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Disrupting Complacency in Disadvantaged High School Students:

Can Principal and Teacher Pedagogical Partnerships

Develop Critical Consciousness?

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Dedication and Thanks

I dedicate this dissertation to my late father, Alfred Halx, who, with my mother, built the personal and intellectual foundation that supports and grounds me; to my mother, Dallas Halx, who tirelessly continues to guide and improve the individual who developed from that foundation; and to my partner, Mark Brodl, who recognized the potential in what my parents created, and inspired and encouraged me to refine myself into the thinking person and scholar I am today.

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Disrupting Complacency in Disadvantaged High School Students:
Can Principal and Teacher Pedagogical Partnerships
Develop Critical Consciousness?

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

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This study is an exploration of the possibility of pedagogical partnership between low socioeconomic public high school principals and their classroom teachers for the purpose of advancing critical thinking skills and critical consciousness development in their students. This study will explore the viability of these partnerships through the perspectives of associate superintendents, principals, and teachers. The exploration will seek to determine the participants' willingness to partner pedagogically, their readiness to advance critical thinking and critical consciousness development in their students, and their perception of district and state policies that might help or stand in the way of such development.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

'You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him discover it within himself.'
— Galileo Galilei

The Problem

High school students from low socioeconomic status (SES) families face well known challenges both in and out of school. A significant number of the in-school challenges that these students confront are not new; sadly, many are the same as those experienced by high school students in poverty 40 years ago (Kincheloe, 2004; Stringfield & Land, 2002). The economic hardship that can negatively affect housing, health, and social standing continues to negatively impact the educational experience of economically disadvantaged students today. In other words, the nation's education system has not been able to effectively take into account and address the external factors that prevent disadvantaged students getting the full benefits of the educational experience that is offered, and the system has also not been able to effectively change that educational experience to accommodate the distinct needs of disadvantaged students. Though many dedicated educators labor daily to improve the educational circumstance of these students, often through special programs and initiatives created specifically for low SES high school students, the behemoth educational systems in most states continue to churn with the same one-size-fits-all overarching pedagogical mindset that has been in

place for decades. This mindset not only ignores economic status, but also ethnic, cultural, and language differences that have a significant effect on how students learn (Cross, 2007; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2004; Osborne, 1996; Peterson, 2006). It is disturbing indeed that forty years and a myriad of initiatives directed specifically toward resolving the divergent issues of low SES students have not resulted in significant improvement in pedagogical and other educational activities for these students. Instead, the myopic state education systems of today, as was the case 40 years ago, leave the majority of low SES students with only two options: learn the way we teach, or get out.

The federal government's recent attempt to "advocate" for economically disadvantaged students, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2001 and its hyper-focus on "standardized" assessment as the sole measure of success, ironically and sadly added yet another burden for low SES students to bear. The middle- to upper-class normed tests of NCLB do not equitably assess the academic abilities of low SES students (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2006; Valenzuela, 2005), and the skewed assessment scores that result from NCLB directives misdirect public funding and force school systems and individual schools to seek funding from profit-driven commercial enterprises. This lack of sufficient funding, along with the resultant opportunistic encroachment of commercialism in public schools, has created an educational atmosphere that focuses attention away from the needs of the individual students in poverty and toward the wellbeing of the funding classes.

Smith and Andrews (1989) state flatly, "Educators have great moral, ethical, and legal obligations to create schools where all students can achieve their full potential and

receive an equal opportunity to succeed in society” (p. 1). Delpit (2006) suggests that perhaps we have “given up the rich meaningful education of our children in favor of narrow, decontextualized, meaningless procedures that leave unopened hearts, unformed character, and unchallenged minds” (p. xiv). Those who still believe in and work to provide an equitable educational opportunity for *all* students in this currently fraught public education environment must battle against insufficient public school funding, marginalizing “accountability” structures that are supported by dominant-population-normed standardized tests, and increased privatization activity that perpetuates the dominant-population’s consumer-culture for-profit encroachment into public schools. This commodification of students, and an extremely weak public resolve to change the systems as they exist, is at once an unstoppable force and a weighty inertia with which educators must contend in the process of educational reform.

The educational reform battle has always been uphill. U.S. public education policy has never been driven by the best interest of the student, let alone the best interest of the low SES student; U.S. public schools were created to support a burgeoning capitalist culture that was in need of employees *and* consumers (De Lissovoy, 2009; De Los Reyes & Gozemba, 2002; Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Solmitz, 2001). In other words, U.S. public educational institutions have always served, and continue to serve, primarily as employee preparation centers, and hence they give little attention to human and civic development. It is, therefore, even less surprising that disadvantaged students, who are sometimes perceived to be less marketable in certain employment roles, would be tacitly channeled into manual, technical, and no-education-required labor positions, or more or less ignored by the system. American public

education has for some time now placed “emphasis on equal access, but unequal rewards” (Katz, 1987, p. 23) and unequal outcomes.

For the sake of human decency and the civic advancement of an increasingly diverse U.S. society, public education stakeholders should not tacitly permit this hegemonic capitalist-centric educational scheme to continue unchallenged. As Freire (1998) so passionately noted, “The freedom of commerce cannot be ethically higher than the freedom to be human” (p. 116). Over 100 years ago, Du Bois (1902) warned, “Education must keep broad ideals before it, and never forget that it is dealing with Souls and not with Dollars” (p. 82). The order of schooling priorities can be reversed. Public schools can and should develop the human/civic individual first and the employee/consumer second (if the second does not follow as a matter of course from the student’s understanding of her place in society and the ability to judge for herself regarding her own best interests as meshed with those of society). As Greene (1985) admonishes, “Surely it is an obligation of education in a democracy to empower the young to become members of the public, to participate, and play articulate roles in the public space” (p. 4).

After the foundational developmental activity of primary school, secondary schooling is the second and perhaps most viable opening to instill critical thinking skills and community consciousness in maturing students. Educators should seize this opportunity, expect critical thinking, and “encourage civic learning... [with] plenty of practice in structured discussion of politics and controversial issues to help them learn to analyze cause and effect and multiple points of view, present fact- and logic-based opinions, and listen to what others have to say” (Estrin & Croddy, 2009, np). It is time to

shake up and radicalize low SES students to make them more aware of the injustices they face *while at the same time* providing them with the tools to confront and conquer those injustices.

Nationally, over 50% of low SES students leave high school before earning a diploma (Pinkus, 2009). In Texas, for example, the lack of academic success in low SES schools is a civic disgrace to the state and a barrier to the social and economic progress of students and their families (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2006; Valenzuela, 2005). And, this disturbing percentage does not include the students who have dropped out prior to high school, or the “defacto dropouts” who attend school two or three times per month, but who are still counted as enrolled (Kozol, 1992). In 2007, the state of Texas claimed to have graduated 78% of its high school students; in its low SES schools that percentage is worse at 69% (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Of the students who make up the state’s *self-reported*, and perhaps overestimated, graduation rates, only 35% meet college readiness standards, and as a result, more than half of all students entering public higher education institutions in Texas require remediation (Texas School Board Association, 2009). These statistics strongly suggest that the teaching and learning activity in low SES populated Texas public schools, as they say in Texas, *ain’t a workin’*.

The Possible Solution

In the face of a system that is inherently flawed on so many levels, what can a concerned educator do to improve the educational experience for low SES students, and, by extension, the lives of these students after their public education? Since the majority of the students who are currently in the primary and secondary school pipeline have no

real choice but to endure the current system as it is, and the prospect of significant change for the immediate future is slight, it could be that the best hope for current and upcoming students is for them to learn how to make the best of a not-so-good educational situation and become their own advocates.

A case can be made that the negative *external* forces that impact students can be challenged most effectively by a strong *internal* force that comes from within the students themselves. This internal force can most readily come in the form of a strong *critical consciousness* in each individual student. The moment that low SES students more fully, viscerally, and intuitively understand their oppressed circumstances, the inequitable educational resources available to them, and essentially, the unjust piece of the social pie that has been allotted to them, is the moment they will have acquired a powerful tool to overcome those circumstances. Considered from the perspective of a sports analogy, the development of a critical consciousness levels the playing field and begins to give a much needed advantage to those who have been disadvantaged from the start of the education game.

Critical Consciousness Development through Alternative Pedagogies

Opening the minds of young people should be the goal of every educator regardless of specific content knowledge being delivered. Stimulating a critical consciousness in students increases openness to knowledge acquisition and deepens the understanding of that knowledge. A comprehensive perception of one's social, political, and economic status conditions and societal contradictions related to them, is the first step in developing the ability to take action against the conditions and contradictions that might oppress (Freire, 2002). Students bring important resources with them when they

come to school. A considerable amount of research suggests that contextually sensitive leadership and alternative, more critical, pedagogical practices that emphasize critical consciousness and critical thinking development have, in combination, achieved impressive results, especially with low SES student populations (Darder, 1991, 2002; Delpit, 2006; Dewey, 1915; Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2002; Gibbs & Howley, 2000; Gruenewald, 2003; Kincheloe, 2004; Martin, 2008). However, though positive outcomes are abundant, some scholars have expressed concern that alternative, localized, and individualized instruction is not possible or practical in densely populated low SES urban settings (Pearl & Knight, 1999; Ravitch, 2000). There are also critics who suggest this sort of instruction is overly idealistic and theoretical, that it is too costly, and that it de-emphasizes the skills that low SES students need to be “successful” in a consumer-culture society. However, these criticisms do not consider how these same obstacles can likely be overcome by the critical consciousness and socially aware students themselves.

Though critical consciousness is, in my view, vital to the future success of low SES students, it rarely develops on its own. It must be encouraged and developed by teachers in the classroom and by the inspiration of school leaders throughout the daily pedagogical activities of the school day. The pedagogical approach used by high school teachers, and supported by high school principals, is the omnipresent force that guides a student through her or his educational experience (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Madhere, 1998). The pedagogical philosophy of a school can motivate students to engage in the learning process, earn high grades, and finish high school successfully. For some students, the high school pedagogical experience lays the

foundation that empowers students to go on to college, graduate school, or directly into a professional career. Yet for others that same pedagogy disempowers, demotivates, and drives students to give up and drop out (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Madhere, 1998). In other words, pedagogy can *make* or *break* students, and as the disparate results suggest, one pedagogy definitely does not fit all.

Traditional one-size-fits-all pedagogy is an especially bad fit for low SES students (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2006; Stringfield & Land, 2002; Valenzuela, 2005). Considering that traditional pedagogy was designed by and for the dominant, middle- and upper-class European American population in the United States (Dewey, 1916; Giroux, 2004; McLaren, 2003; Valenzuela, 2005), it should come as no surprise that it does not accommodate the sensibilities of the low SES, often non-European American, student populations. Instead, and largely because it is not relevant to their lives (Darder, 2002, Ladson-Billings, 1995, Madhere, 1998, Osborne, 1996), the traditional pedagogical activity experienced by these students disengages and drives them away from school (Halx, 2010a, 2010b; Halx & Ortiz, 2010). The achievement levels and graduation rates of low SES, often minority, high school students throughout the country are a clear indication that something is not working, and this study will add to the literature that indicts the dominant-culture-normed classroom pedagogy. The “education of exclusion” that currently exists in low SES high schools can be overcome (Smith, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2008, p. 1). But, change comes slowly. Yesterday’s pedagogy will die out. In the meantime, we should empower students to achieve, this educational oppression notwithstanding, with a pedagogy of tomorrow: a pedagogy of inclusion.

Of course classroom pedagogy is not the only factor involved in the development of critical thinking, critical consciousness, and student achievement. Certainly a student's home life, potential economic hardship, health and community issues, as well as many other factors can also affect greatly individual academic outcomes. However, all of those other factors (and more) could be considered *within* a chosen pedagogy when teaching low SES students. If the pedagogy is not well matched to the student, pedagogical oppression is the result. In other words, the pedagogy employed should match the students' life, culture, history, and social needs. And, even within culturally sensitive pedagogy, students should still be encouraged to question the implications of the curriculum and take action to resolve any inherent conflicts.

There are several pedagogical philosophies that consider and incorporate the student's life circumstances, and thereby, have an increased chance of developing critical consciousness. Critical pedagogy, localized pedagogy, student-centered pedagogy, and culturally-focused pedagogy are just few of them (Anderson, 2009; Kincheloe, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1996; Sviniski, 2002). Critical educators suggest that we should analyze the context, and then deliver the pedagogy. Over twenty years ago, education "reform" was criticized for its "total neglect of context" (Katz, 1987, p. 130). Unfortunately, very little has changed since this indictment. Katz suggested then that context should include not only the physical environment, but also the socio-cultural and demographic milieu of the moment, in addition to class, gender, and race interactions.

Pedagogical philosophies can be placed on a continuum of qualitatively different views of student engagement. Smith, et al (2008) categorize these views in a progression of: *conservative/traditionalist/behaviorist* which emphasizes academic content and

compliance with standard practice; *liberal/progressive/student-oriented* which promotes enriched schooling that goes beyond individual achievement to embrace a connectedness to the community; and *critical/democratic/practical* which emphasizes creating active citizens and prepares students to recognize inequalities, to challenge authoritative discourses, and not to accept the status quo. The first of these views is the basis for traditional pedagogy in this country; the second and third serve well as the basis for critical thinking and critical consciousness development. Though some educators may refuse to accept it, home and community life activities are constants in the minds of the students they teach. School leaders and teachers should remember that, though they do not bear responsibility for the life problems of their students, it is their responsibility to try to do their best to accommodate those problems through the use of alternative pedagogies that allow for the consideration that students are not homogeneous.

While many alternative teaching and learning methods have proven successful in isolated applications, in today's accountability-centric environment, comprehensive use of these pedagogies throughout a large district or state region can be quite difficult to achieve. However, one strong and common component of most of these pedagogies that can be delivered comprehensively is the development of critical thinking, critical consciousness, and agency in students. This development can take place concurrently and within the current standardized structure of public education as it exists in states like Texas and others. A well-developed critical consciousness can help a student negotiate a state education structure that often does not make that negotiation easy.

Just to be clear, the notion of working within the current systems is not a concession to a "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" philosophy. It accepts only that we must

work with the system we have rather than the system we wish we had. Incorporating critical consciousness /critical thinking development into daily pedagogical activities would not require more funding or take away from content delivery time. It would, however, provide the student with the ability to recognize *and verbalize* inequitable treatment, incoherent testing processes, and unjust decision making on the part of a given school or school district, and allow her or him to take action to remedy, or at least offset to some degree, these inequities for themselves and others.

Partners in Pedagogy

This study explores the viability of a more student-sensitive and inclusive pedagogy delivered through *reciprocal relationships* between principals, teachers, and students for the purpose of developing self- and status-awareness (critical consciousness) and critical thinking skills. An *exchange* of teaching and learning is the conceptual foundation of critical consciousness and critical thinking development (Freire, 2002). Teachers should be open to learning from and with their students, and in the same spirit, principals should learn from and with their teachers. This cyclical pedagogical partnership activity can build on itself and yield results that can be much greater than the sum of individual efforts.

However, moving away from a one-size-fits-all traditional pedagogy and toward a progressive and reciprocal pedagogy, in a comprehensive manner, cannot be accomplished by the teachers alone. To accomplish this sort of over-arching pedagogical change, a concerted effort on the part of the teachers, parents, school support staff members, and the students themselves will be required. And, a concerted effort requires a conductor. The only individual who, on a daily basis, interacts with the teachers, the

parents, and the students, *and* who has direct supervisory authority over the operations of a high school, is the school principal. The principal is the “enduring feature” of a school (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006, p. 371). According to Barth (2000), the principal is also “the central figure in determining the quality of the school” (p. 152). The principal is in a position to identify and eliminate the barriers to achievement that are distinct to her student population. It is the principal who is in a position to empower, inspire, or direct teachers to provide contextually effective pedagogy concurrent with, or as an alternative to, the standardized one-size-fits-all traditional pedagogical model that is in place in most of today’s schools.

Pedagogical partnerships between principals and teachers are consistently cited as a vital component of school reform in educational research literature (De Los Reyes & Gozemba, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fullan, 1991; Kincheloe, 2006). The synergy of a principal/teacher pedagogical partnership could be a powerful tool to awaken a greater sense of self-awareness, self-agency, critical consciousness, critical thinking ability, and thus greatly improve educational outcomes for high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In an ideal pedagogically partnered world, the principal would first establish a pedagogical philosophy for the school that is appropriately relevant to the student population. She or he would then work integrally with the teachers to assure this school-specific pedagogy is the base mechanism for content delivery in the school. The daily dialogue and exchange between the students and the teachers would also be conveyed directly and constantly to the principal, her or his leadership team, and instructional

coordinators. This action would of course occur concurrently with the other required management activities of the school.

