.

Following the first focus group, I conducted two in-depth interviews with each of the six participants to understand how participants engage students in critical thinking around emotive issues of race, diversity, equity, inclusion, and identity. These interviews were semi-structured lasting between 60-75 minutes to allow the experience of the participant to emerge and evolve (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prior to the first interview, the participants were given a border pedagogy framework (Giroux 1992/2005) and were

asked to think about ways they may or may not utilize the strategies outlined in the framework. The interviews focused on how the following tenets of border pedagogy are utilized in ELA classrooms: how knowledge is shared with students and among students, how knowledge is created by students, how knowledge is negotiated in the classroom, and the learning community (see Appendix E). I also asked them to reflect on their teaching journey, particularly how they came to teach critically, instances of intellectual border crossings in their own professional lives, and how they utilized border pedagogy in their teaching. I sought to identify shared experiences that aligned with the research questions, and participants were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of these experiences (Seidman, 2013).

During a second interview, each participant was asked to bring an artifact or artifacts that they used to engage students critically. I solicited the help of participants in securing artifacts used to engage students critically to analyze as part of an ongoing conversation into which I was being invited (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2007). Data collection included how and why documents were made, what they contained, and how they functioned (Prior, 2003). Possible artifacts included lesson planning materials, activities, discussion prompts, assessments, or any other instructional tools. Data was analyzed according to the border pedagogy quadrants (see Appendix F).

The final data point was a focus group with all participants in which I shared initial findings as well as the instructional strategies that had been shared. The purpose of this focus group was to ensure that data were being represented as intended by allowing members to check initial findings (Mertens, 2019). This final conversation elicited additional instructional strategies that came to mind as participants shared.

According to Patton (2002), capturing the words of those being interviewed is essential to effective data analysis; therefore, I secured permission to audio record both focus groups and all interviews. Recording allowed me to engage in a conversation rather than focus on note taking during each interaction. Seidman (2019) recommended that the most reliable way to work with the researcher's words is to transcribe them for study. Otherwise, the researcher's summaries and paraphrases may "substitute the researcher's consciousness for that of the participant" (p. 123). Confirmability or neutrality was assured by relying on participant's words as recorded as well as follow-up member checks during the final focus group conversation. In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument; therefore, I clearly stated and monitored my beliefs and biases by journaling and participating in peer debriefing with a trusted colleague throughout the process to track my impact on the study (Mertens, 2019).

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis of data began early in the data collection process (Creswell, 2009). Memo writing about emergent themes and possible questions ensured that the data collection process was participant-driven (Creswell, 2016). Simultaneously, data was prepared for analysis by using Otter.ai to transcribe interviews, reflective post-interview notes were typed, and artifacts like lesson plans were organized and categorized.

As data was initially collected and read, general themes that emerged were noted in the margins and in memos. Data was winnowed to support emergent general themes, and portions were bracketed and reflected upon in relation to them. Winnowed data included significant statements, meaning units, and essence descriptions (Creswell, 2009). These themes were expected, based on the literature review; they may be

surprising or unexpected and take the study in a new direction; or they might be unusual and warrant additional study (Creswell, 2016). The research questions required a combination of predetermined and emerging codes or descriptions including codes that addressed a larger theoretical perspective. I utilized a constant comparative method of data analysis based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) notion of grounded theory in which responses are compared and themes emerge based on the frequency, specificity, emotion and extensiveness that themes hold. Once interrelated themes and descriptions began to emerge, the data analysis turned to interpretation of meaning from the data to provide thick, rich description of the experiences of teachers as well as categories or themes that conceptualized the instructional choices teachers made. Data was presented in narrative form.

Efforts to Support Quality of Research

My role at the university is a non-tenure track field instructor. I supervise student teachers in the field, and I teach English education courses. In response to my students' experiences in classrooms, a colleague and I co-authored a framework for socially just English language arts teaching, and the program in which I work centers socially just pedagogy and practice as a core belief. During my annual performance review, my Department Head praised my design of an Intro to English education course that prioritizes issues related to equitable and just teaching. I acknowledge that this initiative is at odds with the conservative districts in which many of our teacher candidates (TCs) complete field-based apprenticeships and secure teaching positions.

I am a White, middle-class, cisgender woman with eight years of classroom experience before coming to the university. I am aware that my identity positions me as

both an insider and an outsider in this work. I am an insider at a university whose public affairs mission has three pillars: ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement (Missouri State University, 2021, Public Affairs Pillars). I am also an insider in a racially homogeneous, politically conservative area of the country. I was raised as an Evangelical Christian, and I attended a local Christian university. I understand the discourse of some who question the morality of acceptance and teaching "these kinds of topics" in school. I am also an outsider in that many of the schools in which I work as a field instructor both mirror my experience and diverge from my current beliefs. I am aware that universities have academic freedom that is lacking in K-12 schools (Apple, 2018). Often, student teachers narrate a desire to be socially just educators but are unsure how to do this work in a predominantly White placement set in a politically conservative district. I practiced reflexology throughout the study by clearly identifying my preconceptions, past experiences, beliefs, and theoretical frame (Holmes, 2010). I learned ways in which this work can be done within the parameters of the Missouri Teaching and Learning Standards.

I am aware that my relationships with former students and cooperating teachers might have encouraged them to participate in this study. I also believe that having prior relationships with these participants encouraged honest and open sharing, and it felt familiar to discuss instructional practices. I followed ethical research standards to protect the identities of participants and preserve our professional relationships. I was also aware of my bias toward their perceived pedagogy and allowed the data to inform my analysis.

Research began with a review of the American Research Association's Code of Ethical Standards Conduct (AERA, 2011). Additionally, I applied with the IRB through

the University of Missouri for study approval. I explained the purpose of the study to participants both verbally and in written form, provided Informed Consent forms, and allowed participants to ask questions prior to signing.

Rigor in carrying out the study was achieved by seeking to understand the experiences of the participants. A trustworthy study is achieved when the conclusion makes sense based on the data collected and analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 238; Creswell, 2016, p. 201-204). Good qualitative research is explicit about the role of the researcher, including the relationship to those studied, making a case for the topic of study, clarity of methods, and convincing findings (Lichtman, 2013). Some of the ways that I ensured credibility were to engage with participants in an on-going manner so that data collection was persistent, sustained over time, and shared with participants so that they could affirm that I had represented their work as intended or could correct it to do so.

Other aspects of trustworthiness were addressed by including a transparent description of the steps taken in the study from beginning to end (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Mertens (2020), other ways to ensure dependability and confirmability are to conduct audits. I followed protocols throughout the research process to document the quality of the inquiry process, and I communicated a clear and logical path from data to its source.

<div align="center">

Definition of Key Terms

</div>

Homogeneous. For the purposes of this study, *homogeneous* refers to the racial demographic of the district as reported by DESE. It is acknowledged that all schools are comprised of students that are diverse in many ways that may not be apparent in the over

87% White student demographic. Additionally, these districts have a free and reduced lunch rate that is well below the national average, and they are located in low poverty communities. They also have a much higher than average graduation rate which indicates a focus on high achievement and high academic standards including standardized test scores.

Intellectual Border. For the purposes of this study, an *intellectual border* refers to a new way of thinking about something that deals with either distributive or relational justice.

White Veteran High School Teachers. For the purpose of this study, *White* refers to a skin color classification and is a marker of an identification with a particular racial group, or non-identification with another group (for example, Latino*). Veteran* refers to a teacher who has earned tenure and has been teaching for over five years.

Significance of the Study

While much has been written about how White middle class female teachers can enter racially diverse classrooms and engage in culturally responsive teaching, there is little research about how White teachers can enter racially homogeneous classrooms and courageously engage with White students about issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Some common roadblocks to this work are the fear of losing rapport, the conflicting aims of education, losing control of conversations, and a lack of knowledge (Apple, 2005; Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). Additionally, veteran teachers reported a change in the latitude they must choose curriculum and an increase in parental involvement in their pedagogical choices. Previous research has detailed the challenges teachers face as they center critical reflection; however little research has been done about the pedagogical choices that make this work possible in racially homogeneous contexts.

This study functions to support teachers as they encounter the contradictions between what the Missouri Learning Standards and the Missouri Teaching Standards require and the realities of classrooms in the Midwest where politically conservative districts and racially homogeneous classrooms make this work less compelling or even taboo. By narrating the experiences of teachers, this study provides insight into the challenges and the opportunities present in these contexts. Furthermore, this study provides a framework for high school ELA teachers to engage students in critical thinking by understanding how border pedagogy supports students' critical thinking in high school ELA classrooms.

Summary

This study contributes to the understanding of how White high school ELA teachers in mid-sized racially homogeneous districts can engage students in the critical thinking skills required by state standards. Pedagogical choices were analyzed to understand possibilities for engaging in thinking about critical social issues in these contexts. Additionally, collecting qualitative data about the experiences of these teachers illustrated the challenges and possibilities inherent in classrooms from the participants' point of view (Mertens, 2019).

Giroux's (1992/2005) border theory is a framework through which to consider the possibilities of students becoming intellectual border crossers. Crossing intellectual borders requires that students engage in critical thinking as required by the Missouri State Teaching and Learning Standards. Brookfield (1987) defined the critical thinking process, and Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) and The Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Framework (Elder & Paul, 2007) further delineated the habits of mind and

behaviors inherent in critical thinking. The study sought to understand the extent to which border pedagogy is used to support students' efforts to engage in critical thinking.

I collected and analyzed qualitative data to understand both the experiences of high school ELA teachers as well as how teachers utilize border pedagogy to engage students in the critical thinking process.

SECTION 2: PRACTITIONER CONTEXT

Currently, existent research on racially just teaching focuses on the equitable achievement of racially diverse students taught by a mostly White and female middle class teaching force (Cochran-Smith, 2008). Yet, many teachers in Southwest Missouri who have made a commitment to teaching for justice work in racially homogeneous classrooms where most of the students are White. Madison, a White teacher candidate in my Methods of Teaching English course, had earned a minor in Diversity Studies. When she received her student teaching placement information, she was upset to be placed in a racially homogenous rural school for her student teaching because she had planned to be a "social justice teacher." She could not visualize how issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion could be relevant in a racially homogeneous district, with nearly 100% White students. and she wanted to "make a difference."

Madison's placement is not unique to Southwest Missouri, and teachers with a stated commitment to culturally responsive teaching may be unsure how to transition from those aspirations to action in classrooms that appear to lack diversity. Bogotch (2002) asserted that social justice is a social construction and "there are no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership practices" (p. 153). Rather than ascribing meaning to socially just teaching, Bogotch argued for action. This section will explore the history, organization of schools in SW Missouri, the leadership structures and policies that exist, and how this study might address the action of socially just ELA teaching and learning in this context.

Socially Just Teaching

Although previous research sought to define justice-oriented teaching preparation and practice, it is limited in two ways. First, there are several terms associated with teaching for social justice that can complicate just what is meant by equitable or justice-oriented teaching, especially in contexts as varied as public schools. For example, Sleeter (2015) described socially just teachers in the following manner:

> First, justice-oriented teachers reject a deficit understanding of students and families and, instead, situate them within an analysis of structural inequities. Second, they build a reciprocal relationship with students, families, and communities. Third, they teach to the high academic expectations built on students' language, culture, experience, and identity. Last, teachers committed to social justice construct and utilize inclusive curriculum that addresses issues of equity and power to develop democratic activism. (p. 75)

While this is a comprehensive list of teacher behaviors, it does not account for differences in contexts. The setting of schools, what Smagorinsky (2018) termed "competing centers of gravity," complicates what teachers enact regardless of their training and beliefs (Dover, 2013; Navarro et al., 2020; Um, 2019), and teacher agency can be diminished in contexts where educational reform stymies the important identity work necessary for change (Lasky, 2005).

Schools are complex organizations, and districts vary greatly across the country. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), even though the student population in public schools is increasingly diverse, in 2017-2018, 79 percent of

public-school teachers were White (NCES, 2020). Additionally, Houck and Murray

(2019) documented a "*taxonomy of White resistance*" to integrate public education

including legal measures, voluntary moves to maintain demographically homogeneous

districts, and the splintering of districts that pull funding from higher needs areas to

concentrate local funds in certain areas. As a result, White, female, and middle-class

teachers often work in schools that have become less racially integrated. It is widely

accepted (through CAEP standards and professional organization standards) that teachers

entering racially diverse classrooms should demonstrate familiarity with cultures

different from their own and plan and implement lessons accordingly (Henning, 2013;

Lynn & Smith-Maddox, 2007; Matteson & Boyd, 2017). This pedagogical framework is

called culturally responsive teaching and responds to the needs of students in racially

diverse schools (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

      The goal of culturally responsive teaching, according to Hammond (2015), is to

support the rigorous cognitive development of all students by recognizing

> students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond
>
> positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural
>
> knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new
>
> concepts and content in order to promote effective **information**
>
> **processing**. All the while, the educator understands the importance of
>
> being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the
>
> student in order to create a safe space for learning. (p. 15)

The rigorous work of culturally responsive teaching is illustrated in the Ready for Rigor

framework (see Figure 2). This intentional instructional mindset necessarily requires that

28

teachers are "in relationship with students and content in a different way" (p. 52).

Regardless of the cultural and racial makeup of students, self-reflection and an understanding of one's own identity in the world are what Mills & Ballantyne (2010) identified as the first step in a hierarchy of change required to engage in socially just teaching and by extension culturally responsive teaching. Self-reflection is followed by an openness to change, an engagement with students and content in new ways, and finally a commitment to culturally responsive teaching is the enactment of the framework.

Figure 2

Ready for rigor framework

READY for RIGOR
A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching

AWARENESS
- Know and own your cultural lens
- Understand the three levels of culture
- Recognize cultural archetypes of individualism and collectivism
- Understand how the brain learns
- Acknowledge the socio-political context around race and language
- Recognize your brain's triggers around race and culture
- Broaden your interpretation of culturally and linguistically diverse students' learning behaviors

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS
- Reimagine the student and teacher relationship as a partnership
- Take responsibility to reduce students' social-emotional stress from stereotype threat and microaggressions
- Balance giving students both care and push
- Help students cultivate a positive mindset and sense of self-efficacy
- Support each student to take greater ownership for his learning
- Give students language to talk about their learning moves

Affirmation
Wise Feedback
Instructional Conversation

Students are Ready for Rigor and Independent Learning

Validation

INFORMATION PROCESSING
- Provide appropriate challenge in order to stimulate brain growth to increase intellective capacity
- Help students process new content using methods from oral traditions
- Connect new content to culturally relevant examples and metaphors from students' community and everyday lives
- Provide students authentic opportunities to process content
- Teach students cognitive routines using the brain's natural learning systems
- Use formative assessments and feedback to increase intellective capacity

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS & LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
- Create an environment that is intellectually and socially safe for learning
- Make space for student voice and agency
- Build classroom culture and learning around communal (sociocultural) talk and task structures
- Use classroom rituals and routines to support a culture of learning
- Use principles of restorative justice to manage conflicts and redirect negative behavior

© Zaretta Hammond, 2013   www.ready4rigor.com

Hammond is calling for change in classrooms where most students are underserved students of color and English learners. However, if wide-sweeping and systemic change

is to occur, then classrooms everywhere must grapple with issues that affect all Americans. According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant (1999), "there has been a long-standing discussion among African Americans about the role that formal education could play in either maintaining or transforming the existing social order" (p. 707). Hammond experienced first-hand how a different framework for teaching resulted in her own cognitive development, and she argued for a change to the existing social order.

Because of the disconnect between the ideals of American democracy and the realities of many under-resourced groups, Beauboeuf–Lafontant (1999) argued that "culturally relevant teaching" be renamed "politically relevant teaching." In some contexts, politically relevant teaching looks like educators "[recognizing] the existence of oppression in their students' lives and seeking to use their personal, professional, and social power to encourage children to understand and undermine their subordination" (p. 702). It is essential that theory and research focus on how to best educate those whose promise of education has been broken by a flawed system (Ladson-Billings, 2006), and much of the literature on socially just teaching does just that.

Culturally responsive education does not exclude teachers and students in contexts that are mostly White. In fact, North's (2006) study confirmed that teachers in various contexts were grappling with the following question: "Should teachers focus their time on helping students function in the system as it is or work to transform it?" (p. 562). For systems to transform, all students must be taught in culturally responsive ways. In addition to a mostly White teaching force, most public-school leadership is also White, and according to Singleton and Linton (2006), "sustainable reform will occur only when White people individually and collectively embrace and encourage change" (p. 28). One

challenge to this shift is that while educators of color often have racial consciousness, they may lack the ability, because of power dynamics, to engage Whites in conversations about issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Conversely, White educators often lack racial consciousness and find it easier to avoid discussing issues that may raise conflict or tension (Singleton & Linton, 2006). This results in silenced dialogue where issues are ignored and avoided, thus perpetuating the status quo.

Preparing Teachers

A second major limitation in the previous research is how a commitment to teaching justly is enacted in practice. According to a review of literature conducted by Grant and Agosto (2008), attention was paid to critical pedagogies in teacher education programs but little to what graduates of those programs were doing in their classrooms as a result. Further, Navarro, et al., (2020) conducted an auto ethnographic qualitative study of teachers who felt pushed out of the classroom by neoliberal school reforms like "constant school restructuring and mass teacher layoffs, challenging professional development demands, restrictive curriculum, and enduring harassment by administration" (p. 15). The purposes of education, what can be done to further them, and what that means in various educational contexts are central issues.

Teacher preparation programs center culturally responsive teaching to prepare teachers to enter diverse settings and teach equitably (Gay, 2019; Henning, 2013; Matteson & Boyd, 2017). Concurrently, researchers posit theories of social justice that define principles for action. For example, Ahmed (2018) explored the evolution of teacher candidate's conceptions of social justice teaching while enrolled in a teacher education program and found that the tensions that they encountered while student

31

teaching in urban, high-poverty schools solidified their understanding of and commitment to equitable teaching. The participants acknowledged that the act is personal and includes critically caring for students while navigating the political landscape of schools (Ahmed, 2018).

Conklin and Hughes (2016) identified aspects of compassionate, critical, justice-oriented urban secondary teacher education programs. Their qualitative case study found teaching practices aligned with the development of relationships and community, honored preservice teachers' lived experiences and existing attitudes, introduced preservice teachers to multiple perspectives of viewing the world, and provided a vision of equitable, intellectually challenging teaching and learning. Again, the context of the study is central to the findings as the setting is a large, Midwest urban setting. The findings include a focus on hearing multiple perspectives from within the classroom, allowing students to see themselves in the literature studied, and prioritizing relationships within the community. An opportunity for further research is "the development of further concrete pedagogies of justice-oriented teacher education practice[s] across varying contexts" (Conklin & Hughes, 2016, p. 59).

Socially Just Teaching in Practice

Additionally, researchers study the enactment of socially just theories in practice. Although many teacher education programs prioritize social justice, the realities of schools make commitments to the work more challenging whether they be standards-based mandates or lack of support from colleagues and administration. Henning's (2013) study followed teachers beyond their social-justice oriented teacher preparation program into the field in order to understand what is needed to help bridge the commitment of

such teachers to their practice in local contexts. The participants in his study taught in two racially diverse, high-poverty urban public schools, yet they faced resistance to reforming how honors courses were tracked from colleagues and parents, and the researchers were unable to gain access to the classrooms for observations. The study found that central to the work of socially just educators is a supportive community, consistent social-justice focused curriculum, and postgraduate support (Henning, 2013).

Chubbuck and Zembylas (2010) defined socially just teaching as a way "to improve the learning opportunities of marginalized students and to empower them to act against injustice" (p. 275). They acknowledged the emotional toll that teaching for social justice has in a case study of a White novice teacher at an urban school as she struggled to implement socially just teaching practices. Her emotional upheaval eventually resulted in anxiety so severe that her eating, sleeping, and general wellbeing were affected. Through therapy and self-reflection, she adjusted the following key elements in her teaching:

1. She shifted her focus for change from the collective to the individual, prioritizing personal relationships.

2. She shifted her focus from global to local issues affecting her students.

3. She moved from a curricular focus to a literacy focus, prioritizing skills that her students needed to affect change in their own lives and communities. (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2010)

In contrast, Smith et al., (2011) investigated how Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF), "the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost of fighting against racism" (p. 969) affected teachers of color working in urban schools who

encountered issues of racism while working in a White profession. Like the White teacher above, teachers of color surveyed in this study reported feeling anxious, hopeless, depressed, and suffered from sleeplessness. However, the cause was not an insecurity in their own practice, but racial trauma experienced in their workplace due to the mistrust of their motives and aptitude by colleagues and administrators (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020).

Learning stems from "tensions" (Ahmed, 2020; Dover, 2013; Henning, 2013) or "sticking points" (Lillge & Knowles, 2020) that emerge for teachers attempting to teach for social justice (Agarwal et al., 2010; Smagorinsky, et al., 2018). A study conducted by Um (2019) acknowledged that schools are sites with competing goals and agendas that can stifle teachers' commitment to justice-oriented teaching even when that is a stated goal. Her study uncovered how participants who graduated from a social justice-oriented teacher preparation program utilized Bhabha's (1994) Third Space theory to negotiate standards-based educational reform and socially just teaching by paying attention to the choices teachers make daily on a micro-level. The contexts for the study were urban elementary schools, and Um found that defeating the system is not the goal but rather finding agency in teacher creativity.

Vaught and Castagno (2008) conducted an ethnographic study to investigate the attitudes of teachers toward race, racism, and White privilege using a critical race theory (CRT) lens in order to understand the connection between race and achievement in schooling. The study was conducted in two major U.S. urban districts, and it sought to make sense of the messages teachers both received and perceived in response to equity training. One finding is that White teachers do not understand how their own schools which comprise majority non-White students, could be sites of power hierarchies. As

34

with other studies, both teachers and administrators sought to conceptualize an achievement gap that could be addressed through "cultural understandings" and "personal relationships" with students (Vaught & Castagno, 2008. p. 103).

Cho (2017) illuminated the common goals of education that seek to decrease disparities among groups and address systemic inequities by focusing not on labels but on coherent ideals. She argued that social justice education relies on two concepts, equally important to consider: the distribution/redistribution model of justice (Gewirtz, 1998) and the relation/recognition model (North, 2006). In other words, both how things are distributed in society and how people relate to one another are complementary issues of equity. Much of the current research focuses on the relational aspect of social justice in education. However, in order to understand the relationship between how things are distributed in relation to education, then systems and power need to be studied in a variety of contexts.

Because a mostly White teacher education faculty are preparing a mostly White teaching force, "the paradox of the nation's teacher preparation programs is that everything is about diversity and social justice in the preparation of teachers and, simultaneously, nothing is about diversity and social justice in the preparation of teachers" (Juarez et al., 2008, p. 20). Despite a stated focus on social justice, there is little evidence of how it influences educational policy and practice (Hytten & Bettez, 2011) and there is little research on socially just teaching in contexts beyond racially diverse, urban settings.