Many low SES population high school principals are already aware of the need for a pedagogy that is more sensitive to social class, cultural background, and the individual student, but they must contend with the entrenched pedagogical techniques and philosophies that are bolstered by firmly established accountability mechanisms that are self-perpetuated in traditional teaching and learning systems. Even within progressive reform initiatives, the one-size-fits-all pedagogical monster rears its ugly head (Kincheloe, 2006). How can low SES high school leaders who are ready and willing to support alternative teaching and learning philosophies and methods accomplish such a pursuit in today's accountability-centric and traditional educational environment? Will teaching-to-the-test weary teachers support them? What federal, state, or district education policies might help or hinder this pursuit? Which alternative pedagogy, or components of that pedagogy, might best serve low SES students? This study answers these questions.

This Study

Using modified grounded theory qualitative research methods, this study explores the perspectives of self-identified progressive low SES district associate superintendents, high school principals, and their teachers in Texas to identify and describe possible means by which principals and teachers can form viable pedagogical partnerships for the purpose of fully operationalizing a pedagogy that emphasizes the development of critical consciousness and critical thinking skills in low SES high school students. It is important to conduct this study in Texas because, as a result of its large population and high public

education expenditures, many other states, textbook publishers, and national legislators follow the trends that take place in that state.

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe associate superintendents' and high school principals' attitudes toward critical consciousness and critical thinking development in their students and the viability of the principal pedagogically partnering with teachers to facilitate it. In other words, this study explored the potential role of principals facilitating pedagogical alternatives that foster critical consciousness development among student in low SES high schools.

Specifically, this study investigated:

- (1) the openness of associate superintendents, principals, and teachers, who serve predominantly low SES high school students, to alternative pedagogical practices that emphasize critical consciousness and critical thinking skills,
- (2) the openness of associate superintendents, principals and teachers, who serve predominantly low SES high school students, to pedagogical partnerships, and
- (3) the factors (e.g., state education policies, resources) that help or hinder the adoption of such pedagogical practices and partnerships.

Accordingly, this study sought answers to the following explicit questions: In the low SES high schools involved in this research,

- 1) what instructional leadership characteristics, instructional philosophies, and pedagogical strategies are advanced and maintained by the associate superintendents, principals, and teachers?
- 2) how are alternative educational philosophies and pedagogical practices, which emphasize critical consciousness and critical thinking skills, thought of and used by the

principals and teachers?

3) how would pedagogical partnerships be thought of by associate superintendents, principals, and teachers?

4) what factors, including federal, state, or district education polices, might help or hinder associate superintendent, principal, and teacher openness to and use of alternative pedagogical practices that emphasize critical consciousness and critical thinking skills?

The findings from this study, along with specific administrative techniques and pedagogical insights, put forth by the participant district administrators, principals, and teachers, are offered for use by other low SES high school principals, district administrators, teaches, and interested public school stakeholders who accept the findings and ideas as transferable and helpful in the context of their own local settings or institutions. The timing of this study is important because the low SES students cannot wait for the gradual improvements that might be achieved through well-meaning federal, state, and local programs that target this particular demographic student population. Change must come now. The literature supports the notion that an alternative pedagogical approach that comprehensively develops critical consciousness in low SES students can accomplish immediate change that will in turn immediately improve test scores and overall student achievement through the synergy of awareness the occurs with that consciousness combined with critical thinking.

Pedagogical change alone is a powerful tool that is truly at the disposal of the high school principal. Several research studies point to alternative pedagogy and critical thinking skill development as vital to student success, especially in challenging educational environments (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; King & Kitchener, 1994;

Mines, King, Hood, & Wood, 1990; Pascarella, 1989; Tsui, 2003). This study contributes to this literature by juxtaposing institutional, regulatory, and attitudinal barriers to pedagogical change with the perspectives of educational leaders and teachers who seek to overcome them.

In addition to the exploration of partnering for pedagogical change, the research methods of this study also offers a new strategy for future research on low SES school leadership. Grounded theory method, and its focus on individuals with sensitivity to their social and cultural circumstances, has long served well for social justice oriented exploration. For this study, a further modified version of Charmazian (2005) modified grounded theory was used. These methodological enhancements strengthened the transferability of the findings.

The downward spiraling educational statistics for low SES students is, for now, an unfortunate trend. It must be assured this trend does not become a final destiny. Critical consciousness can empower students to take charge of their education, use the education as a vehicle to advance their status in their community and position themselves to take advantage of employment and life opportunities that might otherwise remain out of reach.

Researcher Positionality

I figuratively entered this study, and literally entered the site schools, with a critical theoretical mindset. By this approach I mean that during the preparation for, and execution of, this study I maintained a heightened awareness of power relationships between dominant and dominated sectors of society and openness to fallibility of established societal norms. Though the participants in this study were associate

superintendents, principals, and teachers, I also kept one figurative eye on the students who were the heart of this research pursuit.

My cultural upbringing is Midwestern. I grew up lower middle class. I attended public school. My parents were not college educated. My background of working over 15 years in student development, mostly with disadvantaged students, has sensitized me to the great variety of student issues and concerns. However, since I have not taught in a public school classroom, I do not have first-hand knowledge of the quotidian problems that can hinder even the most well-meaning pedagogical plan. Hence my need to gain this insight from those who are currently on the ground in public schools. Though this lack of personal experience could be viewed as a great handicap, I contend that it also serves to my advantage as a researcher in that I was able to collect data from public school leaders and teachers from a somewhat more neutral position. Though public education is vastly complex, each student lives a very micro experience. This notion was on my mind throughout the data gathering process.

Additionally, I performed constant critical reviews of my actions, analysis, interpretations, and preliminary conclusions during the data gathering process. I believe a critical theoretical framework approach serves best for exploring the distinct circumstances of low SES students and power relationships that exist within urban working-class educational environments. Though a framework is not a blueprint, this critical perspective, and non-deference to dominant norms, more readily illuminated both the pedagogical issues that affect low SES students and how the public school leader, in partnership with teachers and students, can influence the resolution of those issues.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Critical Consciousness Development

Freire's (2002) notion of "conscientization" (p. 17), or critical consciousness, is "learning to perceive social, political, and economic status contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 17). Critical consciousness is questioning, reflecting, voicing *and* taking action (Freire). The self- and social-awareness that is awakened through Freire's conscientization is especially important for low SES, often minority, students. As Freire has expressed, only when students fully understand their circumstance, and their place in the world, can they be empowered to change that circumstance and place. Educational researchers may be able to see the inequities in public education, but many low SES high school students often do not (Halx, 2010a; Halx 2010b; Halx & Ortiz, 2010). Or, if they see them superficially, they cannot conceptualize them systematically. Critical consciousness gives shape to the previously amorphous inequities which in turn allows for conceptualization. A strong critical consciousness creates and sustains student agency *with* guidance from the teacher (Freire, 1973). Critical consciousness has also proven to be a key factor in predicting career success among low SES urban high school students (Diemer & Blustein, 2006). Low SES students need a pedagogy that encourages agency, and many teachers want to provide it (Delpit, 2006; Halx, 2010a); however the current accountability-dominated pedagogy of most school districts often does not allow time for the teaching techniques or the overarching mindset of alternative pedagogies that advance such development.

Table 1 below illustrates a partial list of the goals of critical consciousness development in students and the techniques used to reach such goals as gleaned from the literature.

(Table 1)

Key Goals of Critical Consciousness Development	Teaching Technique to Accomplish Goal
Student must understand her or his place in society	Reoccurring classroom discussion of place
Student must understand her or his SES	Reoccurring classroom discussion of SES
Student must understand her or his political power	Reoccurring classroom discussion of political power
Student must understand the inequities in society	Reoccurring classroom discussion of societal inequities
Student must voice and name status and political issues	Class discussion naming the issues
Student must take action against the inequities	Class projects and papers that are action oriented
Educators must assist the student in this action	Educator support offered at all stages
Student must reflect on the results of the action	Reoccurring reflection opportunities in the classroom

With critical consciousness development, teachers can help students to “recognize themselves as architects of their own cognitive process” (Freire, 1998, p. 112). Students should be encouraged to develop a sense for their own “historicity” which requires a “critical examination of received wisdom, not as a storehouse of eternal truths but as itself situated in its own historicity” (Freire, 1998, p. 14). Only those “historically immersed in oppression can truly fight it,” but that fight cannot start until one is aware of one’s oppressed state (Freire, 1973, p. x). Low SES students know hardship and oppression, but because they are immersed in and inured to it, that oppression does not seem as urgently problematic for them (Halx, 2010a). Mezirow (1997) notes, “often learners are unaware of being oppressed; they internalize the values of the oppressors” (p. 62). Critical consciousness allows students to truly see and analyze the world, perhaps for the first time.

According to Freire (1973), low SES students are seemingly in the worst, but in fact in the best, position to resolve their own state of oppression. By becoming critically conscious, a student is suddenly allowed to transition from being an adaptive object of the dominant culture to being an integrated subject of her or his *own* choosing (Freire). Critical consciousness is “realizing the power of one’s individual and collective voice” (Sekayi, 2007, p. 175). Freire (2002) admonished frequently that this discovery “cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action... and serious reflection” (p. 65).

Achieving critical consciousness occurs when you “shift from simply being aware to being aware that you are aware” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 13). It is an “awareness that your own ideas come from a particular set of life experiences,” as well as, “accepting that ideas about what is normal, or right, or good, are products of life experience rather than universal laws” (Hinchey, 2004, p. 25). This sort of meta-awareness might be perceived by some to be beyond the grasp of economically disadvantaged high school students, but several studies and successful programs across the country prove this that perception would be wrong (Darder, 1991, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gruenewald, 2003; Halx, 2010a; Halx, 2010b; Kincheloe, 2004; Martin, 2008). Critical educators must find ways to “interrupt hegemony and subordination... by facilitating the emergence of critical consciousness” (Hordatt-Gentles, 2007, p. 134).

Dewey (1902) believed strongly that education “must be restored to the experience from which it has been abstracted” (p. 13). In fact, he notes that “an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has a vital and verifiable significance” (Dewey, 1916, p. 144). This emphasis away from concrete thinking toward abstract thinking serves as a solid foundation for

critical thinking and critical consciousness development in students. Freire (1998) suggests that we retain concrete knowledge and juxtapose it to everyday life. He notes that there is value in “adding concrete knowledge of the reality in which teachers teach” (p. 122) because it is this concrete reality that gives the students the “wherewithal to comprehend their own environment as well as the capacity to learn and to confront challenges” (p. 122).

Dewey (1938) decries public education’s “failure to secure the active co-operation of the pupil in the construction of the purposes involved in his studying” (p. 67), and the failure to enlist the student’s “own participating disposition... thereby developing within him an intrinsic and persisting direction in the right way” (Dewey, 1916, p. 27). Both Freire and Dewey believe that social consciousness and social responsibility begin with nurturing a socio-contextual awareness in students. However, Freire adds the critical component of action after awareness. It is this action that moves new awareness into the arena of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness “can only occur if the educational process allows all possibilities to be examined” (Ardizzone, 2007, p. 59), and then, after reflecting on those possibilities, the student must take action in order to advance her or his thinking further. Prawat (1989) notes that this process involves “thinking of the child as a total cognitive being, one who, when empowered, has access to a full range of intellectual resources and thus can respond proactively as opposed to reactively in various in-school and out-of-school contexts” (p. 34). Critical consciousness development also requires that teachers step back and review and reinterpret their own sensibilities and viewpoints so that they can do the same for their students. As Spina (1997) notes, this process “does not simply reinforce student views but scaffolds them to clarification

through striving for critical awareness, with standards imposed from the outside but arrived at from within, recognizing a multiplicity of reasons for interpretation” (p. 35). Anderson (2009) laments leaving students “at the mercy of their surroundings” by not teaching them that they are living and learning in a politically situated environment at all times. He goes on to quote Dewey’s 1908 notion that if the student “has not powers of deliberation and invention, he must pick up his ideas casually and superficially from the suggestions of his environment and appropriate the notions which the interests of some class insinuate into his mind” (as cited in Anderson, p. 28). Without critical consciousness, students must allow others to think for them, and that thinking is not necessarily in their best interest.

Principal as Pedagogical Partner

Seeking to resolve achievement problems in public schools, several scholars suggest that the “on-the-ground” school leader, the principal, is the individual who can make or break a school (Barth, 2000; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006; McGough, 2003). In fact, Rost (1993) suggests focusing almost entirely on leadership to solve institutional problems. While noting that there is a distinction between management ability and leadership ability, Rost contends that all substantive change begins and remains with the organizational leaders; therefore, he believes that the success or failure of a given organizational initiative rests almost completely with that leader.

Principals are the front-line managers in public school leadership. They are the only high-level school leaders who have, and are in fact frequently mandated by their states to have, daily contact with the students, teachers, and parents. This pivotal position

places much responsibility on the public school principal, but at the same time it also creates the opportunity for her or him to affect positive change where needed. In Texas, for example, the Texas Administrative Code (Texas Education Agency, 2009) specifically directs school principals to take innovative action to assure a better learning experience for students. Chapter 150, subchapter BB, section (a), domain (1), of the Instructional Management of the Texas Education Code reads:

The administrator promotes improvement of instruction through activities such as the following: monitoring student achievement and attendance; diagnosing student needs; **helping teachers design learning experiences for students;** **encouraging the development and piloting of innovative instructional programs;** and facilitating the planning and application of emerging technologies in the classroom (Texas Education Agency, 2009).

Principals are not only professionally obligated to be innovative on behalf of their students; they are mandated by the state to do so. Fullan (1991) notes, “The principal is in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas and people” (p. 144). This central position provides the principal with a distinctly comprehensive knowledge base that can coherently bring together the ideas and needs of all pedagogical players.

Any comprehensive pedagogical change must begin in the classroom, but it is the principal who can establish an alternative pedagogical philosophy for the school as a whole and inspire or direct the teachers to implement it. Principals can and should be as actively engaged in the teaching and learning as they are with administrative concerns. As Barth (2000) notes, “A principal who is a committed learner is likely to have a school full of students who are committed learners” (p. 152). The days of the principal as “lone

instructional leader” are over; instructional leadership must be shared (Lambert, 2002, p. 37). McGough (2003) suggests that a nurturing an environment of mutual learning creates a pedagogical paradise for all of the potential partners in that pedagogy, and the resultant teaching and learning synergy can be a powerful force to improve student achievement.

Traditionalists propose that change is not always the answer; they contend that effective principals know how to navigate around the potholes that appear in the road as they begin to implement transitions (Chirichello, 2008; Leech & Fulton, 2008). However, Leech and Fulton counter that if change is to occur, it must flow through the teacher/principal axis. They call for “participatory leadership” in which the teachers work with and through the principal to affect positive, grass roots change (p. 631).

There is no shortage of research on the best practices for educating particular ethnic, cultural, or linguistic groups in particular educational settings (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1996, Valenzuela, 2005). Low SES high school principals need not re-invent the wheel. The research foundation has been laid. However, research findings are not static. The educational landscape is constantly changing. Low SES population school principals and teachers should adapt these successful practices to the unique environment that exists in their schools. In fact, some teachers are already clandestinely using class-relevant pedagogies (Halx, 2010a). In this case, the principal need only engage and support them more openly.

Even after gaining the trust of the teachers, even a dedicated principal will face the same paradox that is faced by all organizational leaders: “how to maintain integrity and mission without making their organizations rigid and intractable... walking the

tightrope between rigidity and spinelessness” (Copland, 2003, p. 377). Especially in an organization of “permanent white water” (p. 377) like a school, holding true to a particular pedagogical philosophy will require a comprehensive understanding of all facets of an organization, *hopefully* combined with a commitment to a core belief in the pursuit of equitable education for all students.

McGough (2003) also notes that one cannot fully understand a principal without “authentically assessing and refining... the idiosyncratic nature of principals' approaches to their work” (p.469). According to McGough, principals fall into one of three broad categories: 1) the “principal-as-technician notion emphasizing the standards-based technical preparation of beginning principals - training them to be both managers and instructional leaders,” 2) the “principal-as-expert notion seeking to identify and disseminate problem-solving skills used by successful, effective, or expert principals,” and 3) the “principal-as-craftsperson notion phenomenally describing the pragmatic craft of the principalship toward a reality-based understanding of the role (p. 451). In other words, McGough sees principals as expert technocrats, expert problem solvers, or expert pragmatists. Interestingly, he does not offer a category that includes the position of principal *teacher* or instructional leader. Though McGough’s three approaches are viable descriptions of different styles of school management, if the pedagogical activity in and out of the classroom is not included in those management considerations, there is no real value in the categorization.

Educational research and state performance codes considered, most high school principals think of themselves as straightforward crisis managers (Fullan, 1991). Principals are expected to be all things to all people all of the time. Can we really expect

any professional in this position to take on the additional responsibility of pedagogical partnership? Since leadership of a school is also “a form of stewardship” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 270), and stewarding employees is critical, school leaders should devote as much energy to the wellbeing of their teachers and staff as they do to the wellbeing of the students. A reciprocation of understanding between administrators and teachers can create a heightened awareness of the foundational purpose of their work: to educate students (Fullan, 1991). According to McGough (2003), a school leader must now be a “contextual-actor guided by sociocultural determinants” (p. 452), i.e., a principal should maintain an awareness of her or his surroundings and act within them. Brueggerman, Reitzug and West (2009) state that a school leader should “nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness, and a perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture” (p. 86). A macro “vision” of the school, though vitally important, is not enough. The culturally sensitive principal must be involved at the micro level: in the classroom pedagogy. She or he should also establish the conceptual mindset that guides the pedagogy.

The Importance of Instructional Leadership

Successful instructional leadership requires that principals “free themselves of bureaucratic tasks and focus their efforts on improving teaching and learning” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 34). Beyond quotidian managerial duties, the high school principal is also an instructional authority. And, as Sergiovanni (1996) notes, “This pedagogical authority is authoritative rather than authoritarian. Its legitimacy comes in part from the virtuous responsibilities inherent to the principal's role and in part from his or her obligation to function as the shepherd of the school's moral compact” (p. 270). Though the principal is

professionally obligated to provide instructional guidance, research suggests that most principals spent only 10 percent of their time on it (Fullan, 1991; Jenkins, 2009; Stronge, 1988).

Devos and Bouckenooghe (2009) conducted a study that distinguished three types of instructional leader profiles: (1) the *people-minded profile* with a strong emphasis on educational leadership and mentoring as a school leader and possessing the necessary skills to implement a shared vision; (2) the *administrative-minded profile* with the focus on administration and the leadership role, but lacking feeling and unable to develop a vision; and (3) the *moderate-minded profile* with an emphasis on educational leadership, but with limited ability to involve all teachers in her or his vision. Devos and Bouckenooghe found that type one instructional leaders enjoyed greater and sustainable professional success and satisfaction than those they identified as types two and three. Supporting Devos and Bouckenooghe, Smith and Andrews (1989) synthesized several research studies to determine that successful instructional leaders possess four essential skills: they are resource providers, they are instructional resources themselves, they are good communicators, and they are a visible presence in their schools.

It is up to the instructional leader, the principal, to build a coherent instructional infrastructure that will accommodate *all* students (Smith & Andrews, 1989). However, the principal cannot lead instruction alone. Lambert (2002) notes that as dominant instructional leaders gets stronger, the school often gets weaker. This imbalance of instructional leadership power stifles innovation and participation. Only partnerships, or “shared vision results in program coherence” (p. 38).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 30 years of research on the effect of leadership on student achievement. The authors distilled 70 research studies into what they call a “balanced leadership framework” (p. 2). This framework correlated instructional leadership and student achievement and showed a positive correlation between the extents to which the principal is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment practices and improved student achievement. Along with building a shared sense of community, establishing standardized procedures and professional development opportunities, and maintaining discipline within the school, principal involvement in classroom pedagogical activities was valued by the teachers and had a direct and positive effect on the students (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty).

Clearly, instructional leadership, and even general school leadership actions, can have a significant impact on student achievement, but Robinson (2010) suggests that research has not yet made clear which general leadership capabilities in combination lend themselves best to instructional leadership success. In her recent meta-analysis study, Robinson found that principals with the capacity to, in combination, “build trust” and “solve complex problems” with a “deep leadership content knowledge” exhibited the greatest impact on positive student outcomes (p. 1). In other words, Robinson warns that “knowledge of effective leadership practices is not the same thing as knowledge of the capacities required for enactment” (p. 2). Robinson contends that the strong leadership capabilities identified in her meta-analysis (trust/deep knowledge/problem-solving) are more likely to improve student achievement when integrated and implemented as one strategy. Her study suggests the need for further investigation into instructional

leadership capacity combinations and the possibility that particular combinations might work best for particular educational environments.

The Challenge of Leading in Low SES Settings

Traditional top-down leadership models are too often not effective in low SES student population school settings (Healey, 1993). According to McLaren (2003), the progressive educational leader must use innovative, sometimes radical methods. Though these methods might not be well-received in a conservative environment, good educational leadership is leadership with “eyes wide open; it is resourceful, it is systemic, and it is informed” (Marshall & Young, 2006, p. 308) regardless of the political milieu of the moment. Because of the additional challenges in the lives of low SES students, the administrator engagement that is so vital to success in any school is all the more important in low SES population schools. The principal must be “instrumental in setting the tone of the school, helping decide on instructional strategies” in addition to organizing and distributing scarce resources (Edmunds, 1979, p. 16). The principal should be an engaged instructional leader who is sensitive to the distinct needs of her micro-local community and the individual students who have been acculturated by that community. Especially in schools serving low SES communities, “the very nature of their constituency” is a powerful force for pedagogical change (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006, p.377). Cultural and class difference can be embraced and capitalized upon. Low SES students are not “unfinished products needing polishing with middle-class virtues,” (Katz, 1987, p. 28), they are independent individuals who are perfectly capable of excelling on their own terms if given the opportunity. Yet, as Katz points out, “schools fail, and indeed have always failed, to equalize opportunity” (p. 112). He goes on to say

that schools are so “repressive and spirit-breaking” that students are, not surprisingly, “unable to assume the few responsibilities offered them” (p. 112).

Riehl (2000) speaks to the need for principal sensitivity to the increased diversity of today’s schools. This diversity is manifest not only in the student population, but also in the teaching and administrative staff. Behar-Horenstein (1995) provides a detailed examination principal preparation programs and advocates for program design that is “supported by a vision that centers on developing leaders who are prepared to deal with change processes and the challenges associated with leading schools comprised of diverse student populations” (p. 20). Behar-Horenstein also suggests that principals must, “understand the macro curriculum, a view that emphasizes the relationship between separate subjects and the entire curriculum” viewing it “holistically rather than segmentally” (p. 31). The need for the sensitivity is multiplied when diversity of teachers and staff is also considered. Middle-class teachers come from a background where a high school diploma and a Bachelor’s degree equal a good job; this is often not the case with most of their low SES students (Hinchey, 2004). Kanpol (1997) notes that a high degree of finesse necessary if a principal wishes to pursue an “emancipatory agenda” (p. 83), especially one that involves being directly involved in the classroom pedagogy. Reciprocal leadership and pedagogical partnerships are counter to the norm and, if imposed one-sidedly, resistance is virtually certain.

Successful pedagogical change requires that all stakeholders play a personal role in the process. The leader should develop a “shared vision... of plural parentage” (Murphy, 2000, p. 117) if she or he hopes to successfully implement a philosophical

change within an organization. The successful principal might consider living by the axiom, “if you don’t listen to others, they won’t listen to you” (p. 122).

Teacher Resistance to Pedagogical Alternatives and Partnerships

Even the most skilled and dedicated high school principal will encounter resistance from those she or he leads. Teacher resistance to change is well researched and documented (Chirichello, 2008; Elmore, 2002; McGough, 2003; Murphy, 2000; Short & Jones, 1991; Soo Hoo, 2004). Even a talented and dynamic change agent principal is very likely to encounter resistance from at least a few staff members. This resistance might manifest itself in willful disregard of pedagogical philosophy, or a more subtle subversion of the guiding principles of the educational leader. Teachers are the ultimate multi-taskers. They must juggle the classroom dynamic at a given moment, while at the same time keeping an eye on how each individual student is performing at that moment as well as evaluating that same student’s *potential* performance in the future (Delpit, 2003). Teachers of course must play a vital role in advancing alternative pedagogy.

Progressive educators believe that if the teacher does not “become engaged in active struggle against current oppressive conditions, schools will continue to mass produce ‘human capital’ for greedy corporations while simultaneously failing to meet the needs of children and helping to eliminate teaching as a profession” (Hinchey, 2004, p. xx). In the case of the implementation of critical pedagogy in particular, Soo Hoo (2004) notes, “even when teacher education programs provide practical strategies for combating oppressive practices in schools, student-teachers frequently report that they are faced with institutional barriers that block their ability to operationalize critical pedagogy in their classrooms” (p. 199). She goes on to say that “prospective teachers often state that they

cannot find ways, nor are they encouraged, to integrate new ideas into old, defunct, institutionalized schemata” (p. 199). It is not surprising that teachers resist being deskilled. This deskilling of teachers can be moderated and potentially reversed at the direction of the school principal.

Halx (2010a) conducted a study that explored the extent to which a representative sample of low SES population high school teachers use the tenets of critical pedagogy in their classrooms. In Table 2 below Halx indicates the degree of use:

(Table 2)

Key Aspects of Critical Pedagogy	Degree of Teacher Implementation
Frequent Discussion of the Power of Education	Negligible
Frequent Discussion of Societal Power Structures	Negligible
Frequent Discussion of Student Status in Society	Negligible
Encouragement of Student Self-Reflection	Negligible
Differentiate Instruction Based on Student/Class Status	Low
Attempt to De-objectify/Humanize Students	Low
Relate Course Content to the Lives of the Students	Low
Use of Dialogue in the Classroom	High
Attempt to Develop Critical Thinking Skills	High

As the table indicates, the non-traditional pedagogical techniques of critical pedagogy, that were developed especially for low SES population students, are not often used even by teachers in low SES population high schools. However, in contrast to their current practice, the teachers in this study all responded enthusiastically to the notion of using alternate pedagogies, like critical pedagogy, more routinely in their classrooms (Halx).

The teacher is the role model of the “public intellectual” (Hinchey, 2004, p. 134). According to Hinchey, teachers should be encouraged and even expected to exercise their professionalism. And, if not for the sake of encouraging teacher professionalism, Barth (1990) suggests that modeling collaboration can still have a positive effect on the entire school. As Barth notes, “The relationship between the principal and the teacher seems to

have an amplifying effect. It models what *all* the relationships [within the school] will be” (p. 19).

Education philanthropist Bill Gates (2009) believes that the teacher is the pedagogical heart of a school. In a statement regarding the successes and failures of his preeminent philanthropic organization, he offered this summary opinion:

Many of the small schools that we invested in did not improve students' achievement in any significant way. These tended to be the schools that did not take radical steps to change the culture, such as allowing the principal to pick the team of teachers or change the curriculum (A15).

Gates also believes that one of the key actions toward successful student outcomes is to “help their teachers be more effective in the classroom (A15). He went on to say, “If you want your child to get the best education possible, it is actually more important to get him [or her] assigned to a great teacher than to a great school” (A15).

However, for teachers, developing and *displaying* critical consciousness can be challenging. A new critical consciousness can sometimes lead to an “unhappy new awareness of unacknowledged and unearned privilege” (Hinchey, 2004, p. 26) on the part of the teachers. As Delpit (2006) notes, “How can we reach the worlds of others when we don’t even know they exist. Indeed, many of us don’t even realize that our own worlds exist only in our heads and in the cultural institutions we have built to support them” (p. xxiv). This is yet another reason why the principal should handle pedagogical change delicately and assist teachers through the process.

Established Traditional Pedagogy and the Need for Change

Public secondary school education in the United States today offers some of the highest quality instruction in the world for upper- and middle-class student populations (Cross, 2007; Valenzuela, 2005). Dominant-population-normed pedagogies function very well for the dominant population's children, and the dominant population sees no reason that the dominated population should not be able to achieve equally within this pedagogical realm. Unfortunately, low SES, often minority, students are not receiving the same culturally relevant pedagogical quality or compatibility that their counter parts in the middle and upper classes are receiving (Cross, 2007; Giroux, 2004; McLaren, 2003; Osborne, 1996; Valenzuela, 2005). And even in the middle and upper classes, pedagogical relevance is lacking. As Delpit (2006) notes, "Engaging almost any middle- or high-schooler, regardless of ethnicity or social class, in real conversation about schools will inevitably leave one with a sense of the vacuousness of much schooling" (p. xvi).

Traditional pedagogy creates an asymmetry of language where the teacher's voice dominates, and the students are quickly socialized into silence (Ardizzone, 2007; Wrigley, 2006). The lecture-heavy methods of traditional pedagogy sometimes serve well if they are matched with a compatible student population, but too often this match does not occur (De Los Reyes & Gozemba, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). As I noted earlier, the education system in the United States was designed for and by dominantly European-American population that settled the country (Dewey, 1916; Giroux, 2004; McLaren, 2003; Osborne, 1996; Valenzuela, 2005). Even with the considerable increase in the low SES status non-European American student population, the hegemonic "standard" education system has become so entrenched that it has even

been accepted by the marginalized populations who have been so ill-served by it (Kincheloe, 2004). The pedagogy in place in the U.S. was “constructed to serve particular interests currently a narrow set of white, Anglo-Saxon, male capitalists and professionals and those hegemonized accordingly” (Osborne, 1996, p.287). Osborne suggests that the public schools of today are not assembly lines with the same input that allows for standardized output. The curriculum and the text book should not be one and the same (Apple, 2009). At present, perhaps more than ever before, students arrive at school from an infinite number of backgrounds and personal experiences. Several researchers suggest that educators should take advantage of this opportunity for more diverse learning rather than waste energy on trying to neutralize it (Ardizzone, 2007; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2004).

Ironically, this neutralizing, one-for-all, pedagogy is not imposed completely by force; it is in fact accepted consensually and mutually by the dominated and the dominant, but this tacit acceptance can be disrupted. According to Breault (2003), “even the freest of societies must revise its list of oppressed peoples to include all those who are kept from reaching their potential by the attitudes or institutions of another group” (p. 2). A hegemonic entrenchment sustains the currently flawed U.S. education system, and the dismal achievement rates of the educationally marginalized low SES, often minority, student populations in several parts of the country (Bacolod & Hotz, 2006, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008) call attention to the strong possibility that a tacit form of educational oppression is occurring. Martin (2008) laments the “intense educational estrangement” (p. 31) that is experienced by low SES students, especially by “culturally and linguistically subordinate” populations (Bartolomé, 2003, p. 408). These students,

“historically, have been mistreated and miseducated” (p. 408) or ignored by school systems that at the same time purport to be inclusive of all students with their “one size fits all” pedagogy that in fact does not fit low SES students (Reyes, 1992, p. 435). As Reyes suggested in her study, the fault is clearly not with the students, it is with the system that does not recognize that entire student populations, let alone the individual students themselves, must be considered differently. Today’s students do not come from homogenous populations, and schools too frequently “reproduce the same asymmetrical power relations” that exist between different cultural, class, linguistic, or ethnic background groups in the nation (Bartolomé, 2003, p. 410). The literature overwhelmingly suggests that the conventionally accepted notion that distinctly different cultural and SES populations can flourish in an educational system that was designed for one particular population is, at best, ill-conceived.

Whether innocently ill-conceived or purposeful, the tacit oppression of this dominant-population-centric educational system has in fact resulted in “widespread and severe student alienation” and disillusionment that has stunted the achievement and intellectual growth of millions of public school students, especially low SES students in urban-center settings (Martin, 2008, p. 31). After years of the pedagogical oppression, students learned that “docility and conformity were the best strategies for survival” (Katz, 1987, p. 112). Marginalized and low SES students must sacrifice independent intellectual development just to get through the educational system that has been deemed to be in their best interest by others.

The current and predicted demographic changes (Paik & Walberg, 2007; Santiago, 2007; Valenzuela, 2005) in Texas and many other regions of the country

suggest that resolution of this educational inequity is imperative. In Texas “minority students are already the majority in elementary school grades” (Marshall & Oliva, 2006, p. 5). A significant number of researchers suggest that a new teaching and learning approach is needed more than ever for low SES students (Bacolod & Hotz, 2006; Bartolomé, 2003; Breault, 2003; Cross, 2007; Kilgore, 1998; Martin, 2008; McLaren, 2003; Reyes, 1992). Alternative pedagogies have proven to be more effective for non-dominant population students, and a more comprehensive application of such pedagogies could produce even greater results.

Alternate Pedagogical Models

What is effective pedagogy? Certainly, there is not one definition. What is effective for one student population might not be effective for another. Effective pedagogy is clearly subjective and contextual (Hordatt-Gentles, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1996). It is up to the discretion of the school leader, in consultation with the teachers and community stakeholders, to determine what pedagogy will facilitate student achievement in a given environment. Choosing the right pedagogy for a given setting is critical to the success of that pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1996). However, Leach and Moon (2008) advise that it is important that “pedagogy remains an adventure” (p. 21). In other words, pedagogy should be open to change and avoid becoming routine.