History

During the past century, the country worked toward more equitable education by legislating school segregation, access to certain kinds of instruction, and redressing inequitable housing policies. Although woefully inadequate in their implementation, the cases themselves surfaced and attempted to address educational issues of equity and access. In the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), schools were legally desegregated although it took decades in some areas of the country to implement (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). Despite the resistance to enact legislation designed to redress the inequities present, there continued to be a national movement against discrimination and the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (Civil Rights Act, 1964).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), even though the student population in public schools is increasingly diverse, in 2017-2018, 79 percent of public-school teachers were White (NCES, 2020). Additionally, rural districts comprise 30% of districts, and the demographic of these districts is vastly different than urban districts. Nationally, approximately 19% of public-school students are enrolled in rural schools, but in thirteen states, more than one in three students attend rural schools (NCES, 2016; Johnson, et al., 2014). Because of public housing policies and Supreme Court rulings that upheld unjust policies, urban and suburban schools remain deeply segregated (Milliken v. Bradley, 1974).

Racial disparities in Southwest Missouri can be traced to the early 20th century when "a large and prosperous" (Froelich & Zimmermann, 1999) African American community was decimated after three Black youths, Horace Duncan, Fred Coker, and

Will Allen were falsely accused of rape, lynched, and incinerated in Springfield's town square on Easter Eve, 1906 (Wilson, 2010). After the murders, the Black population went from between 10 and 20 percent to 2 percent (Wilson). Currently, the population of Black residents is 4.5 percent (Temple, 2019). As a result, Springfield Public Schools (SPS) have also been racially non-diverse, and the districts bordering SPS are situated in racially homogeneous smaller towns with nearly 100% White populations (DESE). A tension arises when community concerns stymie socially just teaching practices, and teachers may feel pressure to reify homogenous norms in order to achieve tenure and remain employed.

Organizational Analysis

When considering the organization of public education in the state of Missouri, the structural frame is useful (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Schools are microcosms of their communities, and while the organizational structure of schools is standard, each district is unique (Bratlinger, 2003). According to Bolman and Deal, the structural frame is undergirded by the assumptions that an organization's purpose is to achieve established goals, that structure increases efficiency so that goals can be met, and that diversity within the organization does not need to impede the goals of the organization rather structure will provide a path forward despite differences.

Mintzberg (1979) identified an administrative division of labor within structured organizations: those who do the work, those who supervise the work, and those who standardize the work. Mintzberg (1979) noted that when direct supervision is not possible, standardization takes its place, and organizations have a core of operators who

37

do the work and an administrative component who organize and standardize the work as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Key Parts of an Organization
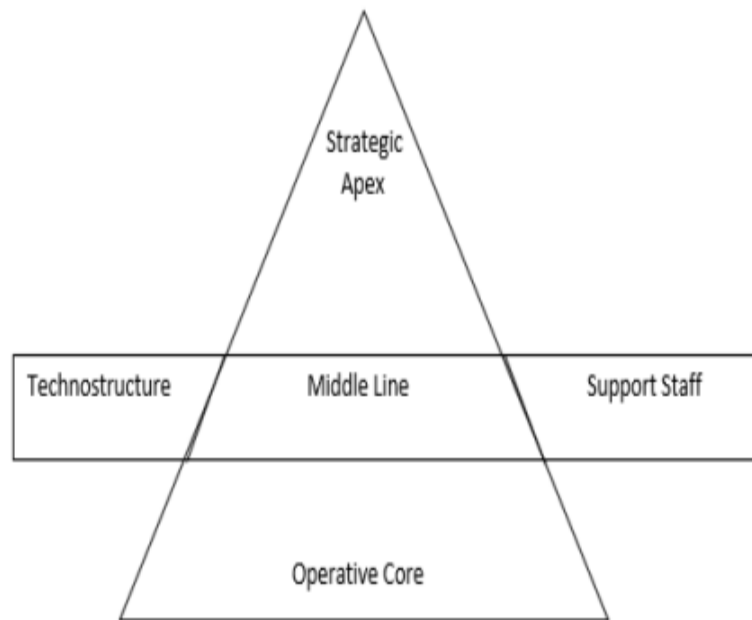
Mintzberg acknowledged interdependence among the five parts of the organization. At the top of the organizational structure is the strategic apex, the U.S. Department of Education, whose mission is to "promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (ED). The goals of the Department of Education are to:

> establish policies on federal financial aid for education and distributing as well as monitoring those funds, collect data on America's schools and disseminating research, focus national attention on key educational issues,

and prohibit discrimination and ensuring equal access to education. (ED,

2021, "Overview and Mission Statement").

The middle line, according to Mintzberg (1979), joins the strategic apex to the operating core, or those who enact the standards. The standardization of education in Missouri is the responsibility of the governing agency, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). DESE is "a service agency that works with educators, legislators, government agencies, community leaders and citizens to maintain a strong public education system" (DESE, 2021a, Mission Statement, Human Resources, para. 1). Within DESE, there are two divisions: the division of financial and administrative services and the division of learning services which is responsible for issues related to the educational success of schools (including administrators, teachers, and students) in the state.

DESE is responsible for creating standards that guide the work of district leaders, teachers, and learning in Missouri public schools. DESE Leadership Standards outline and explain the role and responsibilities of school principals:

- *Visionary Leadership*: The principal develops and implements a vision for the school to guide the learning of all students.
- *Instructional Leadership:* The principal ensures a guaranteed and viable curriculum, guarantees effective instructional practice, coordinates the use of effective assessments, and promotes professional learning.

- *Managerial Leadership*: The principal implements operational systems, oversees personnel, and ensures the equitable and strategic use of resources.

- *Relational Leadership:* The principal interacts professionally with students, staff, family, and community.

- *Innovative Leadership:* The principal continues professional growth, actively engages in reflective practice and applies new knowledge and understanding to drive appropriate change. (DESE, 2021b, Leader Standards)

According to Mintzberg (1979), building principals are considered "first-line supervisors" with direct authority over the operating core. As such, the principal has both standards to enact as well as standards to enforce. "In this hierarchy, the middle-line manager performs a number of tasks in the flow of direct supervision above and below him. He collects "feedback" information on the performance of his own unit and passes some of this up to the managers above him, often aggregating it in the process" (p. 225). In addition to those above and below them in the organization's structure, school administrators are beholden to community stakeholders and partners. Some of these are the school board who are voted into office by the community, community partners who fund district projects, and parents who pay taxes that fund schools. It is useful to note that, according to Bolman and Deal (2017), when considering the political frame of an organization, differences in politics and agendas are inevitable, but "interdependence, divergent interests, scarcity, and power relations inevitably spawn political activity" (p. 183). According to Bolman and Deal (2017), organizations are made of individual

stakeholders with different interests, conflict is inevitable, and goals are reached, and decisions are made through negotiation, bargaining, and interdependence on one another.

In Missouri public education, the operating core, those who "perform the basic work related directly to the production of products and services" are the department heads, teachers in each department, special services teachers who support students, and paraprofessionals who assist students (Mintzberg, 1979. p. 223). According to Mintzberg, the operators perform four functions: they secure the inputs for production; they transform the inputs into outputs; they distribute the outputs; and they provide direct support in the process (p. 223). In Missouri public education, the inputs for production are the Missouri Learning Standards which outline skills students are expected to master. They are organized by grade level and content area. The transformation and distribution of inputs into outputs are guided by teachers' professional education, both formal and continuing in the form of professional development. These are standardized through the Missouri Teaching Standards disseminated by DESE (DESE, 2021c, Teacher Standards).

A current debate in public education is whether teachers should engage only with the skills outlined in the standards or whether they are also responsible for what Giroux (1982) calls the hidden curriculum, the analysis of ideas in the content as well as an investigation into how those ideas interact with our identities. According to Banks (2001), teachers are responsible not only to teach skills but also to help students develop cultural, national, and global identifications in order to engage students in the true aim of education which is a more just and equitable society. Historically, teacher activists have come under assault for the often-clandestine work of adding to the standards; however, in classrooms where these ideas are not engaged, standardization can lead to what Brazilian

educational activist, Paulo Freire, calls the banking model in which knowledge and ideas are perpetuated from one generation to the next without critical examination (Freire (1968/2018); Bratlinger, 2003).

Leadership Analysis

DESE is directed by a Commissioner of Education. According to state law, the commissioner shall "seek in every way to elevate the standards and efficiency of the instruction given in the public schools of the state" (Section 161.122 RSMo). Figure 4 illustrates how, within the department, each division is guided by a deputy commissioner who oversees programs, including the office of educator quality and the office of quality schools which directly impact teaching and learning.

Figure 4

Leadership Structure of DESE
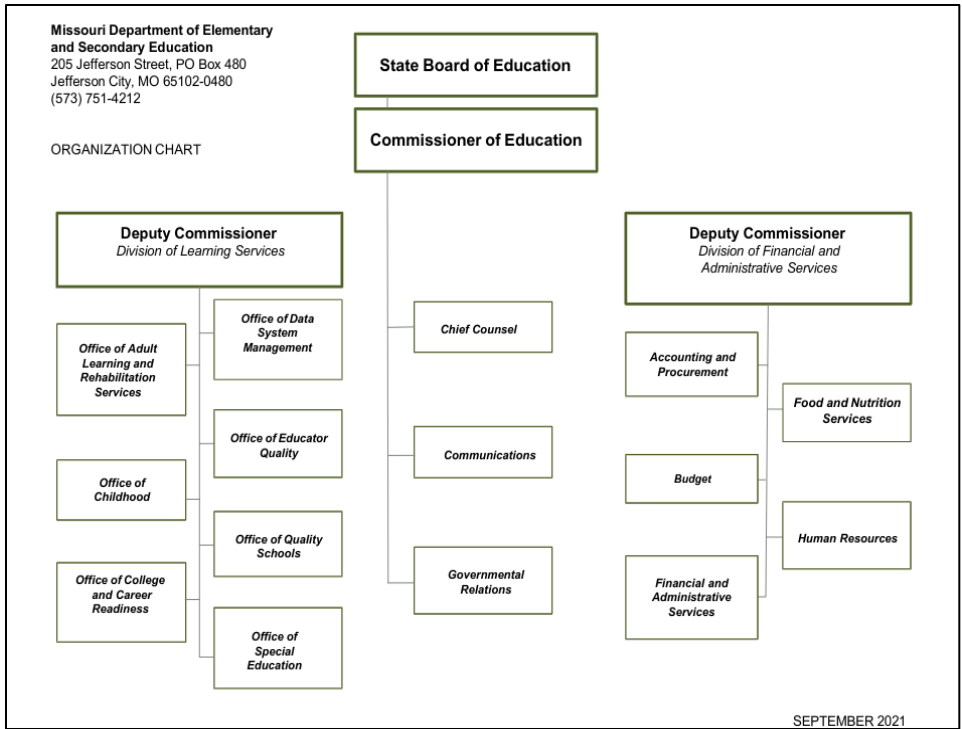
Local districts are governed by a community elected school board who determines the goals for the district, and the superintendent and their staff are responsible for managing and enacting the goals as determined by the school board. Within the district, principals serve as building leaders who directly influence the operating core to bring about the district's goals. The success of such endeavors can be enhanced by the effectiveness of the leader's ability to influence based on their own values and the behaviors that result from those values (Kotze & Venter, 2011).

According to Northouse (2019), transformational leaders are able to influence followers to meet the goals of the organization. Understanding the requirements of building leaders, the Missouri Principal Standards are scaled from "Aspiring" to "Transformational" (see Figure 5) and include standards that specifically address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion:

- *The Visionary Leader* "understands the fundamental impact of equity on educational outcomes and what it means to be culturally proficient."

- *The Instructional Leader* "understands that all students, based on individual strengths and diversity, bring value into the learning community and should be held to high academic expectations."

- *The Managerial Leader* "understands the need for cultural proficiency and responsiveness in developing equitable policies and practices" and "how explicit and implicit biases affect actions and reactions."

- *The Relational Leader* "understands and is aware of the importance and power of recognizing and valuing individual cultural backgrounds" and "a variety of strategies for building relationships with diverse families" and

43

"the importance of building positive relationships with diverse community stakeholders."

- *The Innovative Leader* "understands the need to confront institutional biases of marginalized students, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, culture, language, gender, sexual orientation, disability or special status" and "is flexible and willing to vary an approach when circumstances change." (DESE, 2021b, "Leader Standards")

Figure 5

MLDS Transformational Leader Principal Standards

The Transformational Principal is…

A **Visionary** Leader
- Develops a vision
- Implements a vision

An **Instructional** Leader
- Ensures a guaranteed and viable curriculum
- Guarantees effective instructional practice
- Coordinates the use of effective assessments

An **Innovative** Leader
- Continues professional growth
- Actively engages in reflective practice
- Applies new knowledge understanding to drive appropriate change

A **Relational** Leader
- Interacts professionally with students
- Interacts professionally with staff
- Interacts professionally with family and community

A **Managerial** Leader
- Implements operational systems
- Oversees personnel
- Ensures the equitable and strategic use of resources

These 5 categories, or domains, summarize the main roles a principal must assume, often times simultaneously, to effectively lead a school that is focused on instruction. Each domain is described through a particular set of competencies.

Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) | **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEVEL PARTICIPANT GUIDE** | December 2018

When the standards require that a building principal thoughtfully engages with the diversity present in their context and there is no stated initiative within the district to do so, tensions may arise. Theoharis (2008) studied principals who made a tenacious commitment to social justice leadership based on their backgrounds and critical consciousness. He found the traits of passionate leadership and arrogant humility were central to their work.

> The arrogance means that these principals have a headstrong belief that they are right; they know what is best, and they feel they are the ones needed to lead toward that vision. The humility comes from their continual self-doubt of their abilities and knowledge, their willingness to admit mistakes both publicly and privately, and their questioning whether they are doing any good in their positions. (p. 13)

Transformational leaders, according to Northouse (2019), have strong values and ideals and can motivate followers to act for the good of the collective rather than individual self-interest. This is an important distinction when principals are responsible to a variety of stakeholders including a board, the superintendent, teachers, and students. When leaders are not tenacious in their commitment to influence the culture in their organization for the greater good, transformation and change is not possible. Pseudo transformational leaders are interested in their own good standing with groups who hold power and are "unwilling to encourage independent thought in followers" (p. 165) but try to control behaviors. Theoharis (2008) described this type of leader self-centered rather than other-centered.

Transformational leadership is imperative in a building leader when deeply held beliefs and ways of working are challenged. The Missouri Teaching and Learning Standards as well as the Leadership Standards call for change. According to Heifetz and Laurie (2011), mobilizing followers to respond to adaptive challenges is the work of a leader. One way that leaders can address the challenges facing today's teachers is to take a collective stance and hear from followers about ways to adjust to the changing landscape of education. Another is to acknowledge that with change comes discomfort and the need to re-think traditional ways of educating. Heifetz and Laurie (2011) recommend six principles for adaptive work: (a) getting on the balcony, (b) identify the adaptive challenge, (c) regulate distress, (d) maintained disciplined attention, (e) give the work back to the people, and (f) protect voices of leadership from below (pp. 59-69).

When considering transformational leadership traits as defined by the Missouri Leadership Standards, getting on the balcony is an important strategy for transformational leaders who seek to motivate followers to address the needs of all learners. "Without the capacity to move back and forth between the field of action and the balcony, to reflect day to day, moment to moment, on the many ways in which an organizations habits can sabotage adaptive work, a leader can unwittingly become a prisoner of the system" (Heifetz & Laurie, 2011, p. 61). Another strategy that is key to transformative leadership is giving the work back to the people. A principal who supports and defends teachers' efforts to engage students critically is a transformational leader who understands that "solutions to adaptive challenges reside not in the executive suite but in the collective intelligence of employees at all levels, who need to use one another as resources, often across boundaries, and learn their way to those solutions" (p. 58).

The adaptive challenge of educating all students toward a more just and equitable future requires a transformative leader who can withstand and respond to the inevitable distress. Distress may arise in the form of scrutiny from parents whose children have benefitted most from current systems and questioning those systems may result in parental resistance and lack of political support (Frattura & Capper, 2007). Frattura and Capper (2007) position school leaders as teachers first, "Thus, leaders will need to patiently communicate and continue to educate parents who seemingly have plenty of education" (p. 106).

The current study seeks to understand and describe the teaching practices of experienced teachers who embody the same commitment to social justice work in racially homogeneous districts in Southwest Missouri. Like the standards that guide principals, the policies set forth by DESE for teaching and learning contain a focus on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Policy

Teachers are leaders in their own classrooms and are responsible for the enactment of district goals and state learning standards. DESE provides teaching standards designed to convey the expectations of performance for professional teachers in Missouri. The standards are based on teaching theory indicating that effective teachers are caring, reflective practitioners and lifelong learners who continuously acquire new knowledge and skills and are constantly seeking to improve their teaching practice to provide high academic achievement for all students. (DESE, 2013, "Teacher Standards")

The standards are organized into nine general categories with quality indicators for each to further illustrate how a standard may be addressed.

1. *Content aligned with appropriate instruction:* The teacher understands the central concepts, structures, and tools of inquiry of the discipline(s) and creates learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful and engaging for all students, including a quality indicator that requires teachers to address diverse social and cultural perspectives.

2. *Student learning, growth, and development:* The teacher understands how students learn, develop, and differ in their approaches to learning. The teacher provides learning opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners and support the intellectual, social, personal development of all students with quality indicators to address cognitive, emotional development and acknowledge language, culture, family and knowledge of community values

3. Curriculum implementation: The teacher recognizes the importance of long-range planning and curriculum development. The teacher develops, implements, and evaluates curriculum based upon student, district and state standards data with a quality indicator requiring lessons for diverse learners.

4. *Critical thinking:* The teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies and resources to encourage students' critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

5. *Positive classroom environment:* The teacher uses an understanding of individual/group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages active engagement in learning, positive social interaction,

and self-motivation with a quality indicator of attending to classroom, school, and community culture.

6. *Effective Communication:* The teacher models effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques with students, colleagues and families to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom with a quality indicator requiring sensitivity to culture, gender, intellectual and physical differences.

7. *Student assessment and data analysis:* The teacher understands and uses formative and summative assessment strategies to assess the learner's progress and uses both classroom and standardized assessment data to plan ongoing instruction. The teacher monitors the performance of each student, and devises instruction to enable students to grow and develop, making adequate academic progress.

8. *Professionalism:* The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually assesses the effects of choices and actions on others. The teacher actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally in order to improve learning for all students.

9. *Professional collaboration:* The teacher has effective working relationships with students, parents, school colleagues, and community members. (DESE, 2013, "Teacher Standards")

The Missouri teaching standards clearly call for both academic and social and emotional learning and development with the expectation that teachers are moving along a continuum of understanding.

In addition to teaching standards, DESE has developed and curated standards to guide learning. These standards, the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS), are organized by grade level and content area. In the area of English language arts, some of the standards also require that teachers go beyond the curriculum to address issues from multiple historical, cultural, or diverse perspectives. For example, the following standards require teachers to engage students in critical thinking about cultures and arguments:

- *Reading Literature. 3.c (Grades 9-10):* Analyze how multiple texts reflect historical and/or cultural contexts.

- *Speaking & Listening 1.c (Grades 9-10):* Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives including those presented in diverse media, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, resolve contradictions when possible, and determine what additional information or research is needed.

Clearly, the MLS leave an opening for the information that the current study intends to glean about how experienced teachers engage students in this type of critical thinking.

Another policy affecting teachers in Missouri is the Teacher Tenure Act (2005) which ensures that a teacher who has been employed for five consecutive years in a district (s) will become a permanent, or tenured teacher on the first day of their sixth year (cite). Tenure affords teachers the security of contracted employment unless they are mentally or physically unfit, immoral, ineffective, incompetent, or insubordinate. They must adhere to Missouri school laws and published district policies, not have excessive absences, or be convicted of a felony (MSTA, 2021, "Teacher Tenure Act Questions"). Thus, tenure affords teachers more latitude to go beyond the state standards and engage

students with ideas. Participants in the current study will hold tenure in the state of Missouri.

The Districts

Springfield Public Schools (SPS) is the largest district in SW Missouri and currently has nearly 26,000 students enrolled (Springfield Public Schools, 2021). "Across the Springfield district, there has been a seismic shift in the demographic make-up of students in the past two decades. Enrollment was 90.8 percent white in 2000 — which dropped to 84.1 percent in 2010 and 75.3 percent earlier this year" (Riley, 2019). However, this shift is happening only in certain pockets of Springfield, and the racial demographics of the five high schools range from the most diverse at 68% White to the least diverse at 81% White (Springfield Public Schools, 2020). Additionally, SPS has a designated Office of Equity & Diversity with the stated vision to work in collaboration with Equity Champions in every building to support students, staff, and families to build capacity around areas of equity, diversity, identity, accessibility, and justice. To focus on diverse student populations in SPS, the Office of Equity & Diversity use the terms "underrepresented and under-resourced students" which are defined as, but not limited to:

- Students of Color in terms of domestic and international racial and ethnic identities

- Students with Disabilities

- English Language Learners

- LGBTQ+ Students

- Students who receive FREE and REDUCED Lunch

- Students who receive McKinney-Vento Services

51

- Students from diverse religious backgrounds and belief systems

(Springfield Public Schools, 2021, The Office for Equity & Diversity)

Analysis of Participant Districts which border the more urban SPS (see Table 1) reveals less racial diversity and no stated initiative to address such issues. While some residents of these districts were raised there and either stayed or returned, some may choose to live in the more racially homogenous bedroom communities and commute to slightly more diverse Springfield.

Table 1

Border District Demographic Data based on DESE 2020 school report card. National Average from NCES, fall

District	Enrollment	% White	% FRL	% Graduation Rate	Expenditure Per Pupil	Stated Equity and Diversity Initiative
Oakwood City	1,290	87.4	28.6	97.53	$9,544	no
Northbrook	1,802	87.2	25.6	92.19	$9,284	no
Riverside	1,455	88.4	32.8	96.39	$9,089	no
Weston	1,352	88.8	35.1	97.16	$8920	no
National Average	526	47	52.3	86	$14,891	n/a

Because of the setting of my study, I will explore the dilemma teachers face as they navigate the tensions that arise when enacting the state standards for teaching and learning in settings that may not be welcoming of such instruction.

Implications for Practice: The Difference Between Aspiration and Practice

The audience for this study is primarily high school ELA teachers who have made a commitment to teaching justly, especially those that challenge historical notions of power, privilege, and difference in society. That is, to critically engage students with controversial social issues found in the literature that they read. Or, perhaps to engage students in conversations that they bring to class about their own lives and things that

they encounter in social media rather than shutting down conversations due to fear that they will lose control, or something might surface that they feel unprepared to engage with. These issues may be social topics that could produce conflicting opinions or delve into issues of power and privilege. They may call into question institutions or policies that have gone unexamined. Yet, these classrooms are in contexts that might not be friendly to such instruction and so teachers feel stuck. In such cases, it would be helpful to understand how experienced teachers engage students with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion through ELA content and instruction.

SECTION 3: SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

A focus of teacher preparation programs is to prepare teachers to enter diverse settings and teach equitably. Yet, there is a gap in knowledge about how teachers enter racially homogeneous settings and do the same work. Current research describes the challenges of socially just teaching without providing insight into instructional choices teachers can make to support students' critical thinking efforts. In racially homogeneous settings, "multicultural education is generally seen to be about the 'Other' and taught in ways in which the 'dominating aspects of white culture are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of struggle is muted'" (Giroux, 1992/2005, p. 101).