Shor (1997) suggests that we can only begin to understand the power of pedagogy by trying alternatives to the systemic norm. Sizer (as cited in Shor, 1997, p. 147) laments, “It is astonishing that so few critics challenge the system...The people are better than the structure. Therefore, the structure must be at fault.” Alternative pedagogies can disrupt

routinized educational structures that hinder teacher and administrator sensitivity of difference in students. As an alternative to a “pedagogy of poverty consisting of excessive regimentation, drill of the basics, and harsh discipline” (Books, 2009, p. 64), there are numerous pedagogies and philosophically disruptive educational structures that serve as micro examples of educational programs that are currently making a positive difference for disadvantaged students. Critical consciousness development, thought perhaps not an explicit goal of some of these programs, is certainly inherent in them. While their success is laudable, these programs exist only in micro circumstances that allow for exceptional practices that are not necessarily feasible in conventional public school settings. This micro circumstance gives them advantages that inflate their successes even within those micro environments.

Student resistance to locally and culturally irrelevant pedagogy is well documented (Delpit, 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Sekayi, 2007). Students resist such pedagogy by refusing to learn, or worse, by dropping out. One alternative teaching and learning method that attempts to counter this problem by emphasizing the context of the learning environment is localized pedagogy. By localized I refer to a pedagogy that incorporates local cultural, economic, and political concerns into daily teaching and learning activities. One established example of localized pedagogy is the place-based pedagogy advanced by Gruenewald (2003). Place-based pedagogy is a simple and commonsensical model that literally contextualizes teaching and learning to the immediately surrounding community. Woodhouse and Knapp (2000, as cited in Gruenewald, 2003) describe several distinctive characteristics to this developing field of practice, but the most relevant is the emphasis on a pedagogy that “emerges from the

particular attributes of place,” and that “it connects place with self and community” (p. 7). Gruenewald warns that classroom-based pedagogy is insufficient for today’s world. Young (2007) suggests that locally and culturally responsive pedagogy “seeks to analyze what we do as practioners and how we think as educators” (p. 111) in response to what our students do and how they think.

Delpit (2006) cautions practioner educators that the concern is “not necessarily how to create the perfect ‘culturally matched’ learning situation for each ethnic group, but rather how to recognize when there is a problem for a particular child and how to seek its cause in the most broadly conceived fashion” (p. 167). Delpit goes on to say that teachers should be careful not to “utilize styles of instruction and/or discipline that are at odds with community norms (p. 167). The notion of connecting students with their community, while at the same time connecting the community with the students, is the essence of localized pedagogical practice. As Delpit also warns, “we risk failure in our educational reforms by ignoring the significance of human connectedness in many communities” (p. 95).

Several troubled school districts across the country have, perhaps out of desperation, accepted alternative pedagogies that emphasize a more democratic classroom (De Los Reyes & Gozemba, 2002). The Central Park East public schools and the Harlem Children’s Zone, both in New York City, are examples of how the efforts of a small group of motivated individuals, combined with active community involvement, can affect positive outcomes by challenging students to think critically in a more democratically structured classroom. De Los Reyes and Gozemba (2002) advocate for a democratic classroom because it is an environment that creates critical thinkers who are

willing to challenge injustice and become “thinking subjects who pose real questions about the world in which they live, reflect on them, develop theory, and take action to test their theories” (p. 10). They note that students in these programs are “fully cognizant of the education they are receiving and conceiving, and enjoy the results of the changes that they initiate and implement... these students become democracy’s best hope” (p. 10). As De Los Reyes and Gozemba note, these “pockets of hope” serve as vivid examples of what equitable public schooling could provide. A pedagogy that encourages critical consciousness development and “learning that is critical, creative and student-subjective” creates well-educated individuals and mindful citizens (Ardizzone, 2007, p. 53).

Another pedagogical model that is inherently localized and democratizing is critical pedagogy put forward by Freire (2002), Giroux (2004), Kincheloe (2004), and McLaren (2003) among others over that last four decades. In addition to being a comprehensive critique of traditional pedagogy, critical pedagogy takes specialized and place-based teaching and learning one step further by enhancing the components of empowerment and awareness of power relationships in society. Freire sums up localized, individualized pedagogy best when he states,

People as beings ‘in a situation,’ find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own ‘situationality’ to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human beings *are* because they are in a situation. And they *will be more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it (Freire, 2002, p. 109).

Critical consciousness development is a vital component of critical pedagogy.

As these different pedagogical models and their different goals illustrate, there are many different, and yet successful, means to education the nation's public school students. One pedagogy for all students is as ill-conceived as one pedagogy for each student.

Openness to Pedagogical Change

With such alternatives as those listed above, there is no reason to maintain an outdated and ineffective pedagogy that was created by and for a population different from the population being served. Pedagogy can be normed micro-locally, but with a constant awareness of the macro influence on that pedagogy. Since significant evidence suggests that non-critical traditional pedagogy is not a good fit for low SES, often minority, students (Cross, 2007; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Valenzuela, 2005), why not try alternatives that are not only better suited for and received by low SES student populations, but that also develop critical thinking skills for advanced comprehension and critical consciousness to stimulate civic understanding and responsibility? Inertia and the fear of change is certainly a reasonable explanation.

Resistance to change within organizations and institutions is well documented (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Kantor, Stein, & Jick, 2003), and usually falls into one of two categories: change for the sake of efficiency, or change to improve society. Pedagogical reform can be sought for both of those reasons as well. Affecting sustainable change within the established power structures of an institution like a public school district is certainly a daunting task. Educational organizations are "unusual systems in that they are loosely coupled, a characteristic that

makes larger scale change less likely to occur rapidly or effect the whole organization in dramatic ways” (Simsek & Louis, 2000, p. 550).

Gardner (1990) suggests affecting change by considering a school’s departments, or the schools within a district, as “interdependent organized systems” (p. 81). From Gardner’s perspective, organizational leaders would focus on the interactions and reactions between stand-alone organizations while at the same time paying very close attention to the “intricate organizational patterns” (p. 81) of their own units and the units of others. Patterns of interdependency often illuminate the means by which cooperation can occur (Gardner).

Duke (2004) asks, is change a “product, a process, or a consequence?” (p. 9). The product is the hoped-for result of alternative pedagogy advocates. Bolman and Deal’s (1997) multi-frame model addresses the change *process* incrementally by breaking down organizations (like schools and school districts) into four frames: structure, human resources, politics, and symbolism. Working within these frames individually allows change advocates to address specifically these distinctly different organization forces. Bolman and Deal note the best course of action is to “examine the situation one frame at a time” (p. 363). A negative “consequence” is what those who resist change often fear. It is up to advocate for change to take every precaution, and convince others that the risk of a negative outcome is minimal.

Fullan (1993) suggested that change occurs as a journey, not from a blueprint. Duke (2004) notes four elements of change: discovery (of the need for change), design (creation of a new way to address the need for change), development (planning the implementation of change), and implementation (the introduction of change). He goes on

to define educational change as an action, “intended to alter the goals of education and/or improve what students are expected to learn, how students are instructed or assessed, and how educational functions are organized, regulated, governed, and financed” (p. 31).

Building capacity for a new pedagogy requires a different kind of organizational design, a different kind of organizational structure and a “different kind of school day in which teachers have more opportunity to be observed and to observe other teachers and to look at practice outside of their setting” (Elmore, 2002, p.39). Any organization, by its nature, is structured. That structure gives an organization “order, system... and an established a pattern of authority” (Owens, 2004, p. 189). The “cornerstones of structure” within an organization are ironically “differentiation and integration” (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 364). Masterfully integrating difference into a unified whole is the key to organizational success. Maintaining a sound integration of distinctly different individuals, purposes, and goals is clearly a challenging pursuit. Changing structural processes, tasks, and people within an established educational organization, especially a school, is predictably difficult (Owen, 2004). Comprehensive pedagogical change becomes an on-going and uphill battle without comprehensive organizational and structural change that supports it.

A study conducted by Weiss and Cambone (2000) reviewed principal attitudes toward working within reorganized “shared decision making” (SDM) schools (p. 366). Weise and Cambone note that SDM school reform is change of “significant proportions” that alters the balance of power and creates a more reciprocal pedagogical environment (p. 366). One might anticipate principal resistance to such sharing of authority, but none of the 12 participants studied by Weiss and Cambone exhibited opposition to this change.

In fact, after an initial period of adjustment, several principals welcomed the shared responsibility and collective successes that were achieved with shared decision making.

Though viewing an organization from different perspectives, such as human resources, political, and symbolic might provide greater insights into the application of a new pedagogy, one distinct advantage of the structural perspective is that it reveals the organization as a whole rather than in individual parts. This phenomenon is best illustrated by the notion that organizations can “learn” something while the individuals within it might not (Bolman & Deal, 1997). An organization is sometimes an entity onto itself. It can collectively take action that is more than the sum of the actions of the individuals within it. Awareness of a given organization’s structure can provide a human road map for easier navigation through processes of change.

With regard to change within a school specifically, though structural awareness is clearly important, the professional demands of the principalship may also inherently stand in the way of change. Principals are under considerable pressure to “maintain stability” while at the same time being expected to “lead through change” (Fullan, 1991, p. 145). That stuck-in-the-middle position of the principal (who is clearly a middle-manager) makes negotiating change especially challenging for high school leaders. And, the larger problem is that serious reform requires much more than a single innovation or initiative (Fullan). Real reform requires “changing the culture and structure of a school” (p. 169), and this can be a daunting task fraught with hurdles.

Factors that Could Hinder Pedagogical Reform

Resistance to pedagogical change comes in many forms. One factor known to hinder organizational change is the lack of a common and mutually accepted language

used to describe the processes. Schlechty (2000) notes that familiar language should be avoided during the change process: “A new vision requires a new language, at least until the old language can be unloaded of its prior meanings and recharged with new meanings” (p. 184). Schlechty suggests that words like *teacher* and *principal* should both be linked to notions of leadership since teacher must play a leadership role not only in the classroom, but also in the school as a whole. This notion of the positive effects of a “shared language” is echoed by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002, p.198). They note that a mutually agreed upon language “captures the real truth about the forces that affect people’s day-to-day lives in the organization as well as their hopes for the future” (p. 199). A shared language also provides “a sense of unity and resonance, and the resulting momentum helps people move from talk to action (p. 199).

Another hurdle that must be surpassed in the process of pedagogical change is organizational culture inertia (Bolman & Deal, 2002). Excessive focus on the individual principal, or a select few teachers, runs the risk of “ignoring the basic patterns” (p. 23) of behavior that run through the whole school. These patterns of group behavior, and other institutionalized habits, must be changed concurrently with procedures such as technical pedagogical practices. Wasonga and Christman (2009) suggest that these patterns of behavior can be changed with social interactions that they define as “contextual formal and informal practical conversations rooted in experiences and everyday thinking” that “more likely lead to more widely acceptable conclusions and decisions” (p. 20). In other words, the overarching, collective, and socially-driven acceptance of change within an institution, like a school, is just as important as acceptance by the individuals within that same institution.

Yet another barrier to change is the perceived threat of lawsuits and district or state educational policies. Principals are often paralyzed by the fear of lawsuits and/or policy violations. Hess (2009) suggests that educational leaders are trapped in “cages of their own design” (p.31). He notes that “school and district leaders are hindered by a tendency to regard the law as a stop sign--and their attorneys as traffic cops” (p. 32). Hess goes on to say that attorneys should not decide what is done, that is up to the educational leader. The attorney’s job is to provide the parameters within which that decision is made. The school district’s attorney should simply inform the school principal “how to achieve what you want and how to do it within the law”(p. 32). Hess believes that “deep reform almost invariably entails creating some hard feelings, upending familiar routines, and overcoming established procedures” (p. 33), but that this reform can be accomplished quite readily within established law and policy if the educational leader uses available resources to traverse those laws and policies.

Getting past the entrenched culture of deficit thinking (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001) of administrators and teachers is another notable hurdle in the process of pedagogical reform. This culture of low expectations, which exists in many schools, too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in that educators end up getting what they expect from their students (Valencia, 1997). Deficit thinking refers to the notion (in the minds of educators) that students, particularly low income minority students, fail in school because they and their families experience deficiencies that obstruct the learning process (e.g. limited intelligence, lack of motivation, inadequate home socialization). If teachers and principals accept the false notion that low SES students are not capable of surmounting life issues, they add yet another barrier to the already challenging educational experience

of low SES students (Valencia, 1997). These same teachers are also unlikely to willingly adapt their pedagogical activities to accommodate students within whom they invest no hope for achievement.

Those currently in power will be hesitant to cede that power to others. The privileged exhibit great determination to hold on to privilege. Hegemony is a very strong force, and clearly, there are a myriad of barriers to organizational and pedagogical change. However, advance awareness of barriers to change, the hegemonic forces at play, *and* a sense for the organizational model that work, will position the informed principal well for a greater likelihood of success.

A Critical Pedagogy for Critical Consciousness Development

Of all pedagogical models, critical pedagogy seems to be one of the best matched for the needs and conditions of low SES students partially because critical pedagogy is the constant pursuit of making “oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed” (Freire, 2002, p. 30). Freire believed that from critical consciousness and “reflection will come liberation” (p. 30). Rejecting the student objectification that occurs with traditional pedagogy, critical pedagogy makes the student an integral player in her or his education. As Dewey (1938) stated, “There is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active co-operation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying” (p. 67). When critical consciousness has been awakened, students become impatient and “no longer satisfied to watch, they want to participate” (Freire, 1973, p. 13). Critical consciousness is a consistent thread that runs through critical pedagogical activities.

Many of today's high schools have become "something done *to* kids, not *by* kids" (Cushman, 2003, p. ix). The alternative *critical* pedagogy "must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed" (Freire, 2002, p. 48). Critical pedagogy might be more appropriately termed "ideologically oriented pedagogy" (Guba, 1990, p. 19) since the teaching techniques of critical pedagogy create an awareness of the hidden power structures that oppress (however mildly) and seek to empower the oppressed classes with knowledge (Freire, 2002; Kilgore, 1998; Martin, 2008; McLaren, 2003). This awareness and empowerment can benefit all student populations by leveling the educational playing field and allowing all students to engage and achieve in education (just as they will be expected to engage and achieve as adults).

There is not one definition of critical pedagogy or its methods. Critical pedagogy is a "process of learning and relearning" (Wink, 1997, p. 60) for both the teacher and the student. Critical pedagogy requires empathetic action on the part of the teachers and awareness on the part of the students. The primary focus of critical pedagogy is to enlighten students, through social status awareness, that an improved life is possible for them through education. This process sometimes entails a painful reexamination of old practices, established beliefs and behaviors, and the institutionalized values that reinforce those practices, beliefs and behaviors. Critical pedagogy forces inquiries into equity and justice; "sometimes those inequities are subtle and covert; sometimes they are blatant" (p. 60). This reassessment requires courage and patience, as the process of peeling back layers of entrenched policies is often long and tedious. Critical pedagogy is sometimes negatively categorized by critics as a radical theory, but what is *negatively* radical about a teaching and learning approach that recognizes that the emancipatory potential of

education is great and that the impact of power relations in society should not be underestimated?

Other critics contend that critical pedagogy is “theoretically visionary but lacks the practical tools to accompany it” (Kanpol, 2009, p.1). However, critical pedagogy nonetheless seeks to assist students in the “struggle against formulaic enterprises” (p. 1) – enterprises that sometimes oppress. With regard to the application of critical pedagogy, Kanpol goes on to say, “One cannot be practical in the traditional sense because every context and reality differs. In other words, one cannot give the ‘ten’ steps for a critical pedagogy, especially if critical pedagogy differs in different arenas” (p. 2). Yes, critical pedagogy does vary in different contexts. Critical pedagogy is much more a pedagogical philosophy than a list of techniques (Freire, 1998)

Accepting that critical pedagogy is a pedagogical mindset, Martin (2008) nonetheless attempts to operationalize critical pedagogy by providing a four-step model for incorporating well-established critical pedagogy teaching techniques into everyday teaching. Martin first notes the need for *critical content*. He suggests the need for “courses, materials and class interaction focused on the nature, causes of, and possible solutions to social inequalities and problems” (p. 39). Second, Martin suggests that teachers employ *student-centered, dialogic process* that includes “discussions (occasionally preceded by peer group exercises) in which students were encouraged to consider and expand the subject matter through detailed reflection on its relevance to their daily lives and thoughts” (p. 39). Third, Martin notes that teachers can ensure a *Democratic process* by “openly encouraged maximal participation in discussions, sharing of all viewpoints, student input concerning course policies and decisions, and student

feedback concerning course processes” (p. 39). And finally, Martin suggests that teachers proceed with a *self-reflective process* in which they ask students to analyze the course material and “apply the analysis to our college and class” (p. 39). As is evident from Martin’s model, critical pedagogy requires students to engage deeply in the course material and its relevance to their lives. This model is only an example of one teacher’s method of application; however it serves as a practical illustration of critical pedagogy in action.