This shortfall perpetuates a system in which the dominant narrative is the only narrative (Freire, 1968/2018; Gorski, 2016). Additionally, there is an ongoing conflict arising from distinctly different views about democracy in schools and communities. This conflict is grounded in a sense of loss of traditional values and morality, a decline of traditional curriculum, and a scrutiny of teachers' actions (Apple, 2018). As a result, little is known about how high school ELA teachers in public, mid-sized, racially homogeneous schools engage students in critical thinking about issues of social justice. To orient this study, the following literature review explores the history of critical race theory and its connection to educational policy; the purposes of education as conceptualized by educational theorists; how the two combine to form a socially just teaching initiative in American schools; and how border theory and pedagogy might provide teachers in racially homogeneous contexts an inroad to such work.

The Purposes of Education

Like many ideas, the term "education" is difficult to define. There are conceptual, moral and theoretical aspects of education, so it may be useful to think about the purposes of education. Fundamentally, "education" includes the criteria:

1. that "education" implies the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it.

2. that "education" must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective which are not inert.

3. that "education" at least rules out some procedures of transmission, on the grounds that they lack willingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner. (Peters, 1966, p. 20)

One of the questions raised by educators is whether students should be taught what interests them or what is in their best interest according to the institution (Peters, 1966). As educators have become aware of students' interests, needs, and stages of development, the focus has shifted from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered one. However, according to Dewey (1916/2009) society continues through the transmission of common knowledge and the understanding of certain like-minded aspects, so some imposition of societal norms is inevitable. "Hence, one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education" (p. 19). What complicates this endeavor are the different influences of the various social environments of each student. According to Dewey (1916/2009):

one code prevails in the family; another, on the street; a third, in the workshop or store; a fourth, in the religious association. As a person passes from one of the environments to another, he is subjected to antagonistic pulls, and is in danger of being split into a being having different standards of judgment and emotion for different occasions. This danger imposes upon the school a steadying and integrating office. (p. 42)

Therefore, it could be argued that one goal of education is to socialize members of a society. Dewey (1916/2009) cautioned against societal extremes, and argued for an education that sought to conceptualize, not some idealized society, but a predictable society that could exist. Dewey endorsed an educational goal that was not a repeat of the current society, but one that "extract[s] the desirable traits or forms of community life which actually exist and employ them to criticize undesirable features and suggest improvement" (p. 144). According to Dewey, one aim of education is to critique the existing society in order to create a better future.

Another aspect to consider are the habits of mind of an "educated" person. In addition to having a collection of facts about a subject, they must have "some kind of a conceptual scheme to raise [them] above the level of disjointed facts" (Peters, 1966, p. 8). This scheme must allow the educated to acquire inert knowledge and consider it in relation to the world around them, thus transforming it into meaning. It must also be grounded in truth (Peters, 1966). That is, an educated person must be able to distinguish between evidence and assumption in order to make value judgements about the information they encounter. According to Dewey (1916/2009), "one of the fundamental problems of education in and for a democratic society is set by the conflict of a

nationalistic and a wider social aim" (p. 168), and a goal of education is to provide students with tools to develop the habits of mind that will "secure social change without introducing disorder" (p. 172). The aims of education extend beyond subject matter knowledge to more complex thinking about social and societal issues.

When considering the purposes of American education, Bales (1960) acknowledged that there is a gap between what education currently is and what it ought to be and that the latter is highly personal and value laden. Yet, he contends that democratic education, or an education to prepare students to participate in an American democracy ought to "promote development of a more adequate and more harmonious student outlook on the life of which they are a part and heighten capacity to reconstruct outlooks independently" (p. 208). Dewey (1916/2009) also called for a reconstruction of experience, which necessitates an examination and acknowledgement of both what is adequate and what is inadequate in the status quo. To facilitate a democratic education, Bales (1960) recommended that units of study focus on a problem of either inadequacy, disharmony, or both: "students must study *issues;* matters which, at least as far as they are concerned, are unsettled. Use the adjective "controversial" if you must, but it is redundant -- to say the least, unnecessary -- for, if a matter is not controversial, it is not an issue" (p. 212). Thus, beyond the transmission of knowledge, education contains a problem-solving element that requires students to critically consider societal issues.

Critical Thinking

Educators acknowledge the complexity of melding content knowledge, equitable pedagogy, and state standards (Cho, 2019; Matteson & Boyd, 2017). Critical thinking might provide a starting place for understanding how teachers engage students beyond

58

subject matter to develop the habits of mind that accomplish the important work of forging just societies. Bloom's Taxonomy outlines six cognitive skill levels that move from simple to complex with analysis and evaluation identified as complex thinking skills (Krathwohl, 2002). A revised version of the taxonomy included a metacognitive knowledge category as research continued to demonstrate the importance of awareness of metacognitive ability and being able to adapt ways of thinking (Krathwohl, 2002). The Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Framework illustrates the structures present in the thinking process and the behaviors required for critical thinking including self-assessment (Elder & Paul, 2007). Behaviors essential to the critical thinking process include considering one's own point of view, checking assumptions, raising questions, and gathering relevant data (Merriam & Bierema, 2017).

According to Brookfield (1987), critical thinking "involves calling into question the assumptions underlying our customary, habitual ways of thinking and acting and then being ready to think and act differently on the basis of this critical questioning" (p. 1). He further argued that such thinking is essential in a healthy democracy, for without it relationships stagnate, and civic involvement becomes pointless. Brookfield (1987) delineated four components of critical thinking:

1. Identifying and challenging assumptions is central to critical thinking.

2. Challenging the importance of context is crucial to critical thinking.

3. Critical thinkers try to imagine and explore alternatives.

4. Imagining and exploring alternatives leads to reflective skepticism.

   (pp. 7-9)

These components encompass habits of mind that question the status quo, especially

regarding the context and individual experiences of the thinker. Critical thinking is

characterized by logic analysis and judging arguments but also imagination and creativity

to consider alternatives to current ways of thinking. However, it is important to note that

critical thinking is not passive or commitment-free, and does not assume that everything

is relative, culturally specific, or context bound (Brookfield, 1987). Rather, critical

thinking allows for informed commitment to beliefs, actions, and causes because the

commitment has been informed, rational, and tested against reality. Students must be

assisted to think critically, and Brookfield (1987) positions professional educators among

those who can serve as "critical helpers" (p. 29).

Critical Thinking in the English Language Arts Classroom

The Missouri Learning Standards (2016) that guide ELA instruction require that

students:

> respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives including those presented in
>
> diverse media; synthesize claims made on all sides of an issue, and, when
>
> warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make
>
> new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented. (p. 18)

Additionally, the first Missouri Teaching Standard, requires that "The teacher

understands the central concepts, structures, and tools of inquiry of the discipline(s) and

creates learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful and

engaging for all students" with a quality indicator of "diverse social and cultural

perspectives." The fourth standard requires that "the teacher uses a variety of

instructional strategies and resources to encourage students' critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills" (Missouri Educator Evaluation System, 2013, pp. 3-4).

Critical thinking in the ELA classroom can be accomplished through literacy skills. North (2006) clarified that "by 'literacy' [she did] not mean the acquisition of reading and writing skills, but rather, the range of competencies needed to achieve academically and to effect positive personal and social change." She delineated the following types of literacy in order to identify the habits of mind called for in justice-oriented ELA classrooms. The term "social justice" has become an umbrella term for issues of equity and diversity. North (2006) defines socially just education as "the tension between helping students from historically marginalized communities gain access to and function effectively within social institutions as they currently are and teaching all students ways of knowing and acting that challenge the status quo" (p. 558). The latter is the focus of the present study.

Functional literacy

According to North (2006), socially just teaching encompasses functional literacy, critical literacy, and democratic literacy. Beyond reading and writing, functional literacy includes skills for higher order thinking which promote thinking about equity in terms of redistribution as well as relation (Cho, 2018). In ELA classrooms, higher order thinking also equips students with tools necessary to interrogate issues of injustice found in texts.

Critical literacy

Additionally, critical literacy refers to the ability to challenge existing paradigms of knowledge, question institutionalized power relations, and build strategies to act for equity and social justice (North, 2006). It includes critical analysis of texts to understand

not just what a text says explicitly but also hidden messages to be read implicitly,

questioning whose interests are furthered, and analyzing arguments for validity (Cho,

2018).

Democratic literacy

By comparison, democratic literacy, according to North's 2006 study, contains

three desired components: "the seeking of common ground, opportunities for multiple,

competing perspectives to be voiced and heard, and discursive, rather than physical,

conflict resolution strategies" (p. 563). The conflict resolution strategies noted were

deliberations in which students discussed a real issue of common concern, weighed

alternate options, and made a decision (North, 2006) that ideally improved the

community. Some of the skills that democratic literacy hones are naming policy issues,

arguing persuasively, identifying evidence, listening, and proposing solutions.

Functional, critical, and democratic literacies provide ELA teachers with tools to meet the

state learning standards, address the purposes of education, engage with complex content,

and dialogue meaningfully.

Critical Race Theory

Scholars like Paolo Freire encourage critical conversations like the ones described

above when considering national and local conversations about education and the

purposes of education. There is currently a debate about whether critical race theory

(CRT) should be taught in public schools. Schools respond by saying that CRT is not a

part of K-12 curriculum, but opponents broadly apply the label of CRT to encompass

systemic racism, White privilege, and anything related to equity, diversity and inclusion

which is indeed part of the curriculum. Even diversity training for employees has been

attacked. The narrow view is that educators are positioning students as either oppressors or the oppressed and that a fundamental tenet of this kind of instruction is divisive and centers a critique of America that is negative. On the other hand, educators and proponents of teaching about issues of equity argue that until there is a solution to social issues that affect our lives and the lives of our students and their families, they have a duty to help students be prepared to meaningfully engage with social issues that may surface conflicting feelings. After the social unrest during the summer of 2020 with the police killing of George Floyd, the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, and the shooting of Brionna Taylor, many educators felt that they should do more to engage with issues like racism in America, and the backlash in response to that initiative has been swift. Opponents of CRT argue that after the election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States in 2008, America entered a post-racial era, and that racism is no longer a systemic, institutional problem but rather an individual one (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). However, Henry and Tator (1994) provided a definition of racism and racist ideologies that goes beyond an idea:

> [Racism and racist ideologies] have their basis in real material conditions of existence. They arise because of concrete problems of different classes and groups in society. Racism represents the attempt ideologically to construct those conditions, contradictions, and problems in such a way that they can be dealt with and deflected in the same moment. (p. 2)

The ability for one group to call for sweeping change while another creates policy designed to uphold the current social structures is a contradiction, yet a reality.

When we speak of racism, we refer to Wellman's definition of 'culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities. 'We must therefore contend with the problem facing White people [of coming] to grips with the demands made by Blacks and Whites while at the same time the possibility of institutional change and reorganization that might affect them. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55)

Although strides were made toward racial equality with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, legal scholars were distressed by a stalling of equitable legal initiatives like affirmative action and called for a critique of perceived legal hostility in the 1980's which became critical legal studies (CLS) (McCoy & Rodericks, 2015). According to Yosso (2005) as quoted in McCoy and Rodericks (2015), critical legal scholars implied that the current legal system was complicit in maintaining inequities and did not offer possibilities for social transformation. While CLS scholars critiqued mainstream legal depictions of the United States as a meritocracy, it failed to address the role of race and racism in its critique (Ladson-Billings, 1998), and while CLS was a critique of the legal system, it did not offer a solution. Thus, critical race theory was formed.

The Genesis of a Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is both a response to and a separate entity from the earlier legal movement, CLS. It originated with legal scholars of color who argued that racism, rather than being limited to abhorrent acts of individual violence, is "so enmeshed into the fabric of our social order, it appears both natural and normal to people in the

culture" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12). When something is unseen, it can easily be dismissed or even denied. Crenshaw (1998) argued that the slow and steady strategies of the civil rights movement are flawed within the current legal system and called for "sweeping changes" (p. 13) if any progress is to be made. One example is that, according to Guy-Sheftall (1993), the majority of recipients of the affirmative action hiring policies were White women, many of whom were contributing to households in which White men were employed. Thus, these policies further widened the socio-economic gap. Another tenet of CRT is the challenge of Euro-centric values and the normalization of Whiteness in America (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

However, in cases where the advancement of BIPOC aligns with the interests of the dominant culture, then those in power promote policy and litigation toward equity. Derrick Bell, often referred to as "The Father of Critical Race Theory" (Ladson-Billings, 2013) termed this phenomenon interest convergence theory. For example, Dudziak (2004) acknowledged that prior to the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education,* European countries critiqued educational segregation in the U.S. as being "un-American" (p. 32) and according to the Justice Department briefs, the fact that segregation was harming U.S foreign relations was a major motivation for the ruling (Dudziak, 2004).

Another tenet that CRT scholars acknowledged is the reality of race and racism intersecting with other subordinated identities such as gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015) to further marginalize groups. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1993) formalized the term intersectionality as she sought to understand the experiences of women of color and how racism and sexism readily intersect in the

perpetuation of violence against women, opportunities for employment, and the social location of women of color as portrayed in popular culture. In order to make linkages between critical race theory and education, the voices of BIPOC are required for a complete analysis of the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Delgado and Stefancic (1993), outlined the following tenets of CRT in legal scholarship (a) racism engrained in American life, (b) laws must be reinterpreted if racism is to be remedied, (c) colorblind racism and meritocracy must be named and challenged, and (d) the use of stories or first-person accounts to understand the experiences of people affected by racism.

Implications for Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued for a critical race theory of education akin to the legal theory and outlined the ways it could illuminate inequities in education. The first is that race continues to be an issue in the United States in educational settings where statistics and demographic data clearly show gross inequities in opportunity. Next, they asserted that because the U.S. economy is based on property rights, the definition of property as it relates to education needed to be defined and interrogated. Finally, "the "voice" component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of racial minorities, a first step on the road to justice. Harris (1993) explained Whiteness as property as a 'legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of White privilege and domination" (p. 1715).

Curriculum

CRT included the stories of individuals impacted by oppressions in order to prioritize experiential knowledge and "reconstruct a society crumbling under the burden of racial hegemony" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 15). While the tradition of highly formalized storytelling is part of our legal system, often stories of ordinary people, especially those from subordinate groups, are often left out. However, Delgado (1990) asserted that naming one's own reality is important, and further critical race theorists posit that reality is socially constructed, stories provide members of out-groups a vehicle for self-preservation, and exchange of stories provides the opportunity for multiple perspectives to be known. Further, the dominant culture rationalizes its power through racial constructs, or stories, to avoid self-examination (Delgado, 1990). Finally, the voices of BIPOC are essential in order to form a complete picture of the American educational system.

However, in some districts, these voices and histories are excluded from the curriculum. Harris made the comparison between whiteness and property by noting that they both have the "right to exclude" (p. 1714) and further delineated types of property as "the continued right to determine meaning (p. 1762). Without these voices, schools present a "race-neutral or color-blind perspective" (Ladson-Billings, 1998) in which we were all immigrants to the new world. In her 2001 study of racial messages that students received in a homogeneous suburban school district, Lewis found that color-blind "race talk" was often employed to (a) assert a race-neutral context, (b) stigmatize attempts to raise issues of equity, (c) substitute generic "cultural difference" explanations for racial disparities, and (d) employing nonrecognition or not noticing race (pp. 800-801). In many

English language arts classrooms, this is evident in the books read by students, including the canon, which prioritizes the voices of White European and American authors. Even books that explicitly address issues of race like *Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* are written by White authors.

School funding

An explicit way that property affects educational opportunities is through the funding of schools using property taxes. CRT scholars acknowledge that America is a nation built on property rights of ownership for Whites. Further, "African Americans represent a unique form of citizen in the United States - property transformed into citizen" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 19). The inequities of per pupil expenditures is well-documented (Reardon & Owens, 2014), and the availability of intellectual property in the forms of curriculum and educative materials has been shown to be unavailable in high poverty districts that serve students of color (Kozol, 2006). The U.S. is one of the few countries that does not centrally fund schools so that resources are more fairly and equally distributed (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Assessment

Chubbuck (2010) called for a framework that looked beyond the aptitude for learning of academically struggling students to "analyzing a student's academic struggles with both an individual and a structural orientation [which] may allow the teacher to see the strength and resilience of the student struggling to learn in the face of larger structures that impede learning" (p. 202). One of the ways that the structures of schools widen the opportunity gap is through standardized testing which was implemented in practice after the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 during the Bush administration and the 2009 Race

to the Top initiative of the Obama administration (Loss & McGuinn, 2016). Because

federal funding is directly tied to test performance, economically marginalized and

students of color are impacted by experiencing a greater focus on test prep in math and

language arts while foregoing enrichment with music, art, physical education, social

sciences and geography (Marmol, 2016). Additionally, instruction that includes rich

opportunities for exploration, dialogue discovery, and even anti-racist pedagogy and

practices are often replaced with rote memorization of facts and rigid pedagogy

(Marmol).

Marmol (2016) argued that standardized tests function as democratic racism

(Henry & Tator, 1994) in two ways (a) in spite of numerous studies providing strong

evidence that standardized testing is detrimental to the stated education goals of the U.S.,

it continues unabated and (b) it unfairly blames students and teachers for the failure of a

system that is obviously inequitable. When an entire system is based on an assessment

model that has been proven to privilege some groups over others, critique is warranted.

"Throughout U.S. history, the subordination of Blacks has been based on 'scientific'

theories (e.g., intelligence testing), each of which depends on racial stereotypes about

Blacks that makes their condition appear appropriate" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 23).

Desegregation

Even after the 1954 *Brown* decision to desegregate schools, "African American

student achievement failed to improve, and suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates

continued to rise" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.25). At the same time, policies were put in

place to increase school choice through privatization of public education which

privileged students able to afford transportation, and "by virtue of being less regulated,

charters were expected to become laboratories for experimentation and be freer to respond to consumer demand from students and their families" (Loss & McGuinn, 2016, p. 33). Reardon and Owens (2014) acknowledged that because of differing types of segregation and modes of measurement, there is no simple answer to the trends in school segregation; however, they did investigate trends in school segregation between Blacks and Whites since 1954 and determined that desegregation initially improved educational outcomes for Black students and did not harm those of White students.

The critical race theory debate erroneously centers on the teaching of critical race theory; however, the connection between CRT scholarship and educational issues is clear, and CRT is useful as a tool for policy makers and other educational leaders to use in order to understand and investigate issues about equitable educational policies and practices. The current debate is whether schools are teaching a theory; however, the purposes of education may be a more useful dialogue.

The Gap

There is a gap in knowledge about how teachers enter racially homogeneous settings and become "critical helpers" (Brookfield, 1987) by engaging students in critically examining social issues. Current research details the challenges inherent in such endeavors (Ahmed, 2020; Dover, 2013; Henning, 2013) without providing insight into pedagogical moves teachers can make to support students' critical thinking efforts. In these settings, "multicultural education is generally seen to be about the 'Other' and taught in ways in which the 'dominating aspects of White culture are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of struggle is muted'" (Giroux, 1992, p. 101). This shortfall perpetuates a system in which the dominant

narrative is the only narrative (Freire, 1968/2018; Gorski, 2016). Additionally, there is an ongoing conflict arising from distinctly different views about democracy in schools and communities. This conflict is grounded in a sense of loss of traditional values and morality, a decline of traditional curriculum, and a scrutiny of teachers' actions (Apple, 2008). As a result, little is known about how high school ELA teachers in public, mid-sized, racially homogeneous schools engage students in critical thinking about emotive social issues like racism, sexism, and classism.

ELA teacher educator, Samuel Tanner, (2019) cautioned against White's affirming BIPOC and identifying as anti-racist but failing to understand the project of undermining White supremacy in order to move toward a more just and equitable society. Rather than always looking to BIPOC to disrupt White supremacy, Tanner argued that White people need to better understand their own identity within the system in order to make any changes. He suggested forming communal spaces where White people can "resist the dominating logic of White supremacy" (p. 194). Three suggestions Tanner offered for such spaces are to (a) honor the voices of Black scholars about White supremacy but stop relying on them to be the only ones to speak honestly about Whiteness, (b) not only do the work when there are Black students present, and (c) expect the work to be hard, induce rage in some, and be uncomfortable.

Because most White students in America attend racially segregated schools and reside in neighborhoods with little to no racial diversity (Lewis, 2001), it is often a lack of understanding about their own positionality as racialized subjects in society that is the issue. According to the Pew Research Center, when it comes to racial discrimination, most Americans (57% of Whites and 87% of Blacks) say the problem is White people

71

being unaware of racism that exists (Horowitz, et al., 2019). Lewis (2001) argued that greater racial equity in the United States is only possible through understanding how racial boundaries are produced and reproduced, and that will require a transformation of White, middle-class children.

The experiences of both White and Black teachers in urban, diverse school districts who seek to provide equitable learning opportunities for students and challenge existing structural issues in American schooling are documented in research studies. What is lacking in the research is what White teachers in racially homogeneous districts that do not have a stated equity and diversity initiative can do to cross intellectual borders of understanding along with their students in order to do the important societal work of education. Recognizing such limitations, this study seeks to understand the experiences of teachers in racially homogeneous districts and what pedagogical practices teachers in these contexts utilize to facilitate justice-oriented teaching and learning.

Border Theory

The purposes of education clearly call for more than the transmission of knowledge, and state standards require that teachers both engage with the diversity present in their contexts and ask students to critically consider multiple perspectives on issues. Yet, schools are complex, social organizations that are beholden to multiple stakeholders with competing agendas and goals (Bolman & Deal, 2017). For example, teachers must answer to administrators and parents but also the students in their classes and the society that they will join. To complicate the matter, there is a great deal of difference in schools across the nation, and the demographic reality of America means that schools largely are either racially diverse or decidedly homogeneous. This does not

mean that other forms of diversity aren't present, and ELA teachers who believe in the democratic ideals of justice for all must engage with the rich social issues found in literature while navigating the terrain of schools.

One of the ways that teachers can be critical helpers is to encourage students to probe their assumptions without threatening their self-esteem (Brookfield, 1987). While there are risks, critical thinking can occur with positive triggers, and need not always be disorienting or traumatic. It frequently happens within a social network, and teachers can guide group activities and communicate goals clearly so that they model critical thinking skills. Because critical thinking is not a destination but rather a journey, teachers can be guides on a journey to cross intellectual borders of understanding. Thinking in terms of borders allows one to acknowledge a common identity as fellow humans while also seeking to travel to other lands in search of new ways of thinking. It connotes an openness to listening to others' experiences and points of view in an effort to decrease the distance between groups.

Equally important is the need to provide spaces for students to critically engage teachers, other students, as well as the limits of their own positions as border-crossers who do not have to put their own identities on trial each time they address social and political issues that they do not experience directly. Put simply,

> students must be encouraged to cross ideological and political borders as a way of furthering the limits of their own understanding in a setting that is pedagogically safe and socially nurturing rather than authoritarian and infused with the suffocating smugness of certain political correctness. (Giroux, 2005, p. 25)

With border theory as a lens, this study will investigate how border pedagogy might support teachers' efforts to engage students in the critical thinking required by state standards. "Crossing borders of knowledge, and entering into '*borderlands,*' where existing patterns of thought, relationship, and identity are called into question and juxtaposed with alternative ways of knowing and being, provides the opportunity for creative and oppositional reconstructions of self, knowledge, and culture" (Giroux, 1992). Paulo Freire encouraged the study of one's existence and the power relations inherent in identity. To do so requires intellectual humility in that one must identify with another and adopt a position from which to "critique and distance oneself from one's 'own' subject position," and rather than complete disidentification with oneself, "forming affiliations with other positions, of defining equivalences and constructing alliances" (JanMohamed, 1993, p. 111). What makes border crossing possible is a border pedagogy framework grounded in critical thinking skills and habits of mind that usher students into a critical learning community which hooks (1989) characterized as a "space of radical openness" (p. 19).

Additionally, this study will seek to understand the pedagogical moves that high school ELA teachers are making to engage students in critical thinking about complex social issues. According to Elbaz-Luwisch (2001), "hooks (1994) lamented the fact that we often have no concrete examples of individuals who actually occupy different locations within structures, sharing ideas with one another, mapping out terrains of commonality, connection and shared concern" (p. 83). The purpose of this study is to provide concrete examples of such teaching. Racially homogeneous schools have not

been the focus of socially just teaching practices, yet they are rich spaces of possibility

for crossing intellectual borders in search of change.

SECTION 4: CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

NCTE Annual Convention

Anaheim, CA 2022

Theme: *¡Sueños! Pursuing the light!*

Title:

Border Pedagogy: How Teachers Cross Intellectual Borders to Enhance Students' Critical
Thinking Skills in Homogeneous Spaces

Proposal Description:

This year's NCTE Conference, *¡Sueños! Pursuing the light! r*eminds us of an
important aim of education – to dialogue meaningfully with one another about critical
issues affecting us all. Yet, there is pushback in national conversations about education
when it comes to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Debate about what should be
discussed in classrooms and by whom reveals a sticking point to the goal of engaging
with diverse perspectives on social issues. English language arts (ELA) teachers are
positioned to explore important social issues found in literature, investigate the credibility
of information found in multiple mediums, and share ideas by producing texts. Yet,
teachers who make a commitment to justice-oriented teaching may experience a lack of
concrete strategies to use in the face of increased critique and surveillance.

Hammond described culturally responsive teaching as a commitment to "use
cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and
content in order to promote effective **information processing**. All the while, the educator
understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional
connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning.[1]" Current research

on culturally responsive teaching practices address the importance of demonstrating an understanding of and appreciation for the cultures present in classrooms that may differ from one's own. However, because communities are often racially segregated, classrooms are as well, and many teach in homogenous classrooms where it may feel more challenging to surface issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

As an educational issue, diversity is an integral element that enhances the learning, development, and understanding of all students. Diversity enriches the quality of students' educational experience by exposing them to multiple perspectives and different approaches to what is being learned and how it is being learned. How can we engage students in meaningful and rich dialogue about social issues in racially homogenous classrooms? How do we teach ELA state learning standards that require complex critical thought? How can we engage in this kind of work and keep our jobs? According to Henry Giroux, "Crossing borders of knowledge, and entering into '*borderlands,*' where existing patterns of thought, relationship, and identity are called into question and juxtaposed with alternative ways of knowing and being, provides the opportunity for creative and oppositional reconstructions of self, knowledge, and culture.[2]" This session will explore how border pedagogy might provide teachers in racially homogeneous contexts an inroad to such work.

This session is a report of a community of justice-oriented educators working in racially homogenous settings who are investigating what it means to do this work. In the session, "Border Pedagogy," a panel of experienced teachers will discuss two aspects of justice-oriented teaching in racially homogeneous schools to augment the existing gaps in literature. The first is to understand the experiences of teachers in these contexts. In other

words, how do contexts provide opportunities for teachers to invite students to cross

intellectual borders, or how do contexts foreclose opportunities for teachers and students

to become border crossers? Second, what are the participants doing as a result? That is,

how are social justice issues and different dimensions of diversity, including those that

are detectable, delicately subtle, and those that are invisible negotiated in these

classrooms?

In this interactive session, participants will hear from a panel of experienced

educators who work in highly racially homogenized contexts where more than 87% of

students are White. They will be invited to bridge the gap between aspiration and action

by analyzing their own contexts and by participating in research-based, concrete

instructional strategies shared by the panel. These strategies are designed to cross

intellectual borders with students in an effort to engage critically with important and

often controversial social issues. "Border Pedagogy" contributes to this year's call by

addressing a current issue in education that threatens to divide rather than bring us all

closer together.

Executive Summary

Border Pedagogy: How White Teachers Cross Intellectual Borders to Engage Students' Critical Thinking Skills in Racially Homogeneous Low Poverty Districts

Research Questions:
What are high school ELA teachers' experiences of:
RQ1: The school context?
RQ2: How knowledge is received?
RQ3: How knowledge is negotiated?
RQ4: How knowledge is produced?

Study Overview:

Design: Qualitative, Phenomenological Study using border theory and culturally responsive teaching frameworks

Tools: Focus Groups, Individual interviews, and artifact analysis

Sources: 6 veteran high school ELA teachers in mid-sized, homogeneous districts

Analysis: Inductive, Constant Comparative, Descriptive Narrative

FINDINGS

The School Context
RQ1:The larger community
- Naming the **diversity profile**
- Negotiating a **changing landscape**
- **Identifying** what makes this work possible
- Affirming the affordances of **tenure**

RQ1(subsection): The learning community
- Exploring **identity**
- Illuminating **a collective identity**
- Speaking to issues of **social concern**
- Prioritizing **relationships**

Within the School Context
RQ2: How knowledge is received
- **Questioning patterns** of thought
- Engaging with **personal histories/narratives**
- Reading **within, upon, against** the text
- Leveraging **pop culture**

RQ3: How knowledge is negotiated
- Examining **multiple perspectives**
- **Tolerating ambiguity**
- **Transcending** dualistic thinking
- Acknowledging that **discomfort** may arise

RQ4: How knowledge is produced
- Prioritizing **student voices & experiences**
- Realizing **commonality** across **differences**
- Offering time for student **self-reflection**
- Valuing **student-generated** content

"I'm more confident than ever in my methodologies. As an instructor, I'm less confident than I've ever been in knowing what would be professionally problematic for me." - Wes

"You taught me about the parts of speech, but you also taught me to think and you taught me something about myself." - Denise's student

"We may be exploring an idea they haven't heard before, but that does not mean that I endorse the idea. We have to have uncomfortable conversations sometimes because it may the only time students are going to hear it." -Blair

"It is the role of the instructor to build meaning and connections around the things that are on their minds." - Jake

IMPLICATIONS

Text Choice: Pair canonical texts with diverse text set to read "upon" and "against."

Bloom's Taxonomy: Rather than utilizing linear model, use revised table model to engage students' thinking.
Thinking tools should be taught in conjunction with content.

Distributive and Relational Justice: Teach both.

Literacies: Functional, Critical, and Democratic literacies should all be addressed in ELA classrooms.

Community of Support: Teachers voiced the need for support from administration and community with like-minded others.

Prioritize relationships first. In classroom and with colleagues.

Border pedagogy: Instructional artifacts should include aspects across border pedagogy framework. It can be a useful planning tool for critical engagement.

Border Pedagogy:

How Teachers Cross Intellectual Borders to Enhance Students' Critical Thinking Skills In Racially Homogeneous Low Poverty Spaces

A Qualitative Research Study by Amy Knowles

The Background:

Student teachers shared "sticking points" to equitable teaching.

We created a framework for socially-just ELA instruction

Framework informed program mission and values

Next step: Move beyond theory to practice

Purpose of the Study:

To understand and describe the
school contexts & pedagogical practices
that teachers use to
critically engage students
in homogeneous spaces.

Conceptual Frameworks

Culturally Responsive Teaching	Border Theory
• Support rigorous cognitive development of all students • Use existing cultural knowledge to scaffold new concepts and content • Prioritize relationships • Foster caring learning environment (Hammond, 2015)	• Acknowledge a common identity • Question existing patterns of thought • Connect the local to the global • Co-construct knowledge (Giroux, 2005/1992)

Research Questions

In racially homogeneous schools, what are veteran high school ELA teachers' experiences of:

a. The school context?
b. How knowledge is received?
c. How knowledge is produced?
d. How knowledge is negotiated?

Knowledge, according to Giroux (2005) is how language is used to instill a sense of political. ethical, economic, and social responsibility.

The Participants:

- High school ELA teachers
- Veteran
- Engage students critically
- Teach in racially homogeneous mid-sized districts
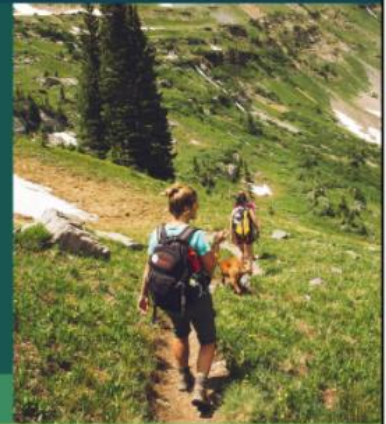
Photo by Holly Mandarich on Unsplash

The Setting

	Enrollment	% White	& FRL	% Grad Rate
Oakwood City	1,290	87.4	28.6	97.53
Northbrook	1,802	87.2	25.6	92.19
Riverside	1,455	88.4	32.8	96.39
Weston	1,352	88.8	35.1	97.16
National Average	526	47	52.3	86

Findings

What are high school ELA teachers' experiences of school contexts?

- Naming the Diversity Profile

- Negotiating the Changing Landscape

- Identifying What Makes this Work Possible

- Navigating Impediments

- Affirming the Affordances of Tenure

Photo by Buro Millennial

"I'm more confident than ever in my methodologies.

As an instructor, I'm less confident than I've ever been

in knowing what would be

professionally problematic for me." - Wes

How is knowledge received?

Questioning existing patterns of thought

Reading within, upon, and against the text

Engaging with personal histories and narratives

Leveraging pop culture

Teaching philosophies that promote critical thinking.

"You taught me about the parts of speech,

but you also taught me to think

and also taught me something about myself."

- Denise's student

Illustrative Examples

A focus on how we think rather than what we think

- Critiquing syllabus, system
- Second order questions
  - "What do we think about that?"
  - "Why do we think that?"

Instructional Artifacts:
- TKaM Closing Statement Analysis
- StoryCorps

Photo by cottonbro

How is knowledge is produced?

Prioritizing student voices and experiences

Offering ample time for student self-reflection

Realizing commonality across differences

Valuing student-generated content

Opportunities for students to thoughtfully contribute.

13

"Students drive open critical inquiry.

It is the role of the instructor to build connections

and build meaning around

the things that are on their minds." - Jake

14

Illustrative Examples

- Student interest inventory
- Civil discourse
  - "People want to hear what you think."
  - "How can we respectfully disagree?"
- Asking students to bring stories that matter to them

Instructional Artifacts
- Film Analysis: *Beasts of the Southern Wild*
- Names & Identity

15

Photo by mentatdt

How is knowledge negotiated?

Safeguarding space to examine multiple perspectives

Transcending dualistic thinking

Tolerating ambiguity

Acknowledging that discomfort may arise

Tools to think through complex issues.

16

"We may be exploring an idea they haven't heard before,

but that does not mean I endorse the idea.

We have to have uncomfortable conversations sometimes

because it may be the only time

students are going to hear it." - Blair

Illustrative Examples

- "This is too complex to be "for or against"
- Researching as collective discovery
  - "Where can we find truth?"
  - "I might be wrong about this."
  - "I don't know"

"Of course we don't all think the same."

Instructional Artifacts
- *Dear Martin* & Officer Combs
- An uncomfortable read of Zadie Smith's essay, "The Bathroom"

Photo by fauxels

The Learning Community

Exploring identity

Empowering students to speak to issues of social concern

Acknowledging and illuminating collective identity

Prioritizing relationships

Values that make this work possible.

19

"A huge part of my philosophy with empathy

and open-mindedness is being brave enough to share,

so I share with them

and I have gotten pretty vulnerable in a lot of ways."

- Suzanne

20

Illustrative Examples

- "Are we allowed–as a bunch of White kids–to speak to this issue?" "Why or why not?"
- Starting with their stories
  - Highs & Lows/ Good News
  - Freewriting
- Norms for being a story recipient

Instructional Artifacts:
- Post Secrets
- Who Wears a Mask?

21

Photo by Jopwell

Discussion

Participants enjoy differing levels of freedom regarding content

Participants utilize Bloom's revised taxonomy

Participants teach both distributive justice and relational justice

Participants address all types of literacy:
- Functional
- Critical
- Democratic
- Relational

Participants prioritize relationships first

Instructional artifacts include aspects across Border pedagogy framework

22

Limitations

| Participants positioned as experts | Pandemic and time constraints | Study limited to veteran high school ELA teachers |

Implications for Practice

Teaching Thinking Structures in concert with content.

Normalize discomfort, ambiguity, and disagreement.

Recharge with colleagues

SECTION 5: CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

To be submitted to *Teaching and Teacher Education*

Abstract

This research addresses the challenges of engaging students in critical conversations about controversial topics in racially homogeneous settings. Data analysis from this qualitative, phenomenological study reveals how veteran high school teachers understand and experience their contexts and how they navigate the complex instructional strategies required by English language arts state learning standards yet may be challenged by community stakeholders. Findings suggest that teachers enjoy differing levels of freedom regarding content yet focus on building relationships and engaging students' thinking. This study offers a framework for critically engaging students while attending to distributive and relational aspects of justice-oriented teaching.

A border maps limits; it keeps people in and out of an area; it marks the ending of

a safe zone and the beginning of an unsafe zone. To confront a border and, more

so, to cross a border presumes great risk.

-Alehandro Morales, Fiction Past, Present, Future Perfect

Introduction

Teacher preparation programs center culturally responsive teaching to prepare

teachers to enter diverse settings and teach equitably so that all students can reach their

academic potential (Gay, 2018; Henning, 2013; Matteson & Boyd, 2017), and current

literature focuses on culturally responsive teaching in diverse schools (Ahmed, 2020;

Cho, 2017; Chubbuck, 2010; Conklin & Hughes, 2016; Hytten & Bettez, 2011; North,

2006). Yet there is a gap in knowledge about how teachers enter racially homogeneous

settings and become "critical helpers" (Brookfield, 1987). Critical helpers guide others

across intellectual borders. They engage issues from multiple perspectives and facilitate

the complex thinking and dialogue that is required to do so. Current research details the

challenges inherent in such endeavors (Ahmed, 2020; Dover, 2013; Henning, 2013)

without providing insight into pedagogical moves teachers can make to support students'

critical thinking efforts. In these settings, "multicultural education is generally seen to be

about the 'Other' and taught in ways in which the 'dominating aspects of white culture

are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of

struggle is muted'" (Giroux, 1992/2005, p. 101). This shortfall perpetuates a system in

which the dominant narrative is the only narrative (Freire, 1968/2018; Gorski, 2016).

Additionally, there is an ongoing conflict arising from distinctly different views about

democracy in schools and communities. This conflict is grounded in a sense of loss of

traditional values and morality, a decline of Euro-centric canonical curriculum, and a scrutiny of teachers' actions (Apple, 2018). As a result, little is known about how White high school ELA teachers in public, mid-sized, racially homogeneous schools engage students in critical thinking about social issues that may be controversial.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the courageous practices that experienced White high school ELA teachers use to engage students in critically considering perspectives from non-White cultures. Specifically, I will explore the experiences of high school ELA teachers who are teaching in racially homogeneous schools in order to understand how they engage students critically in a particular context. It must be acknowledged that this work can be divisive in districts that do not have a stated equity and diversity initiative, and border pedagogy may provide a bridge that teachers and students can utilize to cross into new ways of knowing. According to Elbaz-Luwisch (2001), "hooks (1994) lamented the fact that we often have no concrete examples of individuals who actually occupy different locations within structures, sharing ideas with one another, mapping out terrains of commonality, connection and shared concern" (p. 83). The purpose of this study is to provide concrete examples of such teaching. Apple (2018) cautioned not to "be satisfied with simplistic slogans that may be effective for rallying opposition but are much less effective at determining tactics and spaces of possibility" (p. 76). Racially homogeneous schools where students are predominantly White have not been the focus of socially just teaching practices, yet they are rich spaces of possibility for crossing intellectual borders in search of improving students' critical thinking skills.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

In racially homogeneous low poverty schools, what are White veteran high school ELA teachers' experiences of:

a. The school context?

b. How knowledge is received?

c. How knowledge is produced?

d. How knowledge is negotiated?

Knowledge, according to Giroux (1992/2005), is how language is used to instill a sense of political, ethical, economic, and social responsibility in students. Knowledge allows students to speak "*with* rather than exclusively *for* others" (p. 21) about social issues, to think critically about their own cultural capital and place in the world, and to understand their own identities (Giroux, 1992/2005). Knowledge includes the skills students need not just to climb the socioeconomic ladder, but to imagine a future that is better than the present and to be cultural producers of that future (Giroux, 1992/2005).

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

My personal and professional experience has prompted me to theorize about the dilemma facing teachers who espouse a commitment to socially just teaching and then enter a context where that commitment feels obsolete or even discouraged due to a perceived lack of diversity. Although previous research provides some insight into how White teachers can respond thoughtfully to the diversity present in classrooms that appear to be integrated, it is limited by not addressing how teachers can enter racially homogeneous classrooms and engage in the important work of socially just teaching with

students for whom society may be a comfortable fit. Culturally responsive teaching requires that both difference and power be addressed (Gay, 2018). Limiting socially just teaching practices to schools with a racially diverse student population significantly limits the efficacy of such initiatives. As an entry into this work, I relied on the state teaching and learning standards, the habits of mind and pedagogy required to enact those standards, and a framework for thinking about how a racially homogeneous classroom might engage in equitable teaching and learning practices.

This study will utilize border theory (Giroux,1992/2005) which conceptualizes the place of culture and society within structures of power to understand how teachers can engage students in the complex thinking that state teaching and learning standards require. Bloom's Taxonomy outlines six cognitive skill levels that move from simple to complex with analysis and evaluation identified as complex thinking skills (Krathwohl, 2002). A revised version of the taxonomy included a metacognitive knowledge category as research continued to demonstrate the importance of awareness of metacognitive ability and being able to adapt ways of thinking (Krathwohl, 2002). The Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Framework illustrates the structures present in the thinking process and the behaviors required for critical thinking including self-assessment (Elder & Paul, 2007). Behaviors essential to the critical thinking process include considering one's own point of view, checking assumptions, raising questions, and gathering relevant data (Merriam & Bierema, 2017; Brookfield, 1987; Brookfield 2012).

The Missouri Learning Standards (2016) that guide ELA instruction require that students respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives including those presented in diverse media: synthesize claims made on all sides of an

issue, and when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and

understanding and make new connections in light of evidence and

reasoning presented. (Missouri Learning Standards, 2016, p. 18)

Additionally, the first Missouri Teaching Standards require that teachers "understand the

central concepts, structures, and tools of inquiry of the discipline(s) and create learning

experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful and engaging for all

students" with a quality indicator of "diverse social and cultural perspectives" (Missouri

Teacher Standards, 2013, p. 3) The fourth standard requires that "the teacher uses a

variety of instructional strategies and resources to encourage students' critical thinking,

problem solving, and performance skills" (Missouri Teacher Standards, 2013, p 5).

With border theory as a lens, this study will investigate how border pedagogy

might support teachers' efforts to engage students in the critical thinking required by state

standards.

Crossing borders of knowledge, and entering into '*borderlands*,' where

existing patterns of thought, relationship, and identity are called into

question and juxtaposed with alternative ways of knowing and being,

provides the   opportunity for creative and oppositional reconstructions of

self, knowledge, and culture. (Giroux, 1992/1995, p. 34)

Paulo Freire encouraged the study of one's existence and the power relations inherent in

identity. To do so requires intellectual humility in that one must identify with another and

adopt a position from which to "critique and distance oneself from one's 'own' subject

position," and rather than complete disidentification with oneself, "[from] affiliations

with other positions, of defining equivalences and constructing alliances" (JanMohamed,

1993, p. 111). Freire's work was with the oppressed, or peasants, and encouraged those who were in the non-dominant group to reimagine themselves as border crossers into new ways of thinking and knowing. However, this study will investigate how those in the dominant culture might do the same intellectual crossing of borders to engage in the critical thinking process in defense of a more equitable and democratic educational experience. This looks like a typical White teacher in a homogeneous classroom leading a collective and intentional effort to cross a border.

Border pedagogy may provide a framework for teachers and students in racially homogeneous classrooms to cross borders of understanding in order to consider complex and emotive issues such as race, diversity, equity, inclusion, and identity. Entering this borderland, students can question existing patterns of thought, engage in dialogue with others, experiment, create, and imagine possibilities (Giroux, 1992/2005).

> The concept of border pedagogy grows out of the work of Freire (1968/2018) and speaks clearly to issues of social justice and equality among groups divided in very concrete ways by the powerful but often invisible borders of race, social and economic class, gender and, in this case, ethnic/national identity. (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001, p. 83)

What makes border crossing possible is a border pedagogy framework grounded in critical thinking skills and habits of mind that usher students into a critical learning community which hooks (1989) characterized as a "space of radical openness" (p. 19).

Methodology and Methods

The present study focused on two aspects of justice-oriented teaching in racially homogeneous schools to augment the existing gaps in literature. The first was to

understand the experiences of teachers in these contexts. In other words, how does the context provide opportunities for teachers to invite students to cross intellectual borders, or how does the context foreclose opportunities for teachers and students to become border crossers? Second, what are the participants doing as a result? That is, how social justice issues and different dimensions of diversity, including those that are detectable, delicately subtle, and those that are invisible negotiated in these classrooms? As an educational issue, diversity is an integral element that enhances the learning, development, and career development of all students. Diversity enriches the quality of students' educational experience by exposing them to multiple perspectives and different approaches to what is being learned and how it is being learned.

A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, not much has been written about justice-oriented teaching practices in racially homogeneous settings, and so existing theories about socially just teaching do not apply (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, while I utilized the framework of border pedagogy (Giroux, 1992/2005), I drew on findings that emerged from initial interviews and focus groups to build toward an understanding about what was possible in these contexts, and therefore the study was inductive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, a primary motive for this study was to understand the experiences of and subsequent actions that participants made in order to develop categories for action that lead to intellectual border crossing (Charmaz, 2014).

The study utilized a phenomenological approach to describe the experiences of White high school ELA teachers in mid-sized, racially homogeneous schools who engage students in critical thinking about social issues that may be uncomfortable for some

students. In this study, the culture of the school was central to teachers' experiences, and so focus groups and individual interviews were utilized to understand the interaction between the teachers and the community as well as instructional choices that teachers made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The aim of this study was twofold: first, to uncover the contextual factors that underlie these experiences in order to understand them, and to develop a framework for action that went beyond theory.

A social constructivist, qualitative approach allowed the participants' experiences and "complexity of views" to inform the research design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Social constructivist research is characterized by a desire to listen carefully to what participants say and do to make sense of and interpret meaning from such actions (Creswell, 2016). Because one of the goals of the study was to address how this work might be done, I used the constructs found in the border pedagogy framework to analyze the participants' practices.

The audience for the study is teachers and teacher educators who desire to explore the social issues found in literature and in our communities but are unsure how to navigate the pedagogical tensions and contradictions of social justice in some districts. It is informative to understand both the experiences of teachers currently working in these settings as well as their instructional choices.

The Setting

The study explored the instructional practices of local public high school ELA teachers. Participants were employed full-time in mid-sized and racially non-diverse districts with more than 87% White students that border a more urban and slightly more diverse city in the Midwest. These schools do not have a stated equity and diversity

initiative, and they are "standards-driven" districts that are characterized by high academic achievement. All district names are pseudonyms.