Critical pedagogy and critical consciousness development work best as overarching mindsets or professional philosophies; they cannot be used to their fullest potential if it is forced on the unwilling. As Lavanez, Leistyna, and Nelson (2004) have noted that critical pedagogy is “discursive practice... [that] is intended to work through learners and not simply on them” (p. 4).

The critical pedagogical approach is especially well suited for the inner-city, low SES, students because the discovery-, exploration-based heuristic teaching techniques of this pedagogy enable students to see their situation in a different light and to see themselves as capable of changing that situation (Kilgore, 1998). In other words, critical pedagogy is intended to help those without power to acquire it, and thereby advance their standing in society.

Administrators and teachers can also learn from critical pedagogy. As Guajardo and Guajardo (2006) noted, “The reflection process [of critical pedagogy] has helped the educational leaders better understand their role as public educators, because they have a better understanding of themselves” (p. 4). The “spirit of inquiry,” that is inherent in

critical pedagogy, within a “culture of inquiry” (Copland, 2003, p. 376) that the principal can create, facilitates learning for everyone involved in the process (Freire, 2002, p. 63).

Critical Consciousness Development and Accountability Systems

National and state accountability testing runs parallel with traditional pedagogy. While the demand for this “accountability” has in fact created an even less demanding pedagogy of memorization that has been termed facetiously as “No Child Left Thinking” (Westheimer, 2009, p. 259), for now, any alternative pedagogy must accommodate those testing expectations. Much research suggests that standardized tests are of questionable value, and that they in fact “position students to be dolts who are biologically incapable of engaging with mature information and the cognitive sophistication it demands” (Kincheloe, 2006). They also inspire “teacher proof” curricula that, in pursuit of raising test scores, ignore the “natural rhythms of teaching and learning (Delpit, 2006, p. xiii). Nonetheless, these tests are currently (and for the foreseeable future) tied to federal and state funding formulae, and therefore, they must be considered. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) suggest developing a “more meaningful evaluation tool” (p. 173) to assess the progress of low SES students, but in the mean time we must work within the system as it exists. Any effort to develop critical consciousness and critical thinking skills in students must occur within the current accountability system of the state.

Even thirty years ago Shor (1997) noted that the assessment environment was undemocratic. He stated it quite succinctly, “A standardized testing instrument brought in from the outside, or designed by the teacher separate from the class, would only contradict the emergence of students as subjects” (as cited in Keesing-Styles, 2003, p. 4). Clearly, based on current and historical racial bias in intelligence assessment in

education, there is a need for over-arching change not only in assessment processes, but also in the pedagogical activities that lead up to assessment (Valencia & Suzuki, 2001). Educational leaders must strike a more critical stance when using pedagogical and assessment instruments with working-class, minority students. They should be critical of the failed pedagogies and assessments of the past and consider culturally and sensitive alternative teaching and learning techniques such as those of *critical pedagogy*. The results of alternative methods like critical pedagogy can in turn be assessed critically and equitably because they emerge from a contextually sensitive foundation. To accomplish a critical approach, the assessment should be “centered on dialogic interactions so that the roles of teacher and learner are shared and all voices are validated” (Keesing-Styles, 2003, p. 3). Freire (2002) termed this cycle of shared learning and assessing as “praxis,” i.e., theory in action (p. 87). Contextually sensitive pedagogy and assessment must “value and validate the experience students bring to the classroom, and importantly, situate this experience at the centre of the classroom content and process in ways that problematize it and make overt links with oppression and dominant discourses” (Keesing-Styles, 2003, p. 3).

Critical Thinking Development: An Added Bonus

Critical thinking development has never been the primary focus of *public* schools (Katz, 1987). The “cultivation and the transmission of cognitive skills and intellectual abilities as ends in themselves had far less importance for early school promoters... the character of pupils was a much greater concern than their minds” (p. 23). Many would argue that currently even character development is ignored in traditional pedagogy. Westheimer (2009) suggests that, “by ‘critical thinking,’ school officials too often mean

that students must passively absorb as ‘truth’ the critical thinking already completed by someone else” (p. 262). He goes on to say that the current national assessment program has created a pedagogy that serves primarily to “please authority and pass tests, not how to develop convictions and stand up for them” (p. 263).

Alternative teaching and learning methods, like place-based and critical pedagogy, and critical consciousness development, by their nature go hand-in-hand with the development of critical thinking skills. Although many public school leaders suggest that critical thinking development is an important part of their school’s mission, many of do not practice what they preach (Bailin, Coombs, & Daniels, 1999; Hyslop-Margison, 2003). Critical thinking development not only runs counter to the assessment-driven learning circumstances of the high-stakes testing era, but it also requires a somewhat more labor intensive pedagogy to accomplish. Even students at the college level must sometimes be “forced” to think critically (Halx & Reybold, 2005). It is, nonetheless, vital that public school students learn to think critically. Success in life does not occur by rote; it is accomplished by innovation and by stepping outside the norm. Critical thinking and critical consciousness development go hand-in-hand during the process of being a fully developed citizen and social human being.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

Design

For this qualitative study, I used a multi-framed, modified grounded theory methods approach (Charmaz, 2005). Thus, I accepted the rigorous guidelines and tools of grounded theory, but I rejected the objectivist, positivist foundation of its original iterations presented by Glaser (1978) and Glaser and Strauss (1967). In other words, I maintained respect for the careful methodological standards of grounded theory while at the same time allowing adjustment to those standards if an opportunity was presented to enhance the depth and quality of the data gathered.

The focus of grounded theory is to build “substantive theory” and to “derive inductively theory that is ‘grounded’ in the data” (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). In other words, it is “the study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 522). The ultimately developed grounded theory must be “closely related to the area of investigation,” be usable by those in that area, and be functional in multiple and ever-changing conditions (Merriam, 2002, p. 143).

The modified stance adds awareness and purposeful consideration of possible researcher bias, the non-objectiveness of interviewees, and the influence of the researcher on the data gathering process, but at the same time it avoids any action toward quantification of the data. I agree with Charmaz in openly recognizing that as qualitative researchers “we share in constructing what we define as data” (p. 509). This recognition does not diminish the validity or value of the data; on the contrary, it provides a collaborative perspective that cannot be acquired through quantitative methods. The

upfront admission of the researcher's "interpretive frame of reference" (p. 509), or possible bias, provides valuable information for consideration by readers who must decide whether or not the findings are transferable to their individual circumstance or applicable to their individual concerns.

The epistemology of the researcher "shapes, but does not necessarily determine" what is found in a research study (p. 509). The data ultimately speak for themselves, but data alone languish when unnoticed, and as Charmaz notes, "they need to be *informed* by our theoretical sensitivity" (p. 511, italics added). It is such sensitivity that brings the data to life and makes it useful to others.

As noted earlier, grounded theory began as a reaction to positivist critiques of qualitative inquiry. A grounded theory study with a critical theoretical perspective must be supported by research methods that are open to variation from normative standards. Accordingly, I subscribed to Kincheloe's (2004) notion of bricolage. Contrary to possible first impressions, this overarching methodological philosophy is more than an advanced form of data triangulation. It is the incorporation of multiple qualitative research methods in one comprehensive process. Bricolage allows for the use of any applicable methodological activity, as it is needed, essentially to force the researcher to think about every possible interpretation of the data. This overarching methodological philosophy incorporates "historiography, survey research, ethnography, urban mapping, urban ecology, geography, criminology, and demography" (p. 64). In other words, I borrowed from as many established and progressive research methods as necessary to assure the validity and integrity of the findings. This multi-framed, multi-perspective modified method greatly increases the likelihood that the data collected will yield rich findings.

Methods

Using modified grounded theory as a methodological foundation, this study explored the pedagogical perspectives of three low SES district associate superintendents (or equivalent titles), six low SES high school principals and twelve of their teachers from three large metro areas in Texas. The teacher participants were comprised of 5 content area (tested) subject teachers and 7 elective teachers. The sex and cultural background of each of the participants was as follows:

The Associate Superintendents

One female of Mexican heritage

One male of Mexican heritage

One female of African heritage

The Principals

Three females of Northern European heritage

One male of Northern European heritage

One male of Mexican heritage

One male of African heritage

The Teachers

Five males of Northern European heritage

Three males of Mexican heritage

Two females of Mexican heritage

One female of African heritage

One male of African heritage

All of the teacher participants had taught for over 5 years. All of the principal participants had occupied their positions for at least 2 years. All of the associate superintendents had been in their positions for at least 2 years.

One-hour, semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews were conducted with each associate superintendent and principal participant totaling 9 interview hours. One-hour individual and/or group interviews were conducted with the teacher participants totaling 12 interview hours. In accordance with the purpose of the study, I used a purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2002) to select progressive educational administrators and teachers. Accordingly, I sought recommendations from associate superintendents, principals, and others to select associate superintendents, principals, and teachers who would self-identify as such. By progressive, I mean individuals who advocate for reform or change toward bettering current conditions.

Following the flexible analytic guidelines of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2005, 2006), after each interview I immediately transcribed the audio tapes and open coded the data. Open coding is a first pass through the data to identify “meaning chunks.” This process also allowed for adjustments to the interview guide and process (for use in subsequent interviews) if it was determined that particular questions or the method of inquiry did not elicit sufficiently rich data. After the second interview was completed, I began axial coding. Axial coding is the process of identifying themes common to all interviewees. This constant comparative method sustains focus on the data by constantly revisiting it. The continuous focus on the data is an effective means to “refine the emerging analyses” (Charmaz, p. 508) which in turn prompts the researcher to “follow leads [she or he] might otherwise ignore or not realize” (p. 511). After the last

interview is conducted, I began the selective coding process. This entails returning to the interview transcripts, with the themes identified during the axial coding stage, and verifying that the emergent axial themes are in fact thoroughly supported by the data.

As one of several acts of data triangulation, I used an independent “expert audit” (Patton, 2002, p. 562) to corroborate/confirm the findings. This verification is “an explicit goal” of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2005, p. 509), and it is an important factor in gathering robust data. Expert review of the coding and findings not only reduces potential researcher bias, but it can also deepen insight by focusing emphasis on the findings that are *collaboratively* considered to be the most valuable. For this study, my expert auditor was a qualitative research professor at a large university in the Washington, DC area.

As an additional methodological modification, I also employed an enhanced form of member checking. Standard member checking is the process of seeking a one-time “review by inquiry participants” (Patton, 2002, p. 560) as a supplemental verification of the validity of the findings. This process involves participant review of the findings to be sure the interpretations of the researcher are accurate. I took this dialogical data generation process one step further by member checking with participants at multiple stages of the coding and analysis process (Carspecken, 1996). I also took great care to treat each participant as a colleague in the pursuit of improving public education, not simply as a participant in a study. When one treats research subjects as participants, they tend to act like participants rather than authentic professionals (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Additionally, in my analysis of the interview transcripts, I focused special attention to two concepts that are not frequently considered by researchers: “silence” and “context” as presented most recently by Charmaz (2005, 2006). Voice-centered analysis

was first put forward by Gilligan in 1982. This analytical technique places purposeful focus on the literal tone of the participant as well as attention to analogous and figurative comments. It is especially true for those in power, like principals, that what they *do not* say is often as important as what they *do* say (Charmaz, 2005). I sought to avoid a simple question and answer approach which would succeed in “getting the headline, but miss the story” (Weiss, 1994, p. 13). The contextual moment in which the spoken or unspoken word occurs can illuminate greatly the otherwise superficial meaning of the words themselves. I recorded this action with diligently-taken field notes. These notes were not “words and phrases abstracted out of context,” but instead they were a textual record of the interaction between the spoken words and the human emotion with which they are delivered (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 140). This special attention and examination of “timing, tone, gestures, and postures” helped me to get past “dramaturgical fictions” (Foley, 1990, p. 177) and allowed me to make more accurate “inference reconstructions” during the analysis stage (Carspecken, 1996, p. 98).

I also gave special consideration to achieving overall “data adequacy” (Morse, 1995, p. 147). Though many researchers claim data saturation, this claim is often an exaggeration and “supported” by gathering data that is unnecessary (Morse). The sample sizes in qualitative case studies are frequently small. Generalization is not the goal in most qualitative research; hence, transferability is hoped-for aim in this study. Data adequacy was achieved when the data gathered yielded only outliers, but no new themes. However, participant comments that appear to be outliers were not completely ignored. In quantitative analysis, outliers are often averaged into irrelevance. In qualitative research, as Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) has noted, “attending to the perspective that is discrepant”

avoids “lopping off the many loose ends which life is made of” (p. 246). Outliers can also serve as the proverbial canary in a coal mine. They can provide an early warning of an analytical problem. If this warning is heeded, the analytical error can be corrected before the analysis as a whole is corrupted.

To enhance my analysis further, I also employed the use of “analytic memos” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 32). This process involves making frequent notes of any analytic or methodological thought or research concern as those thoughts occur, and then later reviewing those thoughts and incorporating them into the analysis process.

I used in vivo coding (Saldana, 2009) because it “prioritize[s] and honor[s] the participant’s voice” by using/coding the actual terms the participant uses in daily life (p. 74). This coding is especially appropriate for marginalized-population students because it helps preserve the words and meaning conveyed by the students rather than replacing them with the researcher’s interpretation of those words (Charmaz, 2006, Saldana, 2009).

Additionally, in line with the contextual sensitivity noted above, I maintained detailed field notes to capture any environmental, emotional, and general observational considerations that might have affected my conclusions. These notes were used in the findings-confirmation process. The use of multiple data sources and multiple analysis methods helps to illuminate any inconsistencies in the preliminary findings, as well as to reinforce all conclusions (Patton, 2002).

Finally, I coded and analyzed all data myself and “by hand.” I did not use software coding programs because I fully agree with Carspecken’s (1996) admonition that they can “risk obscuring the effects of temporal context horizons and the existence of interactive rhythms and syntax” of the research moment (p. 149). The process of coding

and analysis is not unlike “simultaneously creating and solving a puzzle” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 144) “while linking specific events and observations to more general analytic categories and issues” (p. 184). I believe that data mining of this nature is an inherently human process, and therefore cannot be accomplished by an automated program.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for free expression of professional insights and perspectives. As the facilitator of these “discussions,” I sought to allow the data to flow without restraint until the synergistic perspectives of the participants formed themselves into independent transferable ideas and approaches to improve the teaching and learning activities in low SES school settings.

A Word about the Ethnographic Foundations of Qualitative Research

Authentically following the guidelines of modified grounded theory provided a “picture of the whole” that would otherwise not have been visible (Charmaz, 2005, p. 530). However, to accomplish this multi-framed approach, I also bore in mind the elements of ethnographic portraiture used in Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1997) five coding modes: repetitive refrains, resonant metaphors, institutional and cultural rituals, triangulation, and divergent patterns. Consideration of these modes as guideposts further increased the likelihood that the data would yield rich findings.

I believe that all qualitative research derives from the rich foundation of anthropological ethnography; therefore consideration of ethnographic research and analysis techniques, even if limited, served as yet another form of the bricolage noted earlier.

Often, case study research is conducted and presented with such purposeful neutrality that the human element of the research circumstance is dismissed. My goal in this exploration was to tell the story of my experience with the district administrators, principals, and teachers in such a way as to provide not only cold hard findings (through the perspectives of the administrators, principals and teachers), but also to convey a warm and real human sense of the personal environment from which those findings emerged. This focus on the human and physical environment ran the risk of being dismissed as just one of many “passionate ethnographies” (Foley, 1990, p. xviii). I was nonetheless willing to take that risk because I believe that an examination of a life circumstance is more likely than not to be enhanced by a sensitivity to human passions rather than a refusal to accept their impact. Behar-Horenstein (1995) noted that if one “writes vulnerably, others respond vulnerably” (p. 16). It is my hope that readers of this study will accept the “soft subjective data” (Plumber, 2001, p. 120) as supportive evidence for the more traditionally-considered “hard” data. Personal professional stories can be “wonderful at overcoming the theoretical fog which obfuscates so many studies: its rich detail exemplifies the theory” and thereby it makes theory more accessible (p. 131).