The Participants

Participants were current high school ELA teachers whose experience ranged from nine to twenty years and who courageously engaged mostly White students in critical thinking about social issues and incorporated perspectives from non-dominant cultures.

I have worked with each of the participants in this study as a cooperating teacher. I have been in their classrooms on multiple occasions and have observed the ways that their interactions with students and their content aligns with their values and ethic of teaching for justice. I have also heard anecdotal evidence from their student teachers and colleagues about the ways in which they engage students critically. I have used pseudonyms for each participant in order to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Data was collected from three sources: focus groups, interviews, and instructional artifacts. Data was collected over the course of three months. The first data collection point was a focus group where six participants were introduced to border theory and border pedagogy and explored the intersection of theory and practice by noting opportunities for border crossing in the state learning standards. Participants heard stories of my own intellectual border crossings and were invited to share stories of their own intellectual border crossings within their contexts. I began the focus group by sharing what I am hoping to learn from their experiences, and that my role was to gather and curate their insights and practices to communicate to others what we collectively learned.

Following the first focus group, I conducted two in-depth interviews with each of the six participants to understand how participants engage students in critical thinking around emotive issues of race, diversity, equity, inclusion and identity. These interviews were semi-structured to allow the experience of the participant to emerge and evolve (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prior to the first interview, the participants were given a border pedagogy framework and were asked to think about ways they may or may not utilize the strategies outlined in the framework. The interviews focused on how the following tenets of border pedagogy are utilized in ELA classrooms: how knowledge is shared with students and among students, how knowledge is created by students, how knowledge is negotiated in the classroom, and the learning community (see Appendix E). I also asked them to reflect on their teaching journey, particularly how they came to teach critically, instances of intellectual border crossings in their own professional lives, and how they utilized border pedagogy in their teaching. I sought to identify shared experiences that aligned with the research questions, and participants were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of these experiences (Seidman, 2013).

During a second interview, each participant was asked to bring an artifact or artifacts that they used to engage students critically. I solicited the help of participants in securing artifacts used to engage students critically to analyze as part of an ongoing conversation into which I was being invited (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2007). Data collection included how and why documents were made, what they contained, and how they functioned (Prior, 2003). Possible artifacts included lesson planning materials, activities, discussion prompts, assessments, or any other instructional tools. Data was analyzed according to the border pedagogy quadrants (see Appendix F).

The final data point was a focus group with all participants in which I shared

initial findings as well as the instructional strategies that had been shared. The purpose of

this focus group was to ensure that data were being represented as intended by allowing

members to check initial findings (Mertens, 2019). Confirmability or neutrality was

assured by relying on participant's words as recorded as well as follow-up member

checks during the final focus group conversation. I clearly stated and monitored my

beliefs and biases by journaling and participating in peer debriefing with a trusted

colleague throughout the process to track my impact on the study (Mertens, 2019).

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis of data began early in the data collection process (Creswell,

2009). Memo writing about emergent themes and possible questions ensured that the data

collection process was participant-driven (Creswell, 2016). As data was initially

collected and read, general themes that emerged were noted in the margins and in memos.

Data was winnowed to support emergent general themes, and portions were bracketed

and reflected upon in relation to them. Winnowed data included significant statements,

meaning units, and essence descriptions (Creswell, 2009). The research questions

required a combination of predetermined and emerging codes or descriptions including

codes that addressed a larger theoretical perspective. I utilized a constant comparative

method of data analysis based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) notion of grounded theory in

which responses are compared and themes emerge based on the frequency, specificity,

emotion and extensiveness that themes hold. Once interrelated themes and descriptions

began to emerge, the data analysis turned to interpretation of meaning from the data to

provide thick, rich description of the experiences of teachers as well as categories or themes that conceptualized the instructional choices teachers made.

Researcher Positionality

My role at the university is a non-tenure track field instructor. I supervise student teachers in the field, and I teach English education courses. In response to my students' experiences in classrooms, a colleague and I co-authored a framework for socially just English language arts teaching, and the program in which I work centers socially just pedagogy and practice as a core belief. I acknowledge that this initiative is at odds with the conservative districts in which many of our TCs complete field-based apprenticeships and secure teaching positions.

I am a White, middle-class, cisgender woman with eight years of classroom experience before coming to the university. I am aware that my identity positions me as both an insider and an outsider in this work. I am an insider at a university whose public affairs mission has three pillars: ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement (Missouri State University, 2021, Public Affairs Pillars). I am also an insider in a racially homogeneous, politically conservative area of the country. I was raised as an Evangelical Christian, and I attended a local Christian university. I understand the discourse of some who question the morality of acceptance and teaching "these kinds of topics" in school. I am also an outsider in that many of the schools in which I work as a field instructor both mirror my experience and diverge from my current beliefs. I am aware that a pedagogy that is comfortable at the university may become uncomfortable in the schools (Apple, 2018). Often, student teachers narrate a desire to be socially just educators but are unsure how to do this work in a predominantly White placement set in a

politically conservative district. I practiced reflexology throughout the study by clearly identifying my preconceptions, past experiences, beliefs, and theoretical frame (Holmes, 2010). I am aware that my relationships with former students and cooperating teachers might have encouraged them to participate in this study. I also believe that having prior relationships with these participants encouraged honest and open sharing, and it felt familiar to discuss instructional practices. I followed ethical research standards to protect the identities of participants and preserve our professional relationships. I was also aware of my bias toward their perceived pedagogy and allowed the data to inform my analysis.

Findings

In this paper, I will initially frame how teachers reflect on their experience and understand the current context. After illuminating experience and context, an overview of the critical lens will be shared before disclosing results related to the four research questions. Results will be illustrated with selected instructional artifacts.

Teacher Portraits

Wes

Wes has been teaching at Oakwood High School for 11 years. He has earned a terminal degree in education, and his thoughtful orientation to this work is evident in his big-picture thinking. One of his educational goals is to initiate and support systems that outlast him. He describes himself as a constructivist, and one of the hallmarks of his teaching is "trying to facilitate really thought-provoking conversations that put all of us into, like, places of tension." He does this by "creating as much space as I can for students to bring those conversations to the table themselves because if a student brings it up, it's them driving the interactions. "Questions are central to his work of asking

students to construct knowledge, and his role is to "introduce more questions that complexify whatever we're dialoguing about, add resources, and that kind of is how the class unfolds. And ideally, students are learning to construct their own driving questions that are connected meaningfully to the content."

Blair

Blair has been teaching for 9 years and is currently in her second year at Northbrook 26 School District. The previous 6 were spent at a smaller, more rural school where she had developed close relationships with students and their families. This allowed her to have conversations about controversial topics "on the regular." Blair attributes her journey to becoming a teacher who desires to engage students critically to "the two teachers that I got to teach with at my previous school." Of one colleague, Blair, reminisced, "She made me pause and think, "'Oh my gosh, I am a little White girl in the Midwest, and you know, what does that really mean? How can I reckon with the fact that I have all of these things?' She started that exact journey for me." Blair is teaching in the district that she graduated from, and she is invested in the community in significant ways. She acknowledges the majority viewpoint and admits that "there are a lot of kids who are really resistant to questioning or talking back to that." In response, she designs learning experiences that invite students to consider multiple perspectives in order to complicate or nuance their initial claims.

Monika

When describing her journey to becoming a courageous teacher who engages students critically, Monika asserted, "I was just born to speak my mind," and also acknowledges that engaging students critically is "better for kids; it's better for our

110

instruction." Her first two years of teaching were in a small district where she enjoyed complete freedom regarding curriculum design; she contrasted that experience with teaching at Oakwood City High School, her current mid-sized district for the past 16 years. She reflected that the students are more diverse in their thinking, but she has much less autonomy in curriculum design. In fact, she is part of an English II team that plans and teaches the same content. Most recently, Monika has worked to incorporate a current young adult novel, *Dear Martin,* into the curriculum grade wide. Although she currently has the restraints of teaching English II this year which requires a more scripted curriculum as well as working with a team that co-plans all lessons and assessments, she is still true to her values.

Denise

Denise described herself as the "most senior" of the participants; she has been teaching at Weston High School for 20 years. We met after school, and when I arrived, students were stopping by to visit and check in with Denise. The walls are covered with student art that captures quotes from texts students found meaningful. Although Denise has a lot of experience, she humbly acknowledged, "I'm constantly learning and am so glad to have the job that I do so that I can learn from others." At the same time, she believes strongly that engaging students critically is important and realizes "just how much the kids need it—to just think about things they haven't thought about before, haven't heard from their folks or seen. They haven't read enough. They don't have enough empathy yet." She acknowledged that much of this work "feels like trial and error" especially with recent more constraining mandates.

Suzanne

Suzanne, an 18-year-veteran teacher, reflected on the ways her current context makes the critical work that she does with students possible in ways that previous districts did not. This is her 8th year at Weston High School, and she has a strong support system of colleagues. Suzanne believes that being genuine is key when building relationships with students. "A huge part of my teaching philosophy is being brave enough to share. I've gotten pretty vulnerable in a lot of ways. I tell the kids about dealing with depression, I share my skin cancer journey with them, I talk about growing up poor. At Weston, I feel like I'm always being real and genuine, so they get a glimpse of not just who I am, but what made me that way." It isn't surprising that Suzanne prioritizes empathy and civil discourse in her English classes. She also described a shift in her teaching about 10 years ago "from a focus on skills to a focus on thinking."

Jack

Jack holds the unique identity of being an Army veteran and reflects on his experience living in the American South. He is struck by the lack of diversity in this area of the Midwest and finds "being here very tough to navigate." He has been teaching for 10 years, and the last two have been at Riverside High School. Jack sees the study of philosophy and politics within literature as a way to "connect with my students." He supports student's participation in the political system, and an instructional goal is "to encourage them to be responsible citizens and proud Americans." He believes that this can be achieved through investigating the diverse perspectives in the current political system, understanding political agendas and their genesis, and using literature to "read the story of a common human experience but also see the real world application." He

believes that his English I honors students don't yet have a context for much of what happens in the world, and an instructional goal is to provide that context. Jack holds a master's degree in counseling and believes that "for every behavior, there's a foundational behavior" which orients his interactions with students. He fosters a classroom environment that allows for relationships to form and described it as "a family where they build each other up. We do not bring each other down."

Teachers' Perception of the School Context

The four districts represented in the study are mid-sized districts that surround a larger, slightly more diverse district in the Midwestern United States. Participant districts are racially homogenous and have graduation rates and per pupil expenditures that are above the national average. They also have free and reduced lunch and dropout rates that are below the national average. Participant districts are similar to one another and present complex terrain to navigate while engaging students critically. Understanding these contexts includes naming the diversity profile of these particular districts, negotiating the changing landscape, affirming the affordances of tenure, and identifying what makes this work possible.

Naming the Diversity Profile

When participants talked about the diversity present in their districts, at first Denise, Suzanne, and Jack said that there was very little diversity especially among honors classes; however, when pressed, Denise acknowledged a growing population of Mormons and Romanians in her community. Monika added that in the Oakwood City school district, there is a large Russian population. Wes believes there is quite a lot of religious diversity present in the Oakwood school district. "You see students who

actually have incredibly diverse perspectives. So, I think that we make assumptions that all of these students kind of share the same ideas. But, in fact, often I think they're quite open and have lots of questions. I see a good healthy amount of diversity there." Additionally, Wes cited socioeconomic diversity as present in his district. Monika is in the same distinct as Wes, and she added that they

> also have a larger population of students who are out as transgender or gay or bi. And so, they have really been speaking up a lot more at Oakwood, which has been great. But also, sometimes it's difficult in class because some of our other students' reactions aren't the greatest.

Suzanne added that" they have quite a few students who are diverse in sexual and gender identity, and I've got more students than ever who go by a different name than their legal name." Jack agreed that "political identity is a diversity issue at this point because it is so incredibly polarizing in some of our classrooms."

Negotiating a Changing Landscape

In addition to increased diversity, other things that have recently changed in these districts is less autonomy about text choice, more parental involvement, and a surveillance feel in the classroom. Because texts are central to ELA classrooms, Blair has "gone back and forth with my department head about broadening the reading list" beyond the classic literature written by White male authors. Denise shared that when she taught *To Kill a Mockingbird,* she asked how students felt about Scout using the n word, parents complained, and her administration told her "to ask something completely different that has nothing to do with race" because they "would rather whitewash it." Monika shared that she taught *Dear Martin*, a young adult novel that tackles some of the same issues;

"however, this year in our curriculum guide, *Dear Martin* was removed. And I'm not quite clear on just why yet."

Suzanne believes that "so much of it is the principal and their personality and their leadership." Wes acknowledged that "educational stakeholders are just differently incentivized. They want everything to run smoothly. Their interests are mitigating risks." But Denise said, "I don't want to be afraid all of the time that the principal is going to come to my room and tell me about a parent complaint that he frankly hasn't assuaged." And Wes concurred that there is a "strange impetus on the part of some leadership that reading a thing is saying yes to it rather than engaging in the exploration of different ideas."

In some ways, things are becoming more open in these contexts. Denise "feels more open to talk about how Atticus isn't a hero, and I never used to do that." Additionally, the current administration has allowed the formation of a GSA club at Weston High School for the first time; however, the "trials have been harder than they used to be." For example, last year, she "was not scared I would lose my job. I just felt fear entering my classroom, afraid of what would happen after my lesson or discussion. I had to worry that my students weren't receptive enough to think." Suzanne echoed this paradox by sharing, "I have a kid who goes by Maverick, but is listed as Maya. This teacher refused to call this kid by their preferred name because it wasn't in SIS."

Teachers have less autonomy in their own classrooms. Wes said, "It sounds paranoid actually, to say it out loud, but there can always be someone recording." And Suzanne added the additional reality that "they're going home and talking more to their parents about what they're doing in class." And when taken out of context, either of those

can be problematic. Jack expressed concern that "It's not all of our parents. It's that one parent, or those five parents that somehow are able to influence the entire curriculum of a department." Because of this, Wes is an advocate of "building something that outlasts the changing tide of administration, district office folks, even our careers." He believes that there is "a lot of strength that comes from curricula like the IB program and the AP program that are outside the reach of the system and the strict control of just a handful of folks." And so, he advocates for those programs. Additionally, Monika shared that a few years ago, she noticed "a shift in discriminatory voices that seemed emboldened."

Three of the six participants also shared directives that they have been given from school leadership. Monika was told by school administration that she was not allowed to ask students what their preferred pronoun was when taking attendance on the first day. While that was the only direct mandate, "the problem at Oakwood is I'm supposed to stay on what my team has planned to do. If I do something not in the overall lesson plan, I could honestly get in trouble if I were evaluated." She is forced to "slip things in—not for points." She also described walking into the library and seeing a stack of books with the assistant superintendent's name on them. They were "pulled for review" although there was no formal process and secondary content is not in his purview.

Blair shared that regarding the use of the n word, her administration said, "we're not going to say the word and refrain from asking students their opinion," but she clarified that "it was another way to avoid a conversation about race." Denise shared an even more direct mandate from her principal, "It was suggested that I only ask questions that aren't the highest level of Bloom's taxonomy."

Affirming the Affordances of Tenure

In this Midwestern state, the Teacher Tenure Act assures that a teacher who has been employed for five consecutive years in a district(s) will become a permanent, or tenured teacher on the first day of their sixth year (2005). Suzanne believes that "sadly, tenure is huge. I'm going to tackle those hard topics because I'm tenured. I've got some muscle behind me. I feel like I've got enough resources that if somebody comes at me and tries to get my job because I'm pushing open-mindedness and tolerance, then I feel like I'm gonna win … hopefully … maybe." Denise, the GSA sponsor, agreed, "I don't think anyone would have touched the GSA who didn't have tenure." Wes questioned, "What is protected? I don't know that you really feel that. I don't really have a sense of that." He added, "I'm more confident than ever in my methodologies. As an instructor, I'm less confident than I've ever been in knowing what would be professionally problematic for me." And Monika confirmed that in her opinion,

> It's just a little more paperwork to remove a teacher, so it hasn't
> necessarily emboldened me. But I would say that my reputation usually
> precedes me with students, and I feel more secure in that. They come in
> and say, "Oh, my sister loved you." Or "My cousin always talked about
> you." And so, I feel as if that gives me a bit more security.

Although Blair had earned tenure at her previous school, she shared that her principal said, "It doesn't really matter if you're tenured; it's just a little bit more paperwork for me." She does not yet have tenure at her current school. She was quiet for a beat, and then she thought aloud, "I don't know that it was so much the tenure part that comforted me, but it was more the relationships that I had with those students and their

parents in that smaller district. I would see them at the basketball game and have conversations. I felt a sense of support there because I knew my students, at the end of the day, most of them had my back."

Identifying What Makes This Work Possible

Beyond having strong student relationships, participants found other avenues of support for their work within their schools. Jack shared that "our department is very much of the same mindset. We're all very open-minded, very dedicated to social justice." Wes agreed, "We also have a like-minded department with the desire to see an openness to texts and approaches in the classroom." Blair admitted that she was struggling to think of ways that her context opens space for her to engage students critically, but then she said that the librarians who don't have the same constraints as teachers have been excellent advocates for books that she may not be able to read as a whole class by advocating for ordering them, displaying them, and "making sure that those books get into those students' hands." Denise similarly had a hard time coming up with things that make this work possible at her school and said, "Is there anything?" But then, she agreed that she has some like-minded colleagues that encourage her.

Navigating Impediments

Participants found it easier to articulate what would help them be even more efficacious in their work. Wes made the distinction that "the exploration of ideas does not equate to their endorsement" and that the school board should understand "what a classroom should look like." He stated that regardless of whether a school board is more liberally or conservatively minded, he believes that they would want the "critical thinking muscle to be developed sooner rather than later." Blair agreed that studying English

language arts is just "a special way to do that" and that "literature is a beautiful way to show different perspectives." She believes that students must be given the opportunity to have conversations where "both sides can be heard calmly and respectfully." Suzanne further stated that "administration has to consider the importance of teaching empathy and civil discourse" and that "we need to find a way to protect teachers who prioritize those two things." Jack shared concerns that "a minority is controlling the narrative" and if he were in leadership, he would acknowledge that "the loudest voices aren't always the smartest voices." Denise mentioned that she "would just ask them to enforce a mask mandate" which seemed a bit out of place in the conversation, but I later learned that she was the only teacher who enforced a mask mandate in her classroom, and she believes that it put her at odds with her students which ended up becoming problematic when she tried to introduce difficult topics that required them to "hang in there with her." Finally, Monika recommended that the administration "trust the professionals they've hired" and "stand up for us when it comes to parents."

A Critical Framework

In the following section, participants describe their values and beliefs about a critical pedagogy including how they create the conditions for such work. This critical framework is organized around four conditions necessary in classrooms: the dissemination of knowledge including how it is received by students, how knowledge is negotiated, how knowledge is produced, and the learning context in which this work happens.

How Knowledge is Received

In racially homogeneous classrooms, teachers use instructional strategies to engage students' critical thinking. The strategies include learning how to question existing patterns of thought and dominant narratives and engaging with their own histories and narratives without putting their identity on trial may provide an inroad for this thinking. Educating students to read both historically and critically can surface problematic patterns and leveraging pop culture to understand and critique the production of meaning and identity in student's everyday lives can challenge students to become critical citizens.

Challenging existing patterns of thought.

Jack articulated the challenge facing teachers when he said, "You know, our Gen Xers' teaching is a little archaic, and we need to find a new way to do things. I'm going to have to be very, very adaptable." Denise exemplified this adaptability when she offered, "we research things about COVID … or you know when kids complain about something, we'll try to learn something about it." Blair also described this search for new information as she talked with a student who had a different opinion than she did. "He and I had extensive conversations about where you find real data and real information. We are both struggling, and where can we find truth?" Wes described this in his classroom "we jump into interesting conversation, and we see what insights the great content provokes and how that intersects with the world we're in at any given moment." Monika admitted that sometimes during these conversations students get "too fired up, too opinionated" and she finds that "casually weaving things in" and "having fun while getting new ideas across" makes them more palatable. Wes cautioned that "instructors need to be as wise as possible and still do the important work of bringing these

conversations to the table. It's kind of inevitable that they are going to encounter that, and I think that the lack of confidence is born out of that tension." Jack added, "It paints a broader picture for them. You expose them to as much as you can, and when they clue in on it, it's like seeing a blueprint because now they know." Wes calls it being a "curator of information."

Engaging with personal histories and narratives.

Wes described the role of a teacher as one who "intersect[s] the interesting content or ideas of the day, the unit, or whatever with the interests of the students and kind of where they live." Jack agreed that "finding that thing they are into and then using it to engage with the content" is key. Monika added to that the skill of building relationships by leveraging what they are into and gave the example "when we do our argumentative unit, that's a really good time for them to bring topics to explore." Additionally, participants shared how they use literature as a tool to access student's thinking. P6 believes that "you have to include them within the content, like 'What is your opinion?' Suzanne agreed, "I always encourage that, like 'What is your perspective and how does that shape the way you read it?' Blair shared that sometimes students laugh when Curley's wife dies in *Of Mice and Men*, and she is interested in that and asks, "Why is our reaction to laugh and not to sympathize with her? Why do we feel that?" Suzanne "is not just evaluating, she is wondering 'What do you think about it? Where was the author coming from? Okay, now what is your lens? Who are you and how does your perspective shape the way that you read this?" Additionally, Wes sees the role of the instructor to also be "connecting whatever content is in front of the students to what's going on in the world at the moment—their shared experiences." Denise remembered that

her student reflected, "You taught me about the parts of speech, but you also taught me to think and also taught me something about myself."

Reading within, upon, and against the text.

One of the challenges that teachers face in these contexts is a standardized curriculum that features canonical texts; however, Jack offered, "every piece of writing is designed to teach you something, right?" And he helps students access the author's message by "saturating them within the timeframe." Blair agrees that "digging into why Steinbeck wrote the way he did" requires "looking at Steinbeck's lens and hearing his story." Denise adds that

> author's craft is also important. Obviously, Harper Lee wanted us to like
> Atticus but we also talked about how that book is about so much more
> than race, and also how we are all hypocrites in some way or another.

Jack further stated that "*Animal Farm* isn't a novel about pigs, it is about much deeper thinking." Denise agreed that "I don't think that there's a reason for me to choose a newer book because I can teach this from a historical standpoint. And we can talk about why that's left in the past." Blair suggested that when reading *To Kill a Mockingbird,* they discuss "how Atticus is kind of forward for his time and also, how do we do better?"

Beyond situating a text within a timeframe, participants talked about analyzing the text with our current lens. Jack said, "and relating the history of the piece to 21st century America. We just looked at the 2016 election cycle and what was taking place there." Blair added, "It's not that we are letting Steinbeck get away with how he treats his characters, but really looking at the time period and the message, and then how do we

bring that message to 2022?" "And it's about connection," Jack concluded, "Like, how do you connect to this text personally? I may ask them to edit their constructed response, but really, I want to have a conversation with them and hear their story. I think through literature you can figure out why people are the way they are—one way or another."

Leveraging pop culture.