Chapter 4

Findings and Reflections

The research protocols, interviews and observations, and archival documents gathered throughout this study provided rich material for analysis, and hence, that analysis yielded significant findings. I have grouped the findings into two categories: deductive and inductive. The deductive findings are specific answers to the questions asked at the beginning of the exploration, and flowed from the bound premises of the investigation. These deductive findings satisfy the purpose of the study and contribute to the knowledge base on the subject matter of the inquiry. The inductive findings are those that were utterly unexpected and emerged organically from the data, and therefore they were not bound by the original premises of the investigation. I believe the inductive findings of this study nonetheless provide valuable and enduring information because they reflect what the participants felt compelled to express even though that expression was beyond the scope of the inquiry. I have also included three especially interesting insights provided by individual participants because I believe they are relevant and support the methodologically-derived findings of the study. While these insights did not emerge through standardized qualitative research analytical methods, they nonetheless came directly from the hearts and minds of individuals who are dedicated to their profession and wish to improve it, and as such, they are worthy of consideration.

The Participants

First, a word about the participants in this study. Though I did not purposely set out to interview only “successful” school leaders and teachers, partly because making that determination seemed somewhat arbitrary or based on questionable metrics, all

participants in this study were in fact considered to be successful professionals by reputation with their peers and/or superiors. I believe this information adds value to the findings because, in addition to being representative of the region of the study, and of low SES educational environments in general, the stated consensus of perspectives also can be, at least anecdotally, considered best practices.

The Research Sites

The locations where the interviews took place varied. All interviews with the principals and teachers took place in the site schools. The associate superintendent interviews occurred in their district offices. The principals were interviewed in their school offices. The interviews with the teachers occurred in conference or class rooms.

My frequent and extended visits to the site schools provided me with a good sense of the educational environment in which the participants practice. After each interview, I spent additional time walking through and observing the school activities. I noted the cleanliness and orderliness of all of the site schools. The students were dressed neatly, and they were very polite when I inquired as to the exact location of the main office or exits (some of the schools were quite large). The overall atmosphere of each school was very pleasant. Though a pleasant atmosphere, cleanliness, orderliness, and polite students do not necessarily indicate academic success at a school, they do suggest an environment that would be conducive toward facilitating it.

During almost every interview, the participants were interrupted, usually by students or staff with student-oriented issues. The participants handled each interruption with great grace and care. Not one participant became angry or impatient with the interruptions. In fact, it was the educational researcher (me) who was intellectually

dismissed during the moments the participants refocused their attention on the student issue at hand. It was clear to me that “putting students first” was more than a public- and school board-friendly slogan to these education professionals.

Deductive Findings

In this section I discuss separately the deductive findings as they relate to instructional philosophies, openness to pedagogical partnerships, and factors that help or hinder the adoption of such practices.

Pedagogical philosophies. The first deductive finding answers the first research question: What instructional leadership characteristics, instructional philosophies, and pedagogical strategies are advanced and maintained by the associate superintendent, principal, and teacher participants in working with their low SES student populations, and how open are these same participants to alternative pedagogical practices that emphasize critical consciousness and critical thinking skills?

In pursuit of a partial answer to this question, I asked each of the participants – three associate superintendents, six principals, and twelve teachers – to state as specifically as possible their personal pedagogical philosophy. While the associate superintendents responded quickly and confidently with, “student-centered,” “multi-cultural,” and “everyone is a learner,” the principals’ responses were much slower and measured at first. Though they took more time to articulate their responses, all of the principals ultimately stated firm pedagogical positions. Their philosophies were equally varied and could be summarized as: multi-sensory, tailored to the students, hands-on/brains-on, one size does not fit all, build a good team, and create teacher leaders. The principals’ hesitancy to express their pedagogical philosophy, especially as juxtaposed to

the associate superintendent responses, might suggest that instructional leadership is not the first concern of a high school principal, while classroom instruction and its results *are* a primary concern of district leaders.

When asked to state her overarching pedagogical philosophy, one principal, Catherine, responded, “It’s evolving.” Another, Clarisa, asked, “Well, what do you mean by that, I’m sorry, could you explain.” Andrew, a principal, stated flatly, “Hmmm, I’ve never really thought about that.” After some time to reflect, Andrew elaborated with,

I would say, probably at the heart of it, that we need to do whatever is necessary in order to help students be successful, and I think that it’s different for each kid. I mean, I would love to say we can hit even 90 percent of kids just by doing everything one way, but that’s not even close.

The teachers conveyed their pedagogical philosophies indirectly, but more comprehensively. None of the teachers described their pedagogical philosophy in succinct terms, but most did emphasize a “students first” foundation for the teaching and learning activities they present to their classes. Dean, a teacher, noted, “One thing that doesn’t change is the kids; it’s all about them.” Several teachers detailed elaborate teaching and learning methods, and noted the need to adapt them at a moment’s notice.

Yolanda, a teacher, summed up the view of many teachers by saying:

Everything that happens here is centered around kids; it’s all about the kids, you know, what we need to do to make every kid feel some level of belonging here; to give them some hope of continuing on and continuing with school, and not giving up on kids.

While almost all of the pedagogical philosophies espoused, especially by the associate superintendents and the principals, leaned more toward the progressive than the traditional, the descriptions of what was actually occurring in the schools, especially the descriptions related by the teachers, leaned much more toward only a slightly liberated traditional pedagogy.

For a specific response to the second half of the first research question, I first briefly defined critical consciousness and critical thinking development in students, and then asked the participants if they were open to the notion of incorporating such development in their daily teaching. All participants stated the belief that, within the contexts of their philosophies and their current teaching environment, it would be possible to develop a critical consciousness and critical thinking skills in their students, and they were willing to do so. In fact, though most of the participants could not fully articulate critical consciousness or critical thinking, once defined, the majority believed that both should be required as a sine qua non of a good education for public school students.

Considering the purposeful selection of recommended and self-identified progressive participants at all levels, this finding did not come as an overwhelming surprise. However, all participants noted that the reason they support, and would advocate for, critical consciousness and critical thinking skill development in their students was that they believe it is vital to disrupt the current complacency in students, teachers, and principals alike. While the participants were optimistic about the future of public education (this optimism will be expanded upon in the inductive findings), all noted a lingering pernicious apathy among many students and teachers and a significant

disconnect between the students and their schooling. Manuel, a principal, noted that “kids have to know that they belong here, that they count, that they matter, before they’re gonna perform... kids need to buy in.” At the moment, Manuel does not believe that the students feel fully connected to their schooling. Marianne, also a principal, noted, “we all got our degrees; we figured a way out, now we just need to teach these kids how to figure a way out... it is possible to teach students how to educate themselves.” In other words, Marianne believes that students can be made aware of their circumstance and taught how to improve it. Juan, an associate superintendent suggested that developing critical consciousness, and his own awareness of the power of education, allowed him, as a Latino, to “become part of those who are in control... part of the decision-making class.” Marianne also noted that it is important to “force students to step out of their own culture... and look at other factors that go into decision making.” Catherine, also a principal, noted, “I would hate to live in a world where I’m just in my bubble, and I want students to know that it’s not all just within this bubble.” Vernon, a teacher, suggested that the only real way to develop critical thinking and consciousness is “not to just tell students they are different, but show them they are different.” As Paul, a teacher noted, “They don’t get it; they are trapped in their own world. So, how do we get them out of that? We *show* them different worlds; we *show* them different choices.” Paul suggested that students learn by seeing, even if what they see is discordant with what they are used to seeing. Paul went on to say that this “show me” activity must be handled diligently because “kids judge value very quickly.” Dean, a teacher summed up this line of thinking by saying, “the kids are tired of hearing the truth, that is, the value of education, we have

to show ‘em.” David, a teacher also noted, “It is important to always segue to relevance” in order to contextualize the lessons.

Linda, an associate superintendent advocated the notion of taking critical consciousness and critical thinking development “to scale,” and making them part of the infrastructure of her district. She noted that making such teaching comprehensive would assure “we would know that they are walking away with the skills and the habits of mind that would allow them to critique and think about things and how those things impact *them*... we just have to make it happen.” Sonia, another associate superintendent, was clear with regard to her belief that students, “can’t take action unless they are able to acknowledge it...you have to be able to voice it, and then say, this is what I’m going to do about it.” She went on to say that the personal and educational environmental circumstances of these students should not hold them back. She noted the importance of making the students aware of opportunities so that they can “reformulate them in their own context.” She also said that, “the scripts have been written for these kids, and they need to know the scripts so they can break them.” Yolanda, a teacher, suggested that low SES students need a “culture of student-centeredness... and you see that in all the highly effective teachers.” Baker, another teacher, added, “if it’s not part of something bigger, then whatever great work is being done in that classroom, in that little bubble, it may just disappear when they go to the next class.”

All participants noted the importance of encouraging self-motivation in their students, and the notion of giving up some “power” in order to empower. This notion of empowerment through guided independent learning is a foundational tenet of critical pedagogy and critical consciousness development. The majority of participants admitted

the strong likelihood that there would be push-back from the students, but that resistance is in fact a welcome part of the process because it indicates student engagement. The greater concern, especially on the part of the principals and teachers, was not to block student enthusiasm and participation. Andrew, a principal, suggested that honoring the skills that students have goes a long way toward helping them get past road blocks while at the same time increasing enthusiasm.

Another challenge in the pursuit of critical consciousness development related by the participants was the ironic problem of trying to be “nice” to the students in the process. Several participants noted that many low SES students have a paradoxical fear of nice. Andrew, a principal, noted sadly, “our kids don’t know how to react when someone is nice to them.” Commenting on his effort to affirm the contributions of his students, Vernon, a teacher, noted, “These kids, they get a lot of: no, no, no, they’re not used to yes.” Andrew also lamented, “Has it been that long since somebody complimented them?” Peter, a principal, said that he has grown close to many of his students, but that they were very “standoffish” when he first expressed a personal interest in them. This resistance to friendliness can be difficult for administrators and teachers to understand, yet they must be prepared for it and persevere beyond it in order to build the trust necessary for the students to accept their guidance. The notions of self-reflection and the critical consciousness do not come naturally to many young people. Adult guidance is a vital component development.

In addition to getting past initial student resistance, all participants noted the problem of assuring that their students were “ready to learn” the required class content *before* they could be made aware of the learning circumstance and possible inequities in

it. Several participants related stories of students who come to school hungry, or with tooth aches from unattended dental issues, or without transportation to get home. As Armando, a teacher, noted, “Students may have a lot of variables that they can’t control outside of school, but we need to let them know that their education is something they can control.” The bottom line for Clarissa, a principal, was, “Are students happy? Because a happy student will be a productive learner.” To be sure she is personally aware of her students’ “state of happiness,” she also has a policy of “no child left unknown.” She assured me that every student is known by her and/or at least one member of her senior staff. The majority of participants believe that critical consciousness and critical thinking development could go hand in hand especially when lessons are delivered with the *location* of that delivery in mind and with the inclusion of that context in those lessons. Clarissa also noted, “Teachers are realizing that they need to address student consciousness in order to be successful in a school like ours.” However, Yolanda, a teacher, related the concerns of a colleague who complained, “What? We have to spend more time on critical thinking? But, they don’t know how to add!” This concern reminds us that there are many teachers and principals who still need to be convinced that alternate pedagogies are ultimately worth the extra effort now because they will remedy the learning deficiency sooner rather than later.

Addressing the extra effort required to use alternate pedagogy to develop critical consciousness and critical thinking, several participants mentioned the need to be constant, consistent, and transparent. Numerous participants noted that though they are dealing with almost-adult high school students, they still require constant and consistent stimulation and support. All participants recognized the maturity of their students while

at the same time acknowledging that their attention spans remain commensurate with their youthful ages. The participants also noted that high school students are very quick to judge what is presented to them, so it is vital to be transparent and up front with any new initiative or program and its specific value. Noting his students' keen sense of what has value (to them), Baker, a teacher, related, "We have to get them to accurately gauge their environment. If they don't hear that language from the teacher... but by just exposing their place in society, they're not gonna want critical thinking skills or feel any urgency to develop them." Baker, and several other participants, suggested that most of their students just don't see the need for higher order thinking in their current circumstance, and they can't imagine the need in the future. David, a teacher, was pleased to say that he gives his students:

many opportunities to believe that they will want something more than they want it now... they may not be aware of the different avenues to use their passion and move beyond their current environment... we can give them a chance to taste what is possible.

Paul, a teacher, summed up his advocacy of critical consciousness development by saying, "It's the process that is important, not the prize... at the end of the day, it's the process that allows the students to defend the prize in future settings."

With regard to contextual relevance and pedagogy, all but one participant stated specifically that the students' home life and surrounding community should be considered when deciding on the pedagogy to be used with that student. The one dissenting individual, a principal, held firm to that she must educate all students without considering their home life. While this position is seemingly noble, the other participants

made strong cases for why the socio-cultural home life and community circumstances must be considered when trying to teach and engage with them. Dean, a teacher, noted, “We want the students to be receptive of what we teach, but at the same time they want a mutual receptiveness of who they are.” Andrew, a principal, noted that his students “don’t get where they fit in the world; they see only their neighborhood...if we are to help them fit in the world, we need to know where they come from and teach them with sensitivity to that place.” Manuel, another principal, declared bluntly:

We have to take into account the limitations, the experiential limitations, of our students. Sometimes they can’t stay after school for tutoring because they can’t afford to take the city bus to get home. So, we have to realize how these kids come to the table if we want to be successful in teaching them.

Manuel went on to say that most of his students have caring and dedicated parents, but that they too have experiential limitations. As Manuel related (speaking about the parents of his students), “my parents can only say, ‘you have to work harder,’ not, ‘I’m getting you tutored today, and you’re going to Saturday school tomorrow!” Manuel noted that these kids just need more learning opportunities because, “you can’t work harder at something you don’t know yet.” Linda, an associate superintendent, stated a firm position on the impact of a child’s home life, “my view is that if a child is here, if she is dressed, she has what she needs, and if she doesn’t have something, it’s our job to give it to her. We have responsibility from eight to three; that’s our job.” She went on to say, “but at the same time, we have to keep parents connected to the school.”

In the same way principals suggested they would make use of senior or master teachers to develop critical consciousness and critical thinking skills (as will be discussed

later), several teachers suggesting using “master students” for the same task. These teachers believe that rather than pull “gifted and talented” students out of the classroom, engaging them in a student pedagogical leader capacity would serve a greater purpose by teaching those higher performing students valuable lessons in both content retention and social awareness. Most participants noted that students tend to listen to other students, especially when the topic is directly related to their social circumstances. Frequently, the teacher or other school staff members live outside the immediate community in which the majority of the students reside. This can elicit resentment in the students. Armando, a teacher, related the response of one of his students to the notion of improving that student’s life circumstances, “this is my culture, so why are you tellin’ me that where I’m livin’ is bad?” Manuel, a principal, explained that it does not empower students simply to tell them they are poor. He noted, “Just letting them know that they are poor?? Oh, now I feel better. I’m poor *and* I have no power, thank you for clearing that up!” Manuel suggested telling *and* giving... “a tutor, a band instrument... it’s gonna cost more money, but that is the cost of making the playing field more equal.” He went on to say that recruiting students to help other students is “pretty cost neutral.”

Paul, a teacher, expressed his belief in the general importance of critical consciousness development when he said, “I think students need to be conscious of the importance of their education. I’m reminded of the analogy: nobody builds a house just to burn it down. Students need to know what they are building.” However, Paul also contended he spoke for many of his colleagues when he said, “just literally, can they do it, can they be made to understand the value of education.” When he tries to convey the power of education to his students, Paul related that they say, “Yeah, yeah, we know that

education is important.” Paul suggested that timing that “jumping off point where we say this is *why* education is important” is one of the difficulties he has when trying to connect what he is teaching to what is important in the students’ lives.

Finally, all of the associate superintendents noted the “tremendously cumbersome” processes that are currently in place to assist their “at risk” student populations, but at the same time they also noted that those processes are simply what are necessary for these students to overcome their life circumstances and become successful members of the community. In other words, extra effort and extra processes are necessary for low SES and other marginalized populations, and regardless of how bothersome, the policies and processes are in place, so for now they must accept them. One associate superintendent, Linda, noted, “The systems in schools are highly operationalized, and some people don’t want to share their knowledge of the system.” Linda suggested that this makes already complicated program and processes all the more difficult to navigate. Another associate superintendent, Sonia, added:

Everybody is coming together to account for this or that. We’re pursuing grant monies; we want to create more data systems to monitor things that are traditionally not captured. And all that is beyond what is already in place... I have a hard time keeping track of these things; imagine how difficult it is for students and their parents.

The associate superintendents expressed a hopefulness that if their students were more critically conscious, perhaps they could more efficiently navigate the cumbersome processes that are meant to help, but sometimes hinder, them.

Pedagogical partnerships. The second deductive finding answers the research question: Are principals *and* teachers willing to partner pedagogically to advance alternate pedagogies and critical consciousness and critical thinking skills? And, are associate superintendents willing to support such partnerships? All of the principal participants expressed enthusiastic willingness to partner pedagogically with teachers. And, the teachers expressed a similar willingness, but qualified that willingness with the need for evidence of the proven success of any initiative put forward by their principals. The associate superintendents were also enthusiastic about the notion of such partnerships, and they contended that they were in the process of initiating programs to facilitate them.

All of the principals concurred that successful pedagogical partnerships could be accomplished through a teamwork plan that includes all teachers, staff, and students in the process, but with a sensitivity and trust in the teachers' abilities in the classroom. All of the principals also noted that this trust could be earned more readily after they had provided the teachers with clear instruction regarding outcome expectations of such partnerships. After those expectations are made clear, all of the principals indicated that they prefer to allow the teachers to "make it happen" in the classroom, but that they could envision monitoring progress more tightly and being involved with the teachers more collaboratively once the teachers were able to accept such collaboration. Several principals and teachers noted that a sudden increase in principal presence in the classroom would certainly be viewed with fear from the teachers' perspective.

Manuel, a principal explained how he would be careful to "get on and off the dance floor" so that he could confidently monitor and exchange with his teachers, but not

interfere with them. Manuel, also noted, “Teachers will follow engaged leadership, and they will eventually believe.” Peter, a principal, emphasized the moment when “it becomes *our* work, not just *my* directives” as the moment he would consider he had achieved a true partnership with his teachers. However, Peter did qualify his statement somewhat by admitting that to some extent the teachers “gotta play the game... unless they want to run their own school.” Addressing the challenge of creating pedagogical partnerships, Marianne, a principal, explained that in her opinion, “we’ve almost done the same thing to our teachers that we have do to the students... come sit here and do this on Tuesday, do that on Wednesday, so it’s so scary for teachers when we say, ‘let’s try something new, *and* you’re still going to be tested.” Dean, a teacher admitted frankly, “I think I am obligated to partner with the principal to be honest with ya.”

Obligated or happily willing, all teacher participants agreed that they could imagine partnering pedagogically with their principals, especially if such partnering included a regularly scheduled exchange of ideas, and if they were able to maintain discretion of the ultimately-delivered of the pedagogy in the classroom.

Several principals noted the need and desire to delegate managerial and discipline duties to allow more time for instructional leadership and potential pedagogical partnering. All three associate superintendents noted that most of their principals have sufficient subordinate staff to whom they may delegate non-instructional school management obligations, so the time factor noted by some of the principals is not insurmountable. Nonetheless, recognizing the finite amount of time available in a work day, all principals also expressed the desire to delegate some of their potential pedagogical partnering duties to senior or master teachers, sometimes referred to as

“teacher-leaders”, in order to maximize their instructional presence. The principals also articulated a strong desire for collaborative conversations about pedagogy and classroom issues. However, Vernon, a teacher, expressed his concern that in many schools teachers do not view the principal as a teacher or academician. This could pose a problem for partnering pedagogically. He noted the principals are often so far removed from the classroom that even associating them with pedagogy would be a stretch. All of the associate superintendents lamented this conventional view and noted that they are currently working to change it. They want their principals *in* the classroom. The progressive nature of the principals and teachers in this study no doubt factored into their openness to the notion of partnering pedagogically; however, their openness also indicates viability.

All participants also noted the need to praise good teachers for their accomplishments and support average teachers when they are moving in a positive direction instructionally. Catherine, a principal, noted that this praise and support would have to be part of any pedagogical partnering. Andrew, a principal, beamed when telling stories of the “moments of greatness” he observed during classroom walkthroughs. Juan, an associate superintendent stated, “I could just stop by to chit chat, but of course I always find something to compliment.” Catherine also noted, “teachers really appreciate being told that what they are doing is noticed...um, in a good way.”

Transparency, noted earlier as necessary for student buy-in, is also a good mechanism of making best practices public and gaining *teacher* buy-in with new initiatives such as critical consciousness and critical thinking development in students. However, several principals and teachers noted that many good teachers are not openly

willing to share their teaching techniques. Even when the principal is engaged and she or he attempts to create a team player atmosphere, Yolanda, a teacher, lamented, “too many teachers are going to go into their rooms, shut their doors, and do what they want to do.” This could present a challenge to successful pedagogical partnerships, and it is a complicated factor with which the principal must grapple. Gaining the teacher buy-in through initiatives like professional learning communities (discussed later) is crucial for functional partnerships that are successful even behind closed doors. Andrew, a principal noted, “We’re always in search of the commonalities in best practices and improvements,” but as Paul, a teacher, noted, principal/teacher partnerships need to happen with “all teachers, not just the best teachers.” Linda, an associate superintendent, spoke of how difficult it can be to get teachers to share their ideas with strangers at regional workshops and conferences, and she noted the same lack of communication and exchange even within individual schools. Linda explained that the importance of recognizing instructional leadership as a continuum:

At conferences and workshops, my principals attend the same sessions as the teachers, so they learn together. Then, when they get back to campus, the principal’s role is to make sure that every teacher on the continuum is able to effectively engage in their work in a supported way. They support each other.

To combat the inclination of independence in many teachers, or to reign in the “independent contractors in the math department,” as Andrew, a principal phrased it, several participants suggested using senior or master teachers to encourage isolated teachers to share their techniques and perhaps to adopt the successful techniques of others. Linda, an associate superintendent noted, “when teachers recognize the value, and

the ‘why,’ they’re much more apt to engage in it.” She went on to say, “we must encourage teachers to celebrate the success of others, but then to also learn from them.”

Marianne, a principal, concurred with Linda. She contended that her teachers are very receptive to her pedagogical guidance, especially when they have “theoretical conversations that engage the teachers in the process.” Marianne noted that teachers want “evidence that this is going to work, but they also want guidance, and they want validation of their discomfort in trying something new.” Marianne went on to say that these theoretical conversations are, “more like an exploration rather than a mandate... like a partnership... especially for many new teachers who are still exploring the profession.” Juan, an associate superintendent, calls this sort of dialog “collaborative conversations” that he says allow teachers to “compare best practices among themselves and the instructional leaders.” Juan noted that there is often a certain amount of “commiserating together” as well, but often that commiserating “gets to issues like the dropout rates and what we can do about them,” so there is great value in it.

The associate superintendents all weighed in on the notion of principal/teacher pedagogical partnerships by suggesting that they could think of no reliable means of knowing that quality instruction was being delivered short of the principal participating physically in that delivery. However, they all readily admit that this desirable physical participation is not currently occurring in many of their schools. All three of the associate superintendents in this study were willing to adjust the district office operational and managerial expectations of their principals in order to allow more time for them to engage with the teachers and other instructional leadership activities. Sonia, an associate superintendent stated flatly, “you can’t push an agenda of quality if you don’t know

what's happening in the classroom.” Juan, another associate superintendent stated that he encourages his principals to be “pedagogically savvy,” and noted that those who are not in tune with their classrooms are the ones who are not successful. The associate superintendents also lamented the fact that their principals are sometimes forced to “reign in good teaching” (the type that tends to benefit especially low SES population students) because it takes too much time away from the content delivery requirements for standardized testing. The associate superintendents expressed great distress at this notion while at the same time also recognizing that they too have tacitly accepted the omnipotence of testing, and therefore they have also been part of the problem rather than instigating a solution. However, as a result of this recent recognition, they are now determined to emphasize equity in every action they advocate. Linda detailed her method of “nesting” equity into any new initiative and into revisions of old initiatives. She stated, “My role is to figure out how to operationalize this nesting.” She intimated that it is sometimes necessary to “sneak a little theory into practice.” She went on to say, “...and that is difficult, but it is also my job to make safe space for the principal to try new things.” Sonia, another associate superintendent noted, “In my previous district, I fought the teachers’ union; in this district, I fight against infighting on the school board. This is my way of defending the kids.” Juan, the other superintendent, stated simply, “I honor the kids; all of the kids.”

Helping/hindering factors. Finally, the third deductive finding answers the question: What factors (e.g., state education policies, resources) might help or hinder the adoption of such pedagogical practices and partnerships. Other than the commonly held assumption, among all of the participants, that over-emphasis on accountability and

standardized test scores would negatively impact alternative pedagogy and critical learning activities (just as they believe it negatively impacts all pedagogical activities), none of the principal or teacher participants could name any other local or state education policy that would likely hinder their attempt to provide such alternatives and learning activities. Clarissa, a principal noted, “we are pretty independent.” Sonia, an associate superintendent stated, “just knowing the state policies in the first place is a good start toward not being hindered by them.” However, Dean, a teacher, did lament the notion that too many educational policy makers do not have the patience to wait out what he called, “the pendulum effect.” Dean related several stories of policy changes that he believed had been implemented too early, or in other words, before the figurative pendulum of the previous policy had a chance to equilibrate. He warned, “There is not enough time to implement what works *and* what doesn’t work at the same time.” However, Dean also noted that he has learned to expect and accept the seemingly knee-jerk adjustments to in state and district policies.

In an attempt to address accountability requirements and still develop critical consciousness and critical thinking ability in his students, Juan, an associate superintendent suggested, “just get the ‘banner,’ *then* add the critical education activities.” By “banner,” Juan was suggesting that principals should just accept that they must satisfy accountability requirements, i.e., get the scores. Juan believes that accountability this is simply the way of the future, or has he phrased it, “the next generation of learning.” According to Juan, educators have no real choice but to accept some level of accountability and standardized testing, *but then* they can continue with what they know to be good educational practices. Like Dean’s acceptance of flip-

flopping policy decisions noted above, Juan when on to say, “Because the accountability system is now old enough, we are beginning to see through the implementation of it.” Somewhat ironically, the administrators and teachers in this study seem to have become so adept at dealing/coping with state and district policy actions that they no longer consider them to be a hindrance. It was distressing to hear that not only does state and district education policy not help administrators and teachers, but only after years of coping with it does it become a non-hindrance.

Another sad and disturbing hindrance also noted by several participants was the existence of too many teachers who don’t like children. With regard to these teachers, Sonia, an associate superintendent stated, “It’s my job to get rid of them.” All associate superintendent and principal participants agreed that a small minority of their teachers should be “coached,” “administratively helped,” or “irritated” out of the profession. Andrew, a principal related his distaste for being “large and in charge,” but he warned, “I’ll be large and in charge if I have to be, and you’re not gonna do that to kids, it’s not OK.”

Several participants also suggested that they have noted a subtle racism among fellow principals and teachers. Andrew, a principal, described a teacher who would give the majority of his minority students a grade of D so as to slip past the negative perception of failing too many minority kids. Sonia stated her firm belief that it is “a veiled racism” that feeds the “low expectations of students of color and students of low socioeconomic status.” She went on to talk about the “bias of the haves against the have-nots,” and summed up the situation as she sees it with, “There is no room at the top. I’m already at the top; I get validated when I help one of you, that makes me feel good, and

so I need for some of you to be down so I can continue to feel good by helping you.”

Other participants commented briefly on this issue, but noted that the majority of teachers have come to accept students of all ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

However, they admitted that they have only noticed this acceptance in recent years.

With regard to critical pedagogy, and its ancillary activities of critical consciousness and critical thinking development, as an established teaching and learning theory, no principal or teacher was familiar with the term “critical pedagogy.” However, when asked about the use of specific teaching and learning concepts and techniques of critical pedagogy, all participants indicated that they either used or would be in favor of implementing them. It was somewhat surprising that low SES population high school principals and teachers would not at least be peripherally familiar with an established alternative pedagogy that was developed for low SES populations. The associate superintendents, on the other hand, were all aware of critical pedagogy and able to provide a detailed explanation of its history and current applications. They also emphasized more cutting-edge progressive viewpoints in general, while the principals expressed a poised-to-be-progressive view, and most of the teachers were still focused on the day-to-day classroom concerns. This could be explained by the advance credential possessed by the associate superintendents and the emphasis such credentialing programs place on comprehensive coverage of traditional as well as alternative pedagogical options.

With regard to critical thinking skill development, even as a stand-alone activity, all participants noted the importance of such skill development while at the same time admitting that they could do a much better job at integrating it into the curriculum and

pedagogy. Juan, an associate superintendent noted that learning is not “just about a box of facts, it’s about process and thinking, and that doesn’t necessarily have parameters.” Juan was adamant that traditional lecture style pedagogy presents students with parameters that block thinking. Andrew, a principal, admitted, “I know it is important, but does it happen on a daily basis? No.” He went on to say that his teachers struggle with critical thinking development because “there is a lot of push-back from students... [the students] are not willing to take any kind of risk” of embarrassment in front of their fellow students. When asked about critical thinking development, Linda, an associate superintendent, spoke for several other participants when she stated, “you might find individuals who do that well, but I don’t think we do that well systemically.” Vernon, a teacher, noted, “Well, it should be every teacher’s job to do that, to make critical thinkers, but many kids are afraid to think, and some teachers are afraid to force them” because too often force results in the students shutting down. Andrew also noted that he sees distinct movement toward a more higher order thinking based curriculum, but noted “what we have to do right now is make sure students pass the assessment tests, and there is not a lot of higher order anything on that test.”

Interestingly, all participants *constantly reiterated* the need for *constant reiteration* of the content and teaching techniques that might develop critical consciousness and critical thinking. Most participants also noted a need for consistency in the delivery of such development. Comments like, “constant, constant messaging put in a real context,” or “that is something we’d have to talk to them consistently about... it has to be in our daily conversation,” or “they need to get a consistent message; we’d all need to speak the same team language,” or “too often it’s bigger, better, rather than just being

consistent,” or “we’d have to constantly work on that; we’d rethink too, but we’d constantly work on that,” or “we have to constantly orient students to what we are doing.” Clearly, the participants believe that developing critical consciousness and critical thinking skills in their students is possible, but only by incorporating it as an integral part of everything they do in the classroom. And of course, this is the only way any pedagogical plan can be implemented.

Inductive Findings

In this section I discuss separately the inductive findings as they relate to an equity-focused critical mass, teachers taking the initiative, the need to entertain students.

Equity-focused critical mass. The first, and perhaps most notable, inductive finding was the expressed belief by every participant that though improving the educational circumstances of low SES high school students might seem to be a daunting and sometimes hopeless endeavor, there is clearly a *critical mass* of students, teachers, principals, and senior district officials in districts across the country that cannot be stopped at this point. The participants noted that in years past, there have been significant reform efforts on the part of a few individuals in relatively isolated environments, but those reform efforts led only to isolated and limited successes. Those limited successes, however, planted the seeds and laid the ground work for an exponential increase in such efforts, and it is these initiatives to which the participants in this study point as an unstoppable critical mass that will finally accomplish sustained equitable outcomes for all students. Peter, a high school principal noted, “For ten years I was the only African American principal of a comprehensive high school in this district.” He went on to describe how that has changed, and how there is now also a “critical mass of kids who get

it,” but what is still needed is a larger and “better mass of professionals... who can make that the norm.” Sonia, an associate superintendent, spoke of her part in the creation of a school several years ago that had “a critical mass of successful teachers” who advocated for social justice. A disproportionate number of those teachers ended up in administrative leadership roles and became part of the cohort that laid the groundwork for the future of the region. Melinda, a teacher, described how she now sees the environment in the low SES school where she teaches as a classic example of a “paradigm shift.” “Things have changed,” she said. Andrew, a principal, noted that he has seen a shift away from “getting the paper work in on time,” to “a lot more focus on what goes on in the classroom.” Andrew went on to say, “in fact, our new superintendent expects principals to be out in the classrooms 60-70% of their day.” Catherine, a principal, described the change she sees as “a bit of a shift in vision.” Catherine also noted that her teachers who used to say, “I teach my kids the way I was taught,” now say, “OK, she has shown me the research that says this works, so I’ll try it.” Catherine lamented that this phenomenon has occurred only recently, but that nonetheless, she clearly sees that its time has come. Amusingly, she labeled these recent convert teachers as her “reluctant receptives.”

This change in the public school environment, and the warming of teachers to more collegial exchange, at least in the schools and districts represented in this study, bodes well for alternative pedagogies and critical consciousness and critical thinking development. Though we cannot be sure how education policy makers will react to the notion of these alternatives, the local reaction not only provides hope for those who seek to more equitable outcomes for all students, but it also suggests alternative pedagogies would likely be welcomed and used to their fullest possible extent at the local level.