This was the weakest finding of the study. Participants use pop culture references during discussion but mostly rely on students to bring issues of interest to a discussion. "I think good theory in the classroom leads to interesting examinations of pop culture. Like, 'How do we evaluate what is normative in our culture and the degree to which this is driven by like social values, by shared media, and so on?'" Wes theorized. Monika agreed that "using pop culture and things they are interested in smooths the way for the bigger pieces." Blair tries to incorporate frequent small snippets: "Okay, someone just tweeted this out—what are we thinking about that?" Monika likes to use commercials and things that they "hear on a regular basis." Pop culture can be a "touchpoint of conversation," argued Wes. And Jack asks students to bring to discussion current topics that interest them. Monika uses pop culture "to build anticipation. For example, Paula Deen got into trouble a couple of years ago for using the n word. So when we have our discussion, I'll say, 'Oh guys, I just remembered … who knows who Paula Deen, the butter lady, is?' Of course, they know her from memes, and so I'll show them something about what happened, and we'll have a conversation."

How Knowledge is Negotiated

Once complex content has been introduced, students must be taught strategies in order to engage thoughtfully with the content which may be controversial or

uncomfortable. This work necessitates students transcend dualistic thinking, consider perspectives that differ from their own, and develop a tolerance for ambiguity. Thinking outside existing boundaries often results in discomfort for teachers as well as students.

Safeguarding space to examine multiple perspectives.

Jack believes that educators "are not in charge of [students] locations. We are in charge of maintaining a vessel to get them thinking. We do not influence their ideas; rather, we present them with information that they decipher on their own." Denise and Suzanne give students options whenever possible, and Wes promotes open inquiry so that students' learning is intrinsically driven. All participants discussed the importance of putting texts from different eras or points of view in conversation with each other which allows students to realize that, for example, although it may have been a century between two pieces, the message or struggle is the same. Suzanne and Monika both utilize NPR's story corps collection to explore others' experiences and contrast them with their own. Suzanne is also "very conscientious about the marginalized voices" both within her classroom and within the content." Questions are always welcome. She shared, "One day [a student] asked a really great question: 'What does LGBTQ stand for?' So, I answered. Another day, he said, 'I just don't understand why a boy would want to dress like a girl.' I said, 'Have you ever felt like a girl?' He said, "No." And I said, 'That is why you don't' understand, because you have never felt that way. But some people do, so just let them do their thing.' He's like, "Alright. It's not hurting me, so it doesn't bother me.' We are making progress," she smiled. Jack celebrated that "it opens up an entire society to different ways of thinking, and that's how you get things done, right? It's not fair to only be exposed and locked into only one way of thinking."

Tolerating ambiguity.

One of the most authentic findings was the willingness for participants to share the ambiguity that they feel surrounding their own work. During our conversations, every participant shared the experience of questioning or not being sure about their practice. Some comments were "I don't know. I wish I had a great answer," "maybe that's wrong," "I think it's still in progress," "I probably don't do that as much as I should," and "I don't know if I have an intuition about that."

Wes models ambiguity for his students by "building some professional distance between personal and shared knowledge. Like, we are talking about an idea over here and we are all going to be evolving in the way we think about that, including me." He often says things like, "I may be wrong about this …" "Please let me know your thoughts about this," or "is there anything that could change our minds about this?" He feels that taking a less serious approach gives students some room to "not be so worried they are going to be called out." He also will say, "It's never crossed my mind before to think through this issue. Where should we begin?"

Monika shared her approach after the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6 as "everyone being vulnerable and all of us on kind of a collective discovery." As students developed their opinions, she would say, "Well, let's check back in a week and see if we have any more information on that." Then, the next week, she would say, "Hey remember when we wondered about that … well, Look! I found something out." Jack believes that "ambiguity is necessary when considering more critical issues." Blair regularly admits to students, "Okay, you made me think about that. I'm going to do a little research and get back to you." And Denise recognizes ambiguity when they "never could decide about

some questions." Because Suzanne assesses what she prioritizes, "if you can Google and answer it probably won't be for a grade. Their interpretation could be completely wrong, but as long as they are showcasing their thinking, they will get credit."

Transcending dualistic thinking.

The importance of critically engaging students in conversation was an ongoing theme. Suzanne is careful "not to let any particular mindset dictate the conversation." Similarly, Jack noted that "you can't let a few people control the narrative—that goes both ways." Suzanne, Blair, and Monika all mentioned having the role of "devil's advocate" at times during discussion both to "cover one's own back" and because "it generates interesting conversation." Blair described feeling "a bit more handcuffed about what I can teach to everyone, but if I can get you on an individual level … that's where some interesting conversations happen."

Monika also models changing one's mind after getting new information, even in low-stakes settings. For example, after a student told her about a movie he liked, she said, "You know, I didn't; want to see that movie but now you've really convinced me." Wes is "very interested in students having time to reflect" for this kind of consideration. He describes giving students a variety of texts that "do not say the same things" and asking them to "think through them on your own and jot down some notes" and then they will dialogue about them. Wes front loads these discussions by "avoiding a kind of reductionist debate by saying, 'we are going to try to aim toward nuance by trying to understand why this is complex for people. If it wasn't, it would not be interesting to us'".

In other instances, Suzanne shared that she would ask, "Okay, what is missing in this point? What aspect of this argument has holes in it? Or what part of this perspective are we not thinking about? I might say, "Okay, how might an immigrant feel about what was just said? I'll intentionally throw in a question to shift the conversation." Denise asks students to come up with their own questions about the reading "it's when we get to the synthesis questions that they really reflect and we think about ourselves, in particular as a culture." Wes added that he feels "providing autonomous learning opportunities matters tremendously—we can nudge them into learning how to care about things."

Acknowledging that discomfort may arise.

Participants were willing to share moments of discomfort that they experience and that their students experience. Jack was open that "there are things that I am not comfortable with; maybe students don't understand or are uncomfortable with something because you don't know their story either." Denise shared a time when a discussion board conversation that wasn't monitored quickly got out of hand, and she "didn't know how to handle it, actually." Now she limits discussions to in-class. Jack concurred that he "does not do a whole lot with paper because that can be a touchy thing. I would rather contain it to my classroom with a student discussion than fielding an email from a parent later." Blair voiced frustration with "trying to show parents and administrators that the conversations we are having are not indoctrinating - we may be exploring an idea they haven't heard before, but that does not mean I endorse the idea. We have to have uncomfortable conversations sometimes because it may be the only time students are going to hear it." Blair also faces discomfort and uncertainty when students bring issues to the conversation "because do I let that happen knowing where this could go? Do I

127

assert some power and shut it down? But that's tricky, too, because again, where are they going to respectfully have these conversations if not in our classrooms?

How Knowledge is Produced

Knowledge production is an important outcome of this critical pedagogy. Knowledge production includes the creation of artifacts as well as new ideas. In a homogeneous classroom, this includes prioritizing student voice and experience, realizing commonality across differences, offering ample time for student self-reflection, and valuing student-generated content.

Prioritizing student voices and experiences.

Jack, Denise, and Monika all begin class by opening space for students to share personally. Jack begins each day by asking students to share "good news." Monika begins with "highs and lows. We always start with each other's stories, and we try to share a ton with each other." Denise described "We just did a little sharing—something at the beginning of class to just be known for what they are doing. It's also a good way to have students bring issues to discussion that are important to them." Blair uses freewriting at the beginning of each class to allow students' choice in what they share. Although Monika has been told not to ask about preferred pronouns, she shares a student interest inventory that asks students "what does your teacher need to know about you before the first day, how do you best learn, things like that. If they share about their identity, I will say, 'Wow, thanks so much for telling me about that. Come see me anytime you need."

Suzanne encourages everyone to participate because "In the real world you're going to have to communicate with people, especially people you disagree with and its'

important to hear other ideas. I try to encourage my really quiet kids by saying, 'people want to know what you think. '"Similarly, Wes "relies on students to bring things to the dialogue. Students drive open critical inquiry. It is the role of the instructor to build connections and build meaning around the things that are on their minds." One way that Wes invites critical inquiry is to have students critique a past syllabus and the American education system, creating a research-based alternative.

Realizing commonality across difference.

Monika has worked to get the book *Dear Martin* added to the English II curriculum. The story is from the perspective of a Black teen. She shared that student said, "This is the first whole book I've read since fifth grade. They were excited and wanted to read it." She also focuses on the Black character, Crooks, in *Of Mice and Men* in order to "learn his story." And then she "brings in pieces from NPR's story corps and we talk about how everyone has a story to share but maybe we didn't know about it." Suzanne also builds connections between her students and others through texts. "We read Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem and an excerpt from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and we talk about why people hide their identity. They don't want to talk upfront about it, so we write about it. But we ask, 'What are our masks and what are we hiding and why?"

Offering ample time to students for self-reflection.

Jack cautioned "Students have an uncanny ability to be smarter than they let you know they are." Monika added that "it seems that they are more stuck in their ways, or maybe just not mature enough to question, but what happens during the argument lesson is normally a kid or two will say, 'You know what I figured out? I actually don't believe

in the topic I'm writing about.' And we all celebrate and make a big deal." Suzanne went a step further and after her students chose a topic, she required that they argue the opposing side. "Most of the kids said at the end, 'I was really pissed off. I didn't want to do it. I didn't like my topic and I was mad that you made me. But I learned that these people who think this way, think this way because of x, y, and z.'" Monika likes to ask students "What did you learn? What was hard for you? What was easy?" Denise asks students to justify their feelings by reflectively writing. In a persuasive essay, she asks them to "reflect on the kind of student they are—speak to your strengths and your weaknesses." Blair adds "a couple of questions about me, like 'Reflect on my pedagogy.'" Wes asks his students, "'Do you find this interesting?' And they might say, 'Not at all. We don't care about this.' That's a good answer if you are asking a question of significance. 'Who would care? Why don't you care? And what would cause you to begin to care?' So those are the kinds of questions that will take us into what we spend time discussing."

Valuing student-generated content.

Because discussion is central to participants' pedagogy, they shared strategies for soliciting students' thinking. Jack asks "Now, what are you seeing?" Blair suggested that students are "thinking deeply about the texts that we are reading and putting their own spin on it. 'Yeah? Give it to me. What do you got?' And that's really neat." Suzanne believes it is "really important that the kids talk." Wes affirmed that critical thinking is "usually born out of conversations." Monika believes in equitable talk. "We all need to be prepared to say something. And we have to respect what everyone else says. And if we disagree, we disagree respectfully."

Blair invites students to bring current issues to the conversation. " I know what is important to me, but asking them to bring in a current event that they're following allows me to stay on the pulse of things that they find important. And it's crazy that typically on those days, no matter what we are doing afterward, we see connection." Wes gives students "time and opportunity to practice how to construct second order questions and how to build those questions around topics that are meaningful to them." Jack leverages a propaganda unit to have students "create propaganda around aspects of school that they want to influence other people's ideas about." Denise finds that "really informal presentations" allow students to share their ideas. Suzanne helps students "really develop their opinions about things. I hope it leads to meaningful development of arguments."

The physical space of the classroom provides an opportunity to construct content. Wes acknowledged that "I have nothing to do with what's on the walls. So yeah, it's the stuff that they find interesting. You can definitely build culture that way. I mean, the space hopefully reflects the values we care about—that you need to construct knowledge."

The Learning Community

A secondary finding that emerged during data analysis about the school context was the classroom culture and community that is necessary in order for critical engagement to occur. Participants share intentional instructional moves and dispositions that allow their students to be intellectual border crossers in racially homogeneous classrooms: exploring one's identity; acknowledging a collective bias without judgment; speaking to issues of social concern; and prioritizing relationships.

Exploring identity.

One of the easiest ways that Blair has found to explore identity is "by journaling and sharing with them." Both Monika and Suzanne begin the year with interest inventories that explore students' identities. Monika also begins every week with an activity called "highs and lows" which is "a really informal way to get them to build relationships but also to share their perspectives on life." Jack theorized that if you "invite them into your world a little bit, they appreciate it and reciprocate." He connects meaningfully with his classes by "doing good news every single day. That helps us build on each other's success and we just know what is going on." Suzanne developed an identity unit because "a huge part of my philosophy with empathy and open-mindedness is being brave enough to share, so I share with them, and I have gotten pretty vulnerable in a lot of ways."

Acknowledging and illuminating collective bias.

Suzanne shared a typical reader response conversation: "Okay, I'm an almost 40-year-old White woman in the Midwest. How does my lens shape the way that I read this? Okay, you're a teenager in the Midwest. How does this shape the way you read this? At the same time, there is a pretty dominant mindset, and so I try to make sure that those who aren't the loudest still get their time to speak up. Blair shared that "there are a lot of moments where we ask ourselves 'Are we entitled to have feelings on this? Are we even entitled to have this conversation? Is this a valid conversation for a bunch of White kids to talk about? Sometimes we don't know, but those conversations have power and open kids' minds to thinking, 'I may not have that personal experience, but that doesn't mean I shouldn't think about it. It doesn't mean I shouldn't engage in that space."

Although Jack is a White male, "At the very beginning of the year, I tell the story that I was fortunate enough to be able to come from a racially diverse family." Denise becomes a part of the learning community by competing every assignment with her students; she also has her name on a sharing stick that is used to ensure equity while sharing. Monika is careful not to have "I got you" moments; rather, "Look, we have found out together as this has developed." And Suzanne conducts a community building activity called "post secrets" where "anyone can anonymously share a secret that is holding them back from realizing their true potential. She always includes one of her own.

Empowering students to speak to issues of social concern.

Wes, Blair, and Monika spoke specifically about the "learning community," "the relationships that are built," and the "amount of comfort" that "talking about controversial issues" requires. Suzanne believes that inclusive, small group conversation is an important prerequisite to whole class discussion, and she qualifies that "they can choose their groups of 2-4 as long as no one is left out," and "putting kids on the spot" is never a good idea. She always "gives the option of sharing on a discussion board rather than in class." Monika feels that "doing things in a casual way" is key when discussing "heavy topics," and Wes added that "Practically, it's really important to interject brevity—lots of comedy." And Blair believes that the "relationships you build with students are your first line of defense." Additionally, Denise believes that with a strong enough relationship, she can talk with students prior to class to see if they are comfortable "opening up a particular dialogue."

Jack acknowledged that "You have to be brave." And Denise shared that if a student says something that isn't aligned with her ethic of equitable and inclusive discussion, she says, "I'd be interested in your research about that." Prioritizing factual information helps her navigate these conversations. Jack believes that currently, "political division is equally important to understand as racial division" because of the "tumultuous relationship Republicans and Democrats have right now." Monika shared that every year, someone will look around and say, "'Well, no one here is retarded, so I can say it.' And then I have to say, 'Well, you know, my sister-in-law has an intellectual disability. Let's talk about what we don't see just looking around the room.'"

Prioritizing relationships.

Prioritizing relationships was the strongest finding in the study. All but one participant indicated that this was essential in order to engage students critically. Participants' classrooms are places students gather before and after school to hang out. Before school, Jack's room has low music playing, students are grouped throughout the room talking, a few are writing on the board, and some are sitting in chairs near his desk. When the first bell rings, students gather their things and head to their first period class as a different group of students fills the room. Similarly, although Wes and I met during the school day, he said, "Students may drop in, they sometimes do." After school in Denise's room, students flow in and out to share some news with her. I get the impression that these are not current students but rather past students who have relationships with her and don't see her during the day. Suzanne said that a group of LGBTQ+ students "hang out every day after school for a few minutes as they wait for the traffic to clear. They are welcome, and they know I love them. They know I will support them any way that I can."

Another commonality is that these participants view their classroom as a "community "or a "family" and they set behavioral norms that facilitate this kind of space. Jack says that they are "one entity in this room. We have to leave things—like who we might talk to in certain social circles—at the door. It's just about kindness." Denise understands the importance of this when tackling content that might be uncomfortable. "Get them to like you as much as you can, and they will roll with you if they like you." Suzanne says, "we are not going to be unkind. We are not going to be cruel. You can treat each other like garbage outside this room, but not in here." Blair sets concrete expectations during conversation. She does not expect that "everyone agrees—of course you don't—but you aren't going to take away from someone else's experience." She understands that non-verbal expressions are powerful and says,

> 'As a listener, you will refrain from making eye contact across the room with someone, your facial expressions and body language won't change depending on what someone shares' so when they are sharing, my eyes are not watching the person sharing. I'm scanning and I'm seeing who's making a rude look at their best friend.

Monika believes that what is most necessary for engaging students critically is building relationships. "So, I greet them at the door, I walk around and try to say everyone's name at least once a period. I try to get within two feet of them bodily. I ask them a million questions, and I try to make a connection with every kid without making it obvious."

Another way that participants prioritize the learning community is through the prolific use of plural, first person pronouns like "we" and "us." There is an intentional decentering of self and their own beliefs and values in favor of a collective "we" who

engage in discovery and knowledge seeking. This is an important tenet of border theory which positions teachers as cultural workers and guides alongside students on an exploration of thought. This use of language allows teachers to hold space for multiple viewpoints while students journey toward more nuanced understanding of complex issues and ideas. It also invites belonging and positions all students as critical thinkers.

Discussion

Giroux (1992/2005) argued for a reformulation of education that gives "as much attention to pedagogy as it does to traditional and alternatives of scholarship" (p. 66). That is, connecting the emerging identities of students to certain kinds of knowledge and power in order to create democratic spheres within our classrooms. A "critical pedagogy for democracy does not begin with test scores but with questions" (p.67). Beyond teaching techniques, Giroux defines pedagogy as "central to any political practice that takes up questions of how individuals learn, how knowledge is produced, and how subject positions are constructed" (p. 74). The border pedagogy framework illustrates how teachers in homogeneous settings were able to engage students critically despite the limitations of their contexts. Limitations might include differing levels of freedom regarding content, more or less administrative oversight, and uncertainty about what is being shared beyond the classroom and with whom. Instructional artifacts that participants shared are illustrative of student engagement in critical thinking, a centering of socially just teaching practices, and address multiple literacies while including aspects across the border pedagogy framework.

The Context

Participants narrated a shift toward more standardized curriculum and co-planning in mid-sized districts to maintain rigor and adapt to the possibilities that virtual instruction offers. During the spring of 2020, schools struggled to provide consistent, online instruction and over the past two years, this has been addressed by standardization of curriculum in mid-sized districts. Participants enjoyed varying levels of instructional freedom regarding content and assessment, yet all engaged students critically. Some were able to design units around diverse texts while others found it more effective to bring in small things to consider and discuss while teaching a standardized curriculum, thus staying under the radar.

Participants described an emboldening of voices that represent a majority mindset and found that teaching empathy and civil discourse were essential. . According to Giroux (1992/2005), educators "need to develop a critical pedagogy in which the knowledge, habits, and skills of critical citizenship, not simply good citizenship, are taught and practiced" (p. 66). One way participants engage students in democratic literacy (North, 2009) is by prioritizing discussion as a model for civil discourse as well as a way to assess these skills. Another shift participants noticed in some students was the tendency toward dualistic thinking of rights and wrongs and an early commitment to initial viewpoint. According to Brookfield (1987), considering other points of view is a central tenet to critical thinking. Participants were intentional about using texts to put conflicting perspectives into conversation with one another in order to teach thinking processes

While participants found colleagues to be a source of encouragement, they articulated a need for administration to move beyond risk mitigation to an active role of support. According to Mintzberg (1973), principals are first-line supervisors and as such have both standards to enact as well as standards to enforce, a complex role. Participants agreed that a principal's leadership style affects their ability to feel confidence in their instruction and all participants expressed a desire to feel more supported. Support for teachers requires what Theoharis (2008) describes as arrogant humility, a belief in what you are doing that supersedes critique. Transformational leaders display both arrogant humility and a commitment to justice-oriented education (DESE, 2021b, leader standards). On the other hand, pseudo transformational leaders try to control (Theoharis, 2008). While only one participant shared an example of a direct mandate from her principal, others reported more subtle, less direct intervention through removal of curriculum, and department-wide mandates. Participants shared that having the trust and support of administrators would positively enhance their work.

Engaging Students' Thinking

Participants utilize Bloom's revised taxonomy which included a metacognitive knowledge category which prioritizes students' self-reflection. The revised taxonomy is less linear and acknowledges the recursive nature of knowledge (Krathwohl, 2002). Participants in this study built students' background knowledge in order to engage their higher-order thinking skills. Participants required that students process different types of information in order to engage in adaptive thinking, and participants did not make distinctions between students in honors and regular sections of English regarding thinking. Rather, the differences were noted as honors students having more practice

138

engaging critical thinking skills or being more compliant and willing to engage with difficult conversations.

The instructional strategy, Closing Statement Comparison, is a close read of Atticus Finch's closing argument to the jury in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Jake Brigance's closing statement in the 1996 film, *A Time to Kill*. This artifact provides a case for students to explore and think about differing perspectives of the justice system. Students are given a hard copy of Atticus' argument to read, and they watch an excerpt of the film with transcription. Students note similarities between the two by tracking "direct quotes" on a graphic organizer. The second part of the activity includes questions designed to analyze the closing statements and make a judgment about whether or not, in their opinion, "this notion of justice typically plays out in our judicial systems today." Blair first encountered a version of this comparison activity when student teaching. She noticed that "the conversations were pretty cut and dry" because in both stories "we had two White men who were saying what justice ought to be." However, she felt that she always had a few students who "did want to push back a little bit "and so she added an "extending the thought" activity with questions in order to "open up space to allow that conversation to deepen" as students explore the nuances of complex issues by considering one's own point of view, checking assumptions, raising questions, and gathering relevant data (Merriam & Bierema, 2017).

Centering Socially Just Teaching Practices

Culturally responsive teaching requires that both difference and power be addressed (Gay, 2018), and participants teach both distributive justice and relational justice. Issues of distributive justice are taught with instructional activities like the 2-3

lesson sequence which explores questions like "Is justice always achievable at a societal level? To what extent is it true that a scarcity model is in play in modern American culture, economics, and academics? And to what extent can monetary compensation resolve injustice and to what extent is it unable to do so? Students are introduced to texts to consider like Michael Sandel's "Arguing Affirmative Action" essay which explores the issue in an "academic, even-handed way" that gives students access to a complex topic. Next, they read an excerpt from Ta-Nehisi Coates *We Were Eight Years in Power* and *The Atlantic's: A Case for Reparations* which bring up the questions "To what extent can it be resolved, or can it kind of be activated momentarily? And then we might pivot to Coates and Hughes discussion. They had a back and forth in front of Congress over "conflicting perspectives on the utility and viability of reparations" which adds a new context to the discussion.

These evaluative reads of an author's argument allow multiple perspectives to be considered, and students are then able to speak to social issues. According to Giroux, border pedagogy "creates the conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power" (p. 20).The summative assessment to this unit allows students the choice to explore an "ethical dilemma" that interests them and ask the same kinds of questions and put texts in conversation with one another about them.

Issues of relational justice are often addressed in the moment. During an uncomfortable conversation, a student stormed out of the class. Blair was stunned, and she had to "go try to figure out how to handle it." She found the student in the hall, had a

conversation, and he was able to share what frustrated him. "It was cool because even though we didn't see eye to eye, I think he recognized that I did give him some kind of a platform" and the relationship was strengthened. When she returned to the room, "the uncertainty was so real," and she said to her class, "I know that you all felt that tension, and I appreciate that you didn't walk out. I appreciate your restraint." Providing students with the opportunity and tools to negotiate conflict when it arises is one way that participants prioritize relational justice.

Attending to Multiple Literacies

Participants address all types of literacy: functional, critical, democratic, and relational. North (2006) defines literacy as a range of skills needed to effect positive personal and social change. Participants narrated a belief in engaging multiple literacies in their teaching in order to challenge the status quo.

Functional Literacy

In ELA classrooms, functional literacy enables higher order thinking skills which equip students with tools necessary to interrogate issues of injustice found in texts. Several activities invite students to critically consider what they read. In one lesson, students write three levels of questions to go beyond comprehension and interpretation to synthesizing information to "apply it to the world or a greater perspective in order to examine society." Students also annotate "for deep critical thinking" by considering "how someone else might interpret this subject in a different way." This activity can be used to critically examine fiction or non-fiction texts. There is a short paragraph that directs students thinking: "Good analysis isn't a race to the finish; it's more about allowing yourself time to think about these questions, ruminate on them, and see where your

thinking goes. *Then,* you can formulate a written response." This is followed by four

questions that move from summary of the text to analysis of the author's life and time

including "what was going on in the world, region, state, etc. "and why it still matters

today.

This activity allows students to read within, upon, and against a text by situating

the text in a particular time, written by a particular author. Students can speak to issues of

social concern by exploring "what was going on in the world at that time," and they

transcend dualistic thinking by considering perspectives that differ from their own while

also thinking about why it "still matters today" not just to them but to someone who holds

a different perspective.

Critical Literacy

According to Cho (2018), critical literacy includes critical analysis of texts to

understand not just what a text says explicitly but also hidden messages to be read

implicitly, questioning whose interests are furthered, and analyzing arguments for

validity (Cho, 2018).

This activity supports students' "analysis of how multiple texts reflect historical

and cultural contexts" as they read the novel, *Of Mice and Men*, set during the depression.

Students view a short documentary titled The Great Depression: Crash Course Black

American History on YouTube and answer the following questions like: What are some

of the policies we still use today? How were many people excluded from legislation that

could help them? To what extent does the racial wealth gap exist today? These questions

help students understand the actions of the characters and consider multiple perspectives

and importantly, perspectives different from their own. A reading analysis question that

follows this activity is "When Curley's wife wants to threaten Crooks, what does she say and how does Crooks react? Knowing the historical context, explain his reaction." The video supports' students reading within, upon, and against the text by learning how "local policies reflect local customs" which is still true today. Dualistic thinking is transcended as students consider the intended and unintended consequences of public policy.

Democratic Literacy

By comparison, democratic literacy, according to North's 2006 study, contains three desired components: "the seeking of common ground, opportunities for multiple, competing perspectives to be voiced and heard, and discursive, rather than physical, conflict resolution strategies" (p. 563).

Monika lobbied to add the young adult novel *Dear Martin* to the English II curriculum. The instructional artifact, Dear Martin Ch. 10, is an example of the kinds of ways that Monika asks students to engage with the text. Word choices like "Why do you think?" "How do you feel about?" "Share your opinion" and "Be creative!" prioritize student voice. Students are given options regarding quotes to choose to connect to, how they respond to the quote, and how they represent Justyce's emotional state during the chapter. An entire page is the outline of Justyce's head to symbolize his emotions.

This activity allows students to explore commonalities among differences by considering how they "would react if you heard one of your friends talking like that" and by "filling in the face to represent the emotional state of Justyce." Students are asked to speak to issues of social concern by writing about how the shooting of an unarmed black teenager affected Justyce, and existing patterns of thought are questioned when students

are asked to "respond to" quotes that illustrate the Black experience of the main character.

A requirement for teaching the book was that "after the first couple of chapters, I had to give a perspective from a police officer." The activity, Questions for Officer Combs, is what Monika created in response. She asked students to construct questions to ask the school resource officer, and he came to class to answer them. Some questions are standard, like "Why did you decide to become a police officer?" and "How long and intense was your training?" Others intersect with the themes of the book, like "How do you respond to a threatening/intense situation? AND when should you use force? And "How are you and other officers trained to avoid racial profiling?"

This activity transcends dualistic thinking by soliciting a point of view that is different from that in the book, *Dear Martin, as students* consider the themes of the book in their own context. Discomfort may arise while asking questions like, "How would you respond to the book situation: Officer Castillo sees the main character in the middle of the night, wearing a hoodie putting a drunk girl in a car."

Relational literacy

Participants understand the importance of prioritizing relationships. For students to engage in the work of critical self-examination and unlearning of dominant narratives, Giroux (1992/2005) suggested a setting that is "pedagogically safe and socially nurturing rather than authoritarian" (p.25). One of the ways that teachers can be critical helpers is to encourage students to probe their assumptions without threatening their self-esteem (Brookfield, 1987). While there are risks, critical thinking can occur with positive triggers, and need not always be disorienting or traumatic. It frequently happens within a

social network, and teachers can guide group activities and communicate goals clearly so that they model critical thinking skills. Because critical thinking is not a destination but rather a journey, teachers can be guides on a journey to cross intellectual borders of understanding. Thinking in terms of borders allows one to acknowledge a common identity as fellow humans while also seeking to travel to other lands in search of new ways of thinking. It connotes an openness to listening to others' experiences and points of view to decrease the distance between groups.

This activity is inspired by Frank Warren's 2005 project, Post Secrets. People mailed anonymous postcards with images and words depicting "a secret that must be true and never expressed before", and he published them online and in book form. The purpose of this project was to "provide inspiration for those who read and write them." Suzanne uses this as a "Monday Motivation" activity, and the anonymous secrets are written because "we all have a story; sometimes we need to release these thoughts, feelings, and secrets; reading others' reminds us to treat others with kindness; and others have felt how we feel." Suzanne described this activity as an antidote to "how cruel they are to one another online; they just need to feel safe." She acknowledged that some students find connection online, but for many, it is an isolating experience. Suzanne includes her own anonymous post secret, and a handful are displayed in the classroom. Students can engage with the strengths and limitations of their own stories, their voices and experiences are central, they are able to self-reflect, and identity is explored. Discomfort may arise as students consider what to share and read others' secrets.

Limitations

Participants were positioned as experts in this study; therefore, challenges and complications of this work in practice may have been minimized. Pandemic constraints required that we conduct our initial focus group via Zoom rather than in person as initially planned. While Zoom provided an alternate platform, it also may have constrained sharing as participants were not able to interact in a comfortable setting prior to the conversation. The study was limited to veteran high school ELA teachers, and student voices and experiences were not included in the study.

Implications for Future Research

Future research is need to understand how teachers are engaging students critically in racially homogeneous spaces. This study confirms that the work is complex and unique to each teacher and school setting. Therefore, studying the instructional strategies of early career ELA teachers who have graduated from teacher preparation programs that center socially-just values may provide a more complex understanding of instructional methods. Additionally, observing and hearing from students who are experiencing these strategies has the potential to strengthen the framework. Finally, exploring the emerging community of like-minded teachers that has emerged from this study as they plan to continue to meet and share experiences and instructional methods may help surface ways to sustain teachers in a profession that has become unhospitable to many.

<div align="center">

Conclusions

</div>

Borders are challenged and crossed when students use new and existing knowledge in order to create their own texts. Leveraging their own experiences and understanding how their location in the world intersects with others is critical. Giroux

<div align="center">

146

</div>

(1992/2005) shared a vision of knowledge production in which knowledge and power

come together not merely to affirm difference but to interrogate it, to open up broader

theoretical considerations, to tease out its limitations, and to engage a vision of

community in which student voices define themselves in terms of their distinct social

formations and their broader collective hopes. (p. 27)

Instructional artifacts are intended to illustrate the complex work that participants

did to engage students in critical thinking in homogeneous settings. They are not

prescriptive; rather, they are context-specific and incorporate multiple tenets of border

pedagogy. Others have addressed culturally responsive teaching by addressing how

teachers of all backgrounds can enter diverse school spaces and help all students reach

high academic achievement by leveraging cultural knowledge to build new

understandings, celebrate cultural difference, and build relationships in the community.

Yet, that view misses a large portion of teachers who find themselves in homogeneous

settings where the diversity present may be subtle or undetectable and whose contexts are

at odds with equity-oriented teaching. In such cases, naming a framework for instruction

that engages students critically within the parameters of the school context is essential.

An important next step is to continue building communities among like-minded

colleagues across districts in order to share ideas as well as to cultivate the hope and

stamina that such work requires. With predictions of a teacher shortage, it is crucial to

find communities that energize practice. Further research in classrooms that includes

student voices would further solidify an effective framework. Because tenure did not

provide the assumed protection, further research with early career teachers who have

graduated from teacher education programs that focus on socially just teaching would

have the potential to expand the framework.

References

Ahmed, K. S. (2020). Evolving through tensions: preservice teachers' conceptions of social justice teaching. *English Education, 31*(3), 245–259.

Apple, M. W. (2005). Doing things the 'right' way: legitimizing educational inequalities in conservative times. *Educational Review,* 57(3), 271-293.

Apple, M. W. (2008). Rightest gains and critical scholarship. *Educational Review, 70*(1), 75-83.

Brookfield, S. D. (1987). *Developing critical thinkers: Challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking and acting.* Jossey-Bass.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory.* (2nd ed.) Sage.

Cho, H. (2017). Navigating the meanings of social justice, teaching for social justice, and multicultural education. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *19*(2), 1–19.

Chubbuck, S. M. (2010). Individual and structural orientations in socially just teaching: Conceptualization, implementation, and collaborative effort. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(3), 197–210.

Conklin, H. G., & Hughes, H. E. (2016). Practices of compassionate, critical, justice-oriented teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 67*(1), 47-60.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2016). *30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher*. Sage.

Dover, A. G. (2013). Getting "up to code": Preparing for and confronting challenges

    when teaching for social justice in standards-based classrooms. *Action in Teacher*

    Education, 35(2), 89–102.

Elbaz-Luwisch, F. (2001) Personal story as passport: Storytelling in border pedagogy.

    Teaching Education, 12(1), 81-101.

Elder, L. & Paul, R. (2007). The thinker's guide to analytic thinking: How to take

    thinking apart and what to look for when you do. The Foundation for Critical

    Thinking. https://www.criticalthinking.org/files/SAM_Analytic_Think2007b.pdf

Freire, P. (1968/2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Bloomsbury. (Original work

    published 1968.)

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.).

    Teachers College Press.

Giroux, H. (1992/2015). *Border Crossing: Cultural workers and the politics of*

    education. Routledge.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* Aldine Publishing.

Gorski, P. (2016). Rethinking the role of "culture" in educational equity: From cultural

    competence to equity literacy. *Multicultural Perspectives, 18*(4), 221–226.

Henning, N. (2013). We make the road by walking together: New teachers and the

    collaborative and context-specific appropriation of shared social justice-oriented

    practices and concepts. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 36*, 121–131.

Holmes, T.R. (2010). *The hierarchy of epistemological beliefs: All ways of knowing are*

    not created equal.

Hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking*. Routledge.

Hytten, K., & Bettez, S. C. (2011). Understanding education for social justice. *Educational Foundations.* (Winter-Spring), 7–24.

JanMohamed, A. R. (1993). Some implications of Paulo Freire's border pedagogy. In Eds. H. A. Giroux & P. McLaren *Cultural Studies,* 7(1), 107-116.

Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An overview. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(4), 212-218.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture.* Jossey-Bass.

Matteson, H. C., & Boyd, A. S. (2017). Are we making "PROGRESS"? A critical literacies framework to engage pre-service teachers for social justice. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education, 13*(1), 28–54.

Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice.* Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Mertens, D. M. (2019). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Missouri Learning Standards. 2016. Revised 6/2020. https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/curr-mls-standards-ela-6-12-sboe-2016.pdf

Missouri Educator Evaluation System, 2013, Teacher Standards. https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/TeacherStandards.pdf

Missouri State University. (2020). Public affairs mission statement. http://publicaffairs.missouristate.edu/pillars.htm

Morales, A. (1996). *Alejandro Morales: Fiction past, present, future perfect.* Bilingual

  Press.

North, C. E. (2006). More than words? Delving into the substantive meaning(s) of "social

  justice" in education. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(4), 507- 535.

Prior, L. (2003). *Using documents in social research.* Sage.

Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in*

  education and the social sciences (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.

SECTION 6: SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

Before I began my journey as an educational researcher, problems that I encountered in the classroom or working with teacher candidates (TCs) seemed inevitable. I would react to them, and often they became patterned. Becoming an educational researcher fundamentally shifted the way that I now approach my work by seeing educational problems as things to learn more about, interrogate from multiple perspectives, and gather data to address. When I enter a classroom either to observe a candidate teaching or to visit with a veteran teacher about her practice, I am more open to see problems I encounter as something that I am obligated to learn about. Over the past few years, the landscape of education has shifted considerably, and problems of practice have become prolific, yet I am energized to think more deeply about them with my colleagues and students.

When I started this program, I had been in my current position for eight years and had developed what French and Raven (1959/2005) called referent power due to my longevity and my commitment to the program. I had also been a student of each new director's leadership style, learning what works and what doesn't which is valuable knowledge for my own leadership (Northouse, 2019). However, I had not yet developed my own scholarly practice of research, and my work was not informed by ongoing intrinsic curiosity, rather I attended conferences and training to learn "the next big thing."

Going through the program and the dissertation process has ignited that curiosity, demystified qualitative research, and provided a process through which to attain what French and Raven (1959/2005) described as expert power, or the ability to gain knowledge in an area and develop expertise. Beyond earning a doctoral degree through

completion of a dissertation, the process has improved my own practice and leadership by centering the role of data and informing my own scholarly identity.

How the Dissertation Influenced my Educational Leadership

I decided to pursue a doctoral program because I had identified problems of practice that I was compelled to learn more about in order to effect change as a teacher educator. Kochar-Bryant (2016) described this evolving educational identity as a "bringing together groups with different world-views and educating, not for tolerance, but for solidarity – learning to live from the point of view of the other without giving up one's own view" (p. 32). In my experience, it is only through listening with the intention of learning from those who have a different perspective that real change can occur. The dissertation process was an exercise in listening to and learning from the participants. I have learned that data analysis is a systematic and thoughtful way to attend to others' perspectives, clarify a complex situation, and create an informed plan of action which has influenced my practice as an educational leader.

Data-Driven Leadership

A pedagogical approach that I value is being responsive to data both in the classroom and in the field. Zettelmeyer and Bolling (2014) posited that leaders must act on the results of data collection. In the field, I am responsive to data in a variety of ways. Student teaching observations are educative experiences rather than assessments. Teacher candidates direct this instruction by identifying areas of focus that are scaffolded and responsive to the needs of their students. During the lesson, I gather data to address the stated goals and we use the data to inform a reflective learning conversation. The goal of these conversations is to bridge the gap between theory and practice as we work within

155

the realities of schools. For example, a teacher candidate's goal might be "student engagement." The data gathered, the evidence of engagement, might reveal the various kinds of engagement that students experience, and the teacher candidate may realize that an activity that engages students' attention may not demonstrate proficiency in a new skill. A goal for the next observation might be "students are critically engaged by demonstrating [a stated skill]." Engaging in the dissertation process which solely focuses on data reified my understanding that data informs concepts, uncovers misunderstandings, raises questions that we had not considered, and guides our instructional decision making.

Another way that data informs my practice is by hearing from students at the midpoint and the end of each course in order to improve my own practice. I also solicit data from students to understand what is working well for them in a course and what isn't working well. I share the feedback, and we discuss the things that can change as well as things that can't with a rationale for both. According to O'Leary (2005), data is useful in addressing "real-world" dilemmas defined as a situation an educational practitioner faces where she has to navigate existing tensions to improve her work. Different from "felt difficulties," these problems are situated in larger educational policy and procedures that create dilemmas for educators in their daily work. It has been interesting to consider how the data that I gathered during the dissertation process can also inform my own practice as an educational leader. While data may not provide clear answers, it is a tool for decision making, and it is the responsibility of the scholar practitioner to take the steps of ethically gathering data in order to find workable solutions to real-world dilemmas.

Identity Shift

Participants in my study shared an ethic of humility which is essential for self-reflection and improvement. Although they are experienced, veteran teachers, each understood and articulated the complex nature of teaching and learning that requires an openness to re-thinking how we might best serve students. A common refrain during interviews and focus groups was "I don't know" or "I'm not sure." Participants voiced how their instruction has changed over the years and predicted more change in the future. They also expressed the value they find in learning from others.

While I have learned to approach data with humility as I seek to improve my own practice, identifying a problem of practice and conducting the research for my dissertation has also solidified my identity as an educational researcher. According to Kochlar-Bryant (2016), higher education institutions are aware of their civic duty to address the needs of their communities but doing so poses challenges due to changing technologies and needs. One role of data is to gather multiple perspectives in order to understand these changes. Teacher educators are uniquely situated to gather data from the field and from TCs in the field in order to better understand the changing nature of education and those we educate. Being responsive to data gathered is one role of the educational leader.

According to Spikard (2017), the data collected depends on the research question. Some of the foundational goals of our program, grounded in the public affairs mission, are to enact equitable teaching practices and dispositions that open literacy learning opportunities for all students; to collaborate with colleagues to refine and adjust teaching; to learn from and contribute to the latest research and conventions in the field; and to

communicate instructional and professional choices to wide-ranging audiences, including students, parents, administrators, and community members (Missouri State University, 2019, "English Education Foundational Goals"). Yet, there is conflict when these "progressive concepts [learned] in universities get washed out in the orthodox settings of schools" (Smagorinsky, 2004, p. 218). The disconnect between the two realms is well-documented (Barnes, 2016; Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016) with a focus on the difficulty TCs face simultaneously navigating the progressive university and the more conservative public-school setting. The ability to adapt to established systems and find ways to work within them is key, both for me as well as my TCs, and that goal informed my research questions for my dissertation.

Prior to this program, I would not have had the skills to address the tension central to the student teaching experience. In ENG 432/433, the seminar course that students take in conjunction with their student teaching semester, TCs brought up "sticking points" to equitable teaching which indicated a need to make a programmatic commitment to socially just teaching. In response, we created a framework for socially just English language arts teaching which shapes our program mission and values. The framework was co-created with students as we read and discussed current writings on culturally responsive teaching, and it centers a commitment to just teaching practices. However, according to research, this work happens on a continuum and so I also developed an introductory English education course in order to introduce the framework earlier in the program. This tension also informed my dissertation topic as I sought the expertise of area veteran teachers who were engaging students' critical thinking skills while navigating these same tensions.

How the Dissertation Process Influenced my Scholarship

Heikkinen, et. al. (2016) conceptualized practitioner research as a service station, a place to refill scholarly tanks in order to develop "local knowledge (i.e., improvement of the teaching and learning practice" (p. 3). Engaging in the dissertation process has been invigorating, and I have experienced a refilling of my scholarly tank. At the same time, teaching is becoming a less hospitable endeavor to many. I often speak with teachers who report a lack of student engagement, more administrative direction than they are comfortable with, and hostility from community stakeholders. As a scholar practitioner, I believe that I have an ethical responsibility to acknowledge and respond to these changes while working to build trusting relationships with candidates.

Johnson (2018) centered morals as a key element in decision making, and he further linked education to moral development. I agree with his argument and believe that educators have an obligation to develop their own moral sensitivity and judgment in order to be responsive to data collected. As a teacher educator and English education scholar, I must first be aware of my own implicit biases, personal experiences and motivations that shape my stance toward socially just teacher preparation in order to effectively address data (Metz, 2018). Preparing candidates to enter the profession as it currently is requiring a nuanced understanding of issues and a commitment to centering relationships.

Complexity and Nuance

Early in the program, I identified a problem of practice that related to our program's mission and values of being justice-oriented educators in homogeneous spaces. This problem of practice relates to socially just teaching preparation and requires

159

data based on both beliefs and attitudes — what people think, as well as on acts and behavior—what people do as a result (Spikard, 2017). Participants in my study are teachers who have also identified this dilemma and are acting as a result. The dissertation experience has provided an inroad to this work that is nuanced and hopeful.

While schools are filled with people who can be analyzed using the human resource frame, these individuals create a complex community. Bolman and Deal (2017) suggested that people are not to blame for politics, rather "interdependence, divergent interests, scarcity and power relations inevitably spawn political activity" (p. 183). Additionally, schools are unique organizations that are managed both from within by an administrative team as well as from without by various stakeholders like school board members, parents, and legislators who may have conflicting agendas (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Gatti, et al., (2018) acknowledged that education is political and being together in school spaces is inherently political. Bolman & Deal (2017) suggested that people in organizations become savvy political actors who "develop an agenda, map the environment, manage relationships with both allies and enemies, and negotiate compacts, accords and alliances" (p. 223). This is informing my scholarship by verifying that there is no one right way to go about this work; rather, as a teacher educator, there are things that we should address to ensure that TCs' individual skill and dedication are not overwhelmed by the inevitable conflict that they will encounter in schools.

In order to navigate this terrain, Johnson (2018) recommended engaging in dual processing which is "based on the premise that both logic and emotion are essential to making good ethical choices (p. 177). Through the dissertation process, I have learned that this conflict can be assuaged through instruction. Participants in my study were not

overwhelmed by the recent shifts in their contexts, and while they were positioned as "experts," none reported feeling overwhelmed by teaching. Their thoughtful orientation to their work illustrated a nuanced interaction with knowledge grounded in experience, context, and openness (Holmes, 2010). Adopting this stance as a scholar is especially important in my work with student teachers who have unique beliefs and are working in varied contexts. Participants were keenly aware of the political risk mitigation that administration was navigating, and thoughtfully designed instruction that allowed for the scaffolding of knowledge, literacy practices that functioned as vehicles to consider both distributive justice and relational justice, and the prioritization of relationships.

People First

A central assumption of the human resource frame is that organizations that try to oust the human element are doomed (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The strongest finding in my study was the focus that participants put on their students, particularly the relationships that they built with students.

One of the things that I am learning about in relation to adult learners is how a goal of   critical thinking is not to change another's mind. Rather, it is a way to open dialogue that may result in a shift in thinking but may also result in a learner being more grounded in their beliefs after careful consideration of others' points of view (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Teacher candidates are technically adults, and my scholarship must allow for individual interpretation of our program mission and values. Throughout the dissertation process, I marveled at each participant's unique stance toward justice-oriented teaching. The constant was their generous spirit toward students and their

understanding of the interactional skills required to do the complex work of learning together in schools.

Final Thoughts

I am leaving this program with a more nuanced understanding of my professional goals, a more open heart to hear and learn from others, and a resolve to as Merriam and Bierema (2014) advised, allow experiences to be educative in ways that allow us to "stop and question, and perhaps change, our beliefs" (p. 212). I learned a great deal from my participants, and it is humbling to reflect on the scope of things I have learned in the past two years. However, I now know that what I presumed would be the completion of my studies will really be the beginning. I have learned that my commitment to my own work has been both challenged and strengthened, and the tenets of MSU's public affairs mission: ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement are guideposts for the work that I do in schools. Finally, I am proud of the journey that took me from a mentor of student teachers with a flexible schedule that accommodated my young family to a leader and co-learner who is empowering graduates to become teacher leaders who care deeply about their students.

References

Ahmed, K. S. (2020). Evolving through tensions: preservice teachers' conceptions of social justice teaching. *English Education, 31*(3), 245–259.

Agarwal, R., Epstein, S., Oppenheim, R., Oyler, C., & Sonu, D. (2010). From ideal to practice and back again: Beginning teachers teaching for social justice. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(3), 237–247.

Apple, M. W. (2005). Doing things the 'right' way: legitimizing educational inequalities in conservative times. *Educational Review,* 57(3), 271-293.

Apple, M. W. (2008). Rightest gains and critical scholarship. *Educational Review, 70*(1), 75-83.

Bailey, S. K. (1976). *The purposes of education: Perspectives in American education.* Eric.

Banks, J. A. (2001). Citizenship education and diversity: Implications for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 52*(1), 5-16.

Bayles, E. E. (1960). *Democratic educational theory.* Harper & Brothers Publishers.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (1999). A movement against and beyond boundaries: "Politically relevant teaching" among African American teachers. *Teachers College Record, 100*(4), 702–723.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Bogotch, I. (2002). Educational leadership and social justice: Practice into theory. *Journal of School Leadership*, 12, 138-156.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2017). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership (*2nd ed.)*. Jossey-Bass.

Borsheim-Black, C. (2015). "It's pretty much White": Challenges and opportunities of an antiracist approach to literature instruction in a multilayered white context. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *49*(4), 407-429.

Borsheim-Black, C., & Sarigianides, S. (2019). *Letting go of literary whiteness: Anti-racist literature instruction for White students.* Teachers College Press.

Brantlinger, E. (2003). *Dividing classes: How the middle class negotiates and rationalizes school advantage.* Routledge.

Brookfield, S. D. (1987). *Developing critical thinkers: Challenging adults to explore alternative ways of thinking and acting.* Jossey-Bass.

Broudy, H. S. (2017). Types of knowledge and purposes of education. In *Schooling and the acquisition of knowledge* (pp. 1-17). Routledge.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory.* (2nd ed.) Sage.

Cho, H. (2017). Navigating the meanings of social justice, teaching for social justice, and multicultural education. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *19*(2), 1–19.

Chubbuck, S. M. (2010). Individual and structural orientations in socially just teaching: Conceptualization, implementation, and collaborative effort. *Journal of Teacher Education, 61*(3), 197–210.

Civil Rights Act of 1964, 78 Stat. § 241 (1964).

Cochran-Smith, M. (2008, March). *Toward a theory of teacher education for social justice*. In paper presented at annual meetings of the American educational research association, New York.

Conklin, H. G., & Hughes, H. E. (2016). Practices of compassionate, critical, justice-

    oriented teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 67*(1), 47-60.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and

    violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1988). Race, reform, and retrenchment: Transformation and

    legitimation in antidiscrimination law. *Harvard Law Review, 101*(7), 1331-1387.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*

    approaches (3rd ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2016). *30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher*. Sage.

Cuervo, H. (2018). Rethinking teachers' production of social justice in rural schools.

    International Journal of Inclusive Education 24(13), 1-15.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Race, inequality, and educational accountability: The

    irony of 'No Child Left Behind.' *Race Ethnicity and Education, 10*(3), 245-260.

Delgado, R. (1990). When a story is just a story: Does voice really matter? *Virginia Law*

    *Review, 76(*1), 95–111.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (1993). Critical race theory: An annotated bibliography.

    Virginia Law Review, 461- 516.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2021a). Mission Statement.

    http://dese.mo.gov

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2021b). Principal Standards in

    Missouri Leadership Development System. Missouri Leadership Development

    System, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (mo.gov)

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021c). Teacher Standards in May

    2013 Missouri Educator's Evaluation System. oeq-ed-TeacherStandards |

    Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (mo.gov)

Dewey, J. (1916/2009). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of*

    education. The Floating Press.

Dover, A. G. (2013). Getting "up to code": Preparing for and confronting challenges

    when teaching for social justice in standards-based classrooms. *Action in Teacher*

    Education, 35(2), 89–102.

Elbaz-Luwisch, F. (2001). Personal story as passport: Storytelling in border pedagogy.

    Teaching Education, 12(1), 81-101.

Elder, L., & Paul, R. (2007). The thinker's guide to analytic thinking: How to take

    thinking apart and what to look for when you do. The Foundation for Critical

    Thinking. https://www.criticalthinking.org/files/SAM_Analytic_Think2007b.pdf

Elsevier Educational Research Programme. (2020). Open Access.

    https://www.elsevier.com/open-access

Fink, A. (2017). *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide* (6th ed.). Sage.

Frattura, E. M., & Capper, C. A. (2007). *Leading for social justice: Transforming schools*

    for all learners. Corwin Press.

Freire, P. (1968/2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Bloomsbury. (Original work

    published 1968.)

French, J. R., Raven, B., & Cartwright, D. (1959/2005). The bases of social power. In

    J.M. Shafritz, J.S. Ott, & Y.S. Jan (Eds.), *Classics of organization theory*, (6th

    ed). pp. 311-320.) Wadsworth. (Reprinted from *Studies in Social Power*, 1959)

Froelich, J., & Zimmermann, D. (1999). Total Eclipse: The destruction of the African

American community of Harrison, Arkansas, in 1905 and 1909. *The Arkansas

Historical Quarterly, 58*(2), 131-159.

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.).

Teachers College Press.

Gewirtz, S. (1998). Conceptualizing social justice in education: Mapping the territory.

Journal of Education Policy, 13(4), 469–484.

Giroux, H. (1991). Border pedagogy and the politics of postmodernism. *Social Context*,

28, 51- 76.

Giroux, H. (1992/2015). *Border Crossing: Cultural workers and the politics of

education*. Routledge.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* Aldine Publishing.

Gorski, P. (2006). Complicity with conservatism: the de-politicizing of multicultural and

intercultural education. *Intercultural Education* 17(2), 163–177.

Gorski, P. (2016). Rethinking the role of "culture" in educational equity: From cultural

competence to equity literacy. *Multicultural Perspectives, 18*(4), 221–226.

Grant, C. A., & Agosto, V. (2008). Teacher capacity and social justice in teacher

education. In M. Cochran-Smith, M. Feiman-Nemeser, D. J. McIntyre, & K. E.

Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions

in changing contexts* (pp. 175-200). Routledge.

Guy-Sheftall, B. (1993). *Black feminist perspective on the academy.* Paper presented at

the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta.

Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching & the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students.* Corwin.

Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review, 106*(8), 1707-1791.

Hayes, E., & Cuban, S. (1996). Border pedagogy: A critical framework for service learning. *The Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*, *4*, 72-80.

Heifetz, R. A., & Laurie, D. L. (1997). The work of Leadership. In *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership* (pp. 57-78). Harvard Business Review.

Heikkinen, H. L., de Jong, F. P., & Vanderlinde, R. (2016). What is (good) practitioner research? *Vocations and Learning*, *9*(1), 1-19.

Henning, N. (2013). We make the road by walking together: New teachers and the collaborative and context-specific appropriation of shared social justice-oriented practices and concepts. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 36*, 121–131.

Henry, F., & Tator, C. (1994). The ideology of racism—'democratic racism. *Canadian Ethnic Studies, 26*(2), 1.

Holmes, T.R. (2010). *The hierarchy of epistemological beliefs: All ways of knowing are not created equal.*

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw-Hill.

hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking*. Routledge.

Horowitz, J. E., Brown, A., & Cox, K. (2019, April 9). How Americans see the state of race relations. www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/04/09/how-americans-see-the-state-of-race-relations

Houck, E. A., & Murray, B. C. (2019). Left Behind: District secession and the re-segregation of American schools. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *94*(4), 388–402.

Huber J., & Whelan, K. (1999). A marginal story as a place of possibility: Negotiating self on the professional knowledge landscape. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 15,* 381-396.

Hytten, K., & Bettez, S. C. (2011). Understanding education for social justice. *Educational Foundations.* (Winter-Spring), 7–24.

JanMohamed, A. R. (1993). Some implications of Paulo Freire's border pedagogy. In Eds. H. A. Giroux & P. McLaren *Cultural Studies,* 7(1), 107-116.

Johnson, A. G. (2018). *Privilege, power, and difference.* McGraw-Hill Education.

Juarez, B. G., Smith, D. T., & Hayes, C. (2008). Social justice means just us white people: The diversity paradox in teacher education. *Democracy & Education, 17*(3), 20–25.

Kochhar-Bryant, C. A. (2016). Identity, commitment, and change agency: Bedrock for bridging theory and practice in doctoral education. In V. A. Storey & K. A. Hesbol (Eds.), *Contemporary approaches to dissertation development and research methods* (pp. 29-32)*.* Information Science Reference.

Kozol, J. (2006). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America.* Three Rivers Press.

Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An overview. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(4), 212-218.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). Sage.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*, 47–68.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 7–24.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in US schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3–12.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review, 84*(1), 74-84.

Lasky, S. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(8), 899–916.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture.* Jossey-Bass.

Lewis, A. E. (2001). There is no "race" in the schoolyard: Color-blind ideology in an (almost) all-white school. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 781–811.

Lichtman, M. (2014). *Qualitative research for the social sciences*. Sage.

Lillge, D., & Knowles, A. (2020). Sticking points: Sites for developing capacity to enact socially just instruction. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 94,* 1-11.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Sage.

Loss, C. P., & McGuinn, P. J. (2016). *The convergence of K-12 and higher education: Policies and programs in a changing era*. Harvard Education Press.

Lynn, M., & Smith-Maddox, R. (2007). Preservice teacher inquiry: Creating a space to

    dialogue about becoming a social justice educator. *Teaching and Teacher*

    Education, 23(1), 94–105.

Marmol, E. (2016). The undemocratic effects and underlying racism of standardized

    testing in the United States. *Critical Intersections in Education, 4*, 1-9.

Matteson, H. C., & Boyd, A. S. (2017). Are we making "PROGRESS"? A critical

    literacies framework to engage pre-service teachers for social justice. *Journal of*

    Language and Literacy Education, 13(1), 28–54.

Mills, C., & Ballantyne, J. (2010). Pre-service teachers' dispositions toward diversity:

    Arguing for a developmental hierarchy of change. *Teaching and Teacher*

    Education, 26(3), 447-454.

McCoy, D. L., & Rodricks, D. J. (2015). Critical race theory. *ASHE Higher Education*

    Report, 41(3), 1–117.

Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2014). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice.*

    Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and*

    implementation (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Mertens, D. M. (2019). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology:*

    Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (5th ed.).

    Sage.

Milliken v. Bradley, 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The nature of managerial work.* Harper & Row.

Missouri Learning Standards. 2016. Revised 6/2020.

https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/curr-mls-standards-ela-6-12-sboe-2016.pdf

Missouri Educator Evaluation System, 2013, Teacher Standards.

https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/TeacherStandards.pdf

Missouri State University. (2020). Public affairs mission statement.

http://publicaffairs.missouristate.edu/pillars.htm

Monaghan, P. (1993). "Critical race theory" questions the role of legal doctrine in racial

inequity. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 39*(42), A6.

Morales, A. (1996). *Alejandro Morales: Fiction past, present, future perfect.* Bilingual

Press.

MSTA. (2021). Teacher Tenure Act Questions https://msta.org/for-missouri-

educators/legal-services/legal-resources/teacher-tenure-act-questions

Navarro, O., Shah, J. K., Valdez, C., Dover, A. G., & Henning, N. (2020). Fighting on all

fronts: The push, pull, and persistence of social justice educators and the move to

reimagine teacher preparation. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 47*(3), 9–31.

Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming diversity: the sociopolitical context of multicultural*

education. Longman.

North, C. E. (2006). More than words? Delving into the substantive meaning(s) of "social

justice" in education. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(4), 507- 535.

Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). Sage.

O'Leary, Z. (2005). *Researching real-world problems: A guide to methods of inquiry.*

Sage.

Patton, M. (2020). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Peters, R. S. (1966). *Ethics and education.* Scott Foresman.

Pizarro, M., & Kohli, R. (2020). "I stopped sleeping": Teachers of color and the impact of racial battle fatigue. *Urban Education, 55*(7), 967–991.

Prior, L. (2003). *Using documents in social research.* Sage.

Reardon, S. F., & Owens, A. (2014). 60 Years after Brown: Trends and consequences of school segregation. *Annual Review of Sociology, 40*, 199-214.

Revisor of Missouri. 2005. Teacher Tenure Act.

https://revisor.mo.gov/main/OneSection.aspx?section=168.104

Riley, C. (2019, December 12). Amid growing diversity in SPS, change more rapid in certain schools. *Springfield News Leader.*

https://www.newsleader.com/story/news/education/2019/12/13/springfield-public-schools-sps-diversity-growing-changing/4308794002/

Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.

Sikes, P. (2005). Storying schools: issues around attempts to create a sense of feel and place in narrative research writing. *Qualitative Research, 5*(1), 79-94.

Singleton, G. E., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools.* Corwin Press.

Sleeter, C. E. (2012). Confronting the marginalization of culturally responsive pedagogy. *Urban Education, 47*(3), 562–584.

Smagorinsky, P., Rhym, D., & Moore, C. P. (2018). Competing centers of gravity: A beginning English teacher's socialization process within conflictual settings. *English Education, 45*(2), 147–183.

Smith, W. A., Hung, M., & Franklin, J. D. (2011). Racial battle fatigue and the

    miseducation of Black men: Racial microaggressions, societal problems, and

    environmental stress. *The Journal of Negro Education, 80*(1), 63-82.

Springfield Public Schools. (2020, December 8). *Analytics, Accountability and*

    Assessment Home. https://www.sps.org/Domain/125.

Spickard, J.V. (2017). *Research basics: Design to data analysis in six steps.* Sage.

Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. (2008). Choose your method: A comparison of

    phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health*

    Research, 17, 1372- 1380.

Tanner, S. J. (2019). Whiteness is a White problem: Whiteness in English education.

    English Education, 51(2), 182–199.

Temple, C. (2019). Trail to the past: African American heritage markers recall significant

    moments in city's history. https://sbj.net/stories/trail-to-the-past-african-american-

    heritage-markers-recall-significant-moments-in-citys-history,620

Um, S. J. (2019). Politics of hybridity: Teaching for social justice in an era of standards-

    based reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 81,74–83.

U.S. Department of Education. (2021). *Overview and Mission Statement.* http://. ed.gov

U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for

    Education Statistics. (Last updated May 2020). *Characteristics of Public School*

    Teachers.

U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for

    Education Statistics. *The Status of Rural Education.*

Vaught, S. E., & Castagno, A. E. (2008). "I don't think I'm a racist": Critical race theory,

teacher attitudes, and structural racism. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 11*(2), 95-

113.

Wilson, E. (2010, August 27). 1906 Lynching on the square. *KSMU Ozarks Public*

Radio. https://www.ksmu.org/post/1906-lynching-square#stream/0

Zettelmeyer, F., & Bolling, M. (2014). Big data doesn't make decisions, leaders do: The

six steps to build organizational muscle in analytics. Northwestern University,

Kellogg School of Management. Retrieved from

https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/news articles/2014/09152014-florian-

zettelmeyer-big-data-white-paper.aspx.

Zirkel, S., & Cantor, N. (2004). 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education: The promise

and challenge of multicultural education. *Journal of Social Issues, 60*(1), 1-15.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Border Pedagogy: How Teachers Cross Intellectual Borders to Engage Students in Critical Thinking in Homogeneous Spaces

The Purpose: To understand how veteran teachers enhance students' critical thinking in racially non-diverse high school ELA classrooms.

The Process …

Initial Focus Group *90minutes*	I would like to gather 4-5 teachers for an initial focus group to discuss how you engage students in critical thinking about important and often emotive social issues found in the literature we read, the experiences students bring to class, and the larger community.
Initial Interview *90minutes*	I would like to talk with you about the instructional choices you make as you engage students in critical thinking.
Second Interview *60 minutes*	I would like you to bring an artifact(s) that engages students in critical thinking to share and talk about its use. Examples of artifacts that you might bring: • Lesson plan • Discussion prompts/techniques • Activity/assessment • Thought exercise
Final Focus Group *90 minutes*	I would like to share your artifacts and clarify their use. I will also share my initial findings. This focus group will also serve to affirm that I have represented your work as intended.

Why you're invited to participate …
The characteristics of *a veteran teacher* include years teaching, academic achievement, and life experiences that have shaped your own critical consciousness.
Critical thinking is defined as how the study of language (both written and spoken) is used and how we can help students engage with language in meaningful ways.
Racially *Homogeneous* districts have nearly 100% White students and do not have a stated equity and diversity initiative. Your district is a border district to SPS.

The difference between aspiration and practice. I am hoping to find ways in which experienced teachers - in this climate - are advancing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in spaces that are racially homogeneous. I would like to learn what this looks like in action when it is done well. Through this project, I hope to begin to accumulate a collection of instructional techniques that can assist others who are committed to teaching justly.

**Consent to Participate in "Border Pedagogy: How Teachers Cross
Intellectual Borders to Engage Students in Critical Thinking in Homogeneous
Spaces Research Study
University of Missouri**

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study focused on how students are engaged in critical thinking in homogeneous classrooms. Before you agree to participate in this study, please read and understand the following explanation and procedures involved. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, be sure to ask the investigator. If you have more questions later, you may contact the investigator at:

Amy Knowles aknowles@missouristate.edu

Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

Purpose of this Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study focused on how you engage students in critical thinking. The purpose of this study is to investigate the pedagogical moves you make as you encounter social issues in literature and current events.

Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation including why you might or might not want to participate, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to discuss and ask the researcher any questions you may have. This study may include participating in an interview, focus group, classroom observation, and artifact analysis. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or change your mind later, your decision will have no negative consequences.

What are the risks?

There are no known risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

What are the benefits?

You may not benefit directly from this study. However, the information from this study will be shared with future students and may be shared with other educators through publications and conference presentations.

How will my privacy be protected?

The data for this study will be coded, with identifying information kept on a secure, password-protected server. Information about you will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law. The identities of all research participants will remain anonymous. Only the researcher will have access to your data. Please be advised that although the researcher will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality.

The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

Cost and Compensation

Participants should not incur any costs for participating in this study, nor will you receive money or any other form of compensation for participating in this study.

Consent to Participate

If you choose to participate in this study, Border Pedagogy: How Teachers Cross Intellectual Borders to Engage Students in Critical Thinking in Homogeneous Spaces, you will be asked to sign below:

I have read and understood the information in this form. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Dear (insert name here),

It was so nice to see you last week. Thank you, again, for spending a few minutes with me and allowing me to tell you about my project. I am always looking for ways to improve my own practice related to supporting teacher candidates as they enter classrooms with a commitment to teach justly. To that end, I am doing some research about what that commitment looks like in practice when done well. I'd like to invite you to be a part of that research as a veteran high school ELA teacher who engages students in critical thinking in a homogeneous classroom.

You don't need to adjust anything about your teaching. My study will be conducted outside of the teaching day and will consist of two focus groups and two interviews like we discussed. If you agree to participate in the study, the data I collect will be used (anonymously of course) in the research study. If you decline to participate, then I will go about business as usual, and none of the data resulting from our previous or future work together will be included in the study.

Attached to this email you will find an informed consent document that further explains the study and your participation in it. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

If you agree to participate, then I will have a paper copy of the informed consent for you to sign at the first focus group.

With appreciation,
Amy

Appendix D

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Opening: Thank you for taking the time for this focus group! We will be having a conversation about how we all engage in critical thinking to cross intellectual borders of understanding and what that might mean for students in your particular school.

> (Give Informed Consent page) I have emailed you a copy of this consent form. Thank you for taking the time to read it. Do you have any questions before you sign? Do you mind if I record our conversation so that I can pay attention rather than take notes?

Thanks so much. Okay, I know each of you from our work with student teachers, but you may not know each other. Let's do some quick introductions -- maybe names, where and what we teach, and one thing we should know about you. I'll go first. (Share a fun fact that builds a connection.)

> --

Introduce the background or genesis of the study which will include a few stories about my own "intellectual border crossing" which I will define for participants and ask if they, too, have experienced border crossing during their own teaching journey.

1. What about your teaching context opens opportunities to cross intellectual borders with

    your students?
2. What about your teaching context hinders opportunities to cross intellectual borders with your students?

Appendix E

Individual Interview Protocol

(Highlighted questions may be saved for second interview about artifact(s)

State Interviewer Name: _____

State Interviewee Name: _____

State Date: _____

Opening: Thank you for taking the time for this interview! I will be asking several questions concerning how the tenets of border pedagogy might align with your teaching.

Could I please have your permission to audio record this interview so that I don't have to take notes? (Obtain permission)

Opening Question:

1. You aren't a typical White teacher in Southwest Missouri. Can you describe your journey to becoming a courageous teacher who tackles controversial issues in a way that students are able to engage?

2. What is unique about this context?

The Context:

3. How do you prioritize relationships in your classroom?

4. How are students able to explore their own identities or their stories?

5. Tell me about a time when bias was acknowledged among the common identity in the room?

6. How do students speak about or to social concerns (like sexism, classism, racism)?

How knowledge is received:

7. In what ways are students able to question existing patterns of thought?

8. How night you ask students to engage with texts in your classroom?

9. How do you use popular culture as teaching tools/texts in your classroom?

How knowledge is produced:

10. How do students create knowledge in your classroom? (Are their voices and experiences used?)

11. How do you talk about differences between groups of people? Are commonalities ever explored?

12. What opportunities do students have to self-reflect?

How knowledge is negotiated:

13. How do students engage with multiple perspectives on issues?

14. When is there discomfort or ambiguity in your classroom? How do students respond?

15. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you think we should?

Closing: Thank you so much for your time and participation in this interview! I appreciate the honesty of your responses. If you have anything further to add or realize you would like to clarify a response, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Appendix F

Artifact Analysis Tool

Name of Participant:

Name of Artifact:

How knowledge is received: Existing patterns of thought questioned Engage with strengths & limitations of own narrative Reading within, upon, and against the text Popular culture leveraged as text	**How knowledge is produced:** Student voices and experiences central to knowledge creation Commonality across differences mapped Students self-reflect Knowledge continually created
How knowledge is negotiated: Students given space to examine multiple perspectives Tolerance for ambiguity increases Dualistic thinking transcended Discomfort may arise	**How knowledge is produced:** Student voices and experiences central to knowledge creation Commonality across differences mapped Students self-reflect Knowledge continually created

Reactions immediately after the interview:

VITA

Amy Knowles was raised in Youngstown, Ohio with her two sisters, Jenny and Susan. Her parents, Tom and Rita Somich, prioritized learning and education. Amy and her sisters were first generation college students who enjoyed unfettered support and encouragement. Amy earned a B.A. in literature with a minor in journalism from Evangel University in Springfield, MO. She returned to earn her Missouri teaching certificate and taught high school English at Kickapoo High School. Amy pursued an opportunity to open a fitness franchise where she became a certified personal trainer and mentored new franchisees as a corporate trainer.

Amy returned to school to pursue a M.S. in English education, and for the past 15 years has taught English language arts in various capacities: at Branson Jr. High School, online with the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program, at a community college, and she has been a teacher educator at Missouri State University for 11 years.

Over the past 11 years, Amy has developed a network of colleagues through her work with student teachers, teaching graduate and undergraduate classes, and as a co-director of the Ozarks Writing Project for ten years. A pedagogical approach that she values is being responsive to data in the classroom and in the field. Her work, broadly speaking, focuses on preparing candidates to enter the profession with skills necessary to sustain both the social/emotional aspects of teaching as well as the deep intellectual work that teaching requires. Her research interests are culturally responsive teaching and interactional awareness in educational settings.

Amy and her husband Jerry have been married for 27 years and are raising two fantastic children, Lizzie and Nate.