Taking the initiative. The second inductive finding revealed elective teachers taking the initiative, or being encouraged to take the initiative, to take up the charge of developing critical thinking and critical consciousness in students. Perhaps more significantly, they have been the primary implementers of alternative pedagogy (in the rare instances when it was implemented). All participants admitted that the core subject (tested subject) teachers, like those who taught reading and math, do not have the time to focus, in a concentrated and productive way, on critical thinking and critical consciousness development. Dean, a teacher, noted, “I have the responsibility to infiltrate what I do into the core and other classes because it all applies, and I have the time to do it.” Dean noted that the core teachers “don’t have the luxury of being able to sit down and say ‘let’s talk; how can we take what we are doing and apply it directly to your life so we can positively impact your future.’” He went on to say, “I try to include as many of the core academics as possible in what I’m doing because kids don’t change from one class to the other; they can see the correlations.” As Clarissa, a principal, noted, “Even in PE, you can teach bowling to help with teaching probability. You can try to be creative, and we’re seeing more and more of that.” Keisha, a teacher, noted that expecting and allowing elective teachers to take charge of critical consciousness and critical thinking development places those teachers in an “empowered leadership role” that creates positive morale among the sometimes ignored elective subject teachers. As Keisha noted, “at testing crunch time, most elective teachers have a sense of responsibility, but some don’t.” So, it is up to the senior or master teachers and the principals to encourage that sense of responsibility. Clarissa, a principal noted, “My highly effective teachers work with the lower performing teachers together as a team; I see to that.” As Keisha also

noted, “A lot of the ideas come from the teachers themselves; we’re all working together, not against each other.”

Another teacher, Vernon, noted that critical thinking development takes time, and many teachers “believe that there are just not enough hours in the day,” but he went on to say, “If you really want to make it happen, you can.” Vernon’s opinion was echoed by most of the participants at all levels. All of the participants in this study were willing to “make it happen,” but they all note that their greatest challenge has been how to inspire that desire in all others. Nonetheless, the majority of the participants in this study believe that most elective teachers would step up to the plate with regard to critical consciousness and critical thinking development and the implementation of alternative pedagogy. Several participants suggested pedagogical techniques that could insinuate critical thinking and consciousness into core content lessons, such as differential economic reports in math classes and diverse literature in reading classes, but even those participants admit that pressure to achieve on standardized tests leaves little time for the sort of engagement needed to master critical thinking and consciousness in the core classes.

Speaking to the notion of critical thinking in his classrooms, Manuel, a principal, noted hesitantly, “*yyeeesss*, we emphasize it, but for us it’s a building piece. Everybody talks about critical thinking, but nobody really does anything about it.” Manuel went on to say that critical thinking “should be in everything that we do, but that’s not easy, it’s bucking tradition, and kids will buck *you*.” He noted that some of his teachers are also uncomfortable with critical thinking, so he believes any initiative to develop it should start with the teachers. Manuel says that some teachers “have an idea [of what critical

thinking is], but they can't articulate it... so, we are retraining teachers to come to class everyday with critical thinking questions they can ask.”

Clearly, the participants in this study are interested and aware of the need to develop critical thinking and critical consciousness in their students; however, they admit that there has been a certain inertia in making that happen, even among the willing.

Need to entertain the students. Finally, complicating the pursuit of adding critical consciousness and critical thinking to an already content-heavy curriculum and pedagogy, several participants noted that students also need “flashes of entertainment.” While all students are different, considering the current entertainment media-focused social lives of high school students, providing some form of entertainment helps keep them engaged with the more purposeful learning. According to the participants, the degree to which students need to be entertained varies greatly between students; however, all students respond better to class assignment and activities if there is an element of entertainment in them. As Dean, a teacher, noted amusingly, “with some kids, you open a stick of gum and there’s your party right there.” For others, as Manuel, a principal, noted, if the teacher does not provide some form of entertainment, they will lose the students before they start teaching. Brandon, a teacher, noted “My students don’t just sit still and listen. They need to be more engaged; they need to talk more.” Paul, a teacher, suggested, “You have to try a little bit of everything... you have to shake it up.” Several participants noted that, similar to general course content delivery, critical consciousness and critical thinking development would have to be presented in a manner that keeps the students engaged and, at least to some extent, entertained.

Notable Insights

In the process of conducting any research study, individual participants often share innovative insights that stand out as note worthy, though they do not necessarily address the purposes of the study. These insights are not necessarily representative of all participants or the region of the study as a whole; however, they do provide an “on-the-ground” perspective that is, in my view, worth taking into consideration. Below I provide three such insights. Again, these thoughts emanated from individual participants in this study, and therefore they were not corroborated by others and/or considered to be part of the methodologically-derived findings.

One participant, Andrew, a principal, put forth a novel solution to intractable problems. He said, “When I am at a loss for action to correct a problem I have not been able to solve, I often just start with reversing everything that I have been doing, in other words, I do the reverse.” He noted that while this might seem to be a radical, and perhaps a reckless over reaction, he has found that it allows for quick correction of any damage incurred by the flawed action, it refocuses him on the problem from a new perspective, and if it yields immediately improved results, he can take additional similar action immediately.

Another participant, Clarissa, spoke of tuning into “learning noise.” Contrary to traditional pedagogy and the belief of many teachers, Clarissa noted that not all classroom noise is a bad thing. She admonished her teachers with, “You have to think differently and understand that noise can be a good thing if it is learning noise.” She described an experience during her classroom walkthroughs when she entered a seemingly chaotic class that was in fact an *enthusiastically engaged* class. She noted that

many teachers would not have permitted this “abundance of enthusiasm,” but as she observed, the students, though boisterous, were discussing the course content. Clarissa decided at that moment to accept learning noise because when she compared the engaged and animated students in the seemingly out-of-control class to a very orderly class just two rooms down the hall where the students were quiet by uttering disengaged, she opted to side with learning by whatever means.

And finally, another novel solution presented by Manuel, a principal, to address his student attendance problem, was his personal effort to “round up” students and bring them to Saturday School. He has particularly effective method to convince students to acquiesce and participate. As he explains it:

Just last Saturday I was in a student’s living room at 8AM saying “come on, we’ve got Saturday school, get on the bus!” And, she’s yelling, “ah, this is Saturday, and I was there all week!” And I responded, “no you weren’t, you were only there three days, and that’s why we’re picking you up! You’ve already had your days off. If someone should have something to complain about, it’s me, because I *was* there every day, and now I’m here with you on a Saturday! So, the kid is like, “OK, you’re right,” and she got on the bus.

Manuel obviously has a sense of humor, but his dedication in this instant is also illustrative of the type of individual educator who is part of the critical mass noted earlier.

The deductive and inductive findings, and the additional insights of this study, emerged from the perspectives of individuals who are in the classrooms and district administrative offices daily. These perspectives are of course not necessarily reflective of all educators in the site or other districts. However, when the majority of a 21-person

participant population responds to direct inquiries with the same categorical responses, those responses are worth noting. It is also reasonable to at least consider what the opinions and insights of the minority, especially when those opinions and insights address pressing concerns from the literature.

In this chapter I presented a brief review of research sites, the deductive and inductive findings, and a few preliminary reflections on those findings. Specifically, I noted the orderliness, cleanliness, and student-centeredness of the site schools. I offered deductive findings that included examples of the participants' pedagogical philosophies, their openness to pedagogical partnering and alternative pedagogy, and their perspectives on the helping and hindering factors toward such pedagogical partnering and alternative pedagogy. I also offered inductive findings that included an equity-focused unstoppable critical mass that is providing the participants with hope for the future, examples of elective teachers taking the initiative to implement alternative pedagogy, and the notion that students need to be entertained. Finally, I offered a few notable insights that emerged from individual participants. These insights included one superintendent's method of reversing his solutions when they prove to be ineffective, a principal's appreciation for the noise of learning, and another principal's unique means of convincing students to come to Saturday School. In the next chapter I will discuss in greater depth these findings and consider them in the context of the relative literature.

Chapter 5

Discussion of the Findings

This chapter is a venue to juxtapose the findings with the relevant literature. It will also allow space for linking the findings directly to potential implications. After some brief comments about the participants, I will discuss each of the deductive and inductive findings individually, along with supplemental discussion of extended aspects of these findings. Lastly, I conclude the discussion with final thoughts on the findings as a whole.

The Deductive Findings

As noted earlier, the deductive findings are specific answers to the research questions. The findings and related discussion in this section will include: pedagogical philosophies, pedagogical partnerships, the surprising contentment with the organizational structure and leadership, the lack of specific knowledge of critical pedagogy, critical consciousness development, stimulating self-motivation in students, and the lack of any federal, state, or district policy influence on all of the above.

The deductive findings of this study strongly suggest that more alternative pedagogical activity would be welcomed in low SES population high schools. Additionally, they suggest that critical thinking and consciousness could be developed more readily with alternative pedagogy, and both were noted as highly desirable goals among all participants. While all admit it would require some pedagogical redirection, sensitivity to those reluctant to change, and a transparent process, the participants all agreed that redirecting from a foundation of partnership would make success more likely.

Pedagogical philosophies. All participants in this study stated their personal pedagogical philosophy. The associate superintendents were quick to state it; the principals took some time to articulate it, and the teachers conveyed it both directly and indirectly through their teacher methods. However, pedagogy is not simply a teaching and learning method; it is, or should be, guided by an overarching teaching philosophy. The principals in this study suggested that they prefer to establish an overarching pedagogical philosophy and allow the teachers to implement it; yet, they were also willing to partner pedagogically to assure a comprehensive application of the overarching plan. The associate superintendents were not only in favor of such partnering, but already working on initiatives to get their principals out of their offices and into their classrooms in an effort to make them more engaged as instructional leaders. Several of the teacher participants suggested that their pedagogical philosophy often changed as the situation dictated, but their students-first approach was always used as a foundation.

Revisiting Smith et al (2008), the pedagogical philosophy of the participants in this study would fall somewhere between *liberal/progressive/student-oriented* which promotes enriched schooling that goes beyond individual achievement to embrace a connectedness to the community; and *critical/democratic/practical* which emphasizes creating active citizens and prepares students to recognize inequalities, to challenge authoritative discourses, and not to accept the status quo. All of the participants meet the requirements for *liberal/progressive/student-oriented*, but only a few were actively engaged in creating active citizens and preparing students to recognize inequalities, etc. However, all participants were ready and willing to advance to the *critical/democratic/practical* philosophy, and the critical consciousness and critical

thinking development that would come with it, especially through pedagogical partnerships.

Pedagogical partnering. The enthusiastic willingness, on the part of all of the participants, to partner pedagogically came as somewhat of a surprise. While it might have been expected that associate superintendents would advocate for such “team-player” and “vertically-aligned” activities, it was surprising to hear the principals’ desire for more instructional engagement and the teachers’ receptivity to it. The findings yielded a general preference in all players on the pedagogical continuum to work much more cohesively. Several participants said that new teachers, or teachers new to their schools, would have to be “brought on board” with the existent pedagogical culture of that individual school, so why not make pedagogical engagement a routine part of everyday activities for all teachers in the school. The participants noted how easy it is to get caught up in one’s own professional culture and forget that newcomers need time to adjust and come to fully understand that culture.

The notion of teacher leaders was also an important theme throughout this study. The associate superintendents and the principals both relied heavily on teacher leaders to facilitate pedagogical partnering and the student developmental pursuits that go along with it. Some of the educational administrators even related instances where they felt challenged to keep up with their teacher leaders. Many principals spoke with great admiration for their senior or master teachers.

This finding also suggests that pedagogical partnering would itself partner quite readily with a more purposeful use of the *professional learning communities* (PLC). The PLC model has existed in one form or another for over 20 years, and it has been notably

successful in many public school settings (Dufour & Dufour, 2006). Hord (2008) provides the six dimensions of the PLC model: “shared beliefs and values, shared support and leadership, supportive structural conditions, supportive leadership conditions, collective learning,” and “peers sharing constructive feedback” (p. 42). All of these dimensions blend readily with pedagogical partnering.

The PLC literature supports the development of pedagogical partnerships in that it contends with many of the same issues that concern the teachers in this study. Teachers have often cited insufficient time to collaborate as a roadblock to pedagogical engagement with other teachers (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Friend, 2000). The participants in this study also noted such time constraints. Participants also related that independent teachers sometimes give the impression that they are listening to the principal’s instruction outside the classroom, but they ignore that instruction when they are in their classrooms. Several studies have show that traditional pedagogical education drives the teachers to work independently behind closed doors, but PLCs encourage them to work collaboratively (Hollingsworth, 2001; Grossman et al., 2001). Additionally, just as the participants in this study noted professional estrangement among many teachers, the literature on the positive outcomes of PLCs reflect that divergent professional views held by individual teachers also hinder collaborative engagement within schools (Lujan & Day, 2010). Like pedagogical partnerships, the PLC model builds time into the day for collaboration, nurtures a shared commitment to the pedagogical philosophy of the school, and trains teachers to use a common language and other more inclusive techniques to allow for more efficient communication between classrooms (Lujan & Day, 2010).

The nascent use of master teachers in the site schools in this study would benefit from the addition of a PLC model, especially since the participants noted that they already use their highly effective teachers to engage their lower performing teachers. This sort of professional group engagement might also mitigate the sometimes problematic teacher independence noted by several of the principal participants. Additionally, because PLCs have proven that engaged teachers *and* accountability can exist concurrently though supportive collaborative conversations between teachers and principals and teachers and teachers (Lujan & Day, 2010), PLC initiatives could help enlighten teachers who often believe, as the findings in this study confirmed, that “good teaching” cannot be accomplished in a content-driven, standardized test-centric environment.

Pedagogical partnership could also be viewed as a more inclusive form of “pedagogical leadership” (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 270). Pedagogical partnership creates shared pedagogical authority that allows the principal to assure that classroom teaching and learning is in the best interest of the students, while at the same time permitting the teachers to exercise *their* professional judgment *and act* in the best interest of the students as well (Sergiovanni). All of the participants in the present study expressed a strong dedication to the best interest of the students. The participants noted that in many cases that dedication was what assuaged or defused any disagreements they experienced with colleagues or superiors.

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) noted that pedagogical partnerships yield greater student achievement and have a positive effect on the partners. This research was corroborated by the participants in the present study who noted improved student achievement when the principal was more involved with the pedagogy in their schools.

However, these participants also noted the current imbalance, or lack of principal involvement, and expressed the desire for more engagement with the principal with the hope that it might yield even greater student achievement. The notion of greater success was compelling for the teacher participants.

Several of the participants in this study noted the need for regular pedagogical conversations if pedagogical partnering was to be successful. While such conversations might seem easy, the inherent tension between the school's leader and the school's teachers can make pedagogical conversations difficult. It can be a challenge for principals to engage pedagogically with teachers who hold different ideological views. Not unlike the "courageous conversations" put forward by Singleton and Linton (2006) regarding conversations about race, pedagogical conversations should stay within many of the parameters suggested for the distinctly courageous conversations about subtle or overt racism. Especially considering the low SES, often minority, population of the site schools, a pedagogical question could involve a racially relevant component. Singleton and Linton suggest that before the courageous conversations begin, in this case between the principals and teachers, the conversants should establish the rules of the exchange "by agreeing to stay engaged, experience discomfort, speak your truth, and expect and accept non-closure" (p. 58). These foundational parameters would help retain the notion of a partnership by allowing each individual to engage freely and without expectation of instant resolution. If principals and teachers can master engaging civilly and productively in difficult or "courageous" conversations about pedagogical partnerships, those partnerships will be much more likely to lead to courageous conversations with students, conversations that will be necessary for critical consciousness development.

The teacher participants of the present study asked for conversation as a prerequisite for partnering with principals. The principals were enthusiastically willing to participate in such conversations. More mutually respectful communication, that includes thoughtful professional conversations, would certainly be helpful in facilitating successful pedagogical partnerships.

The findings also suggest that the participant teachers felt somewhat isolated from their colleagues and the school leadership. As noted in the findings, many teachers are clandestinely working from an overarching critical pedagogical position, but they still believe that they are constrained by the dominance of traditional pedagogy and those who are comfortable with it. If these findings are disseminated to these participants, and others like them, perhaps the timidity or fear of presenting a pedagogical program that is counter to the norm will not be so daunting once they are aware that many of their colleagues are experiencing the same trepidation.

Since all of the participants in this study were willing to engage in or facilitate pedagogical partnerships, additional research should now focus on how to more readily bring about such collaboration, and once achieved, how to strengthen it. Based on the findings, and the comments of the individual participants, it seems that such partnerships might in fact build on themselves, but a more purposeful investigation of the process would be beneficial.

Contentment with organizational structure and leadership. The participants in this study all expressed surprising contentment with regard to the organizational structure of their schools and districts. This contentment was surprising because of the study locations, large metro areas in Texas, which is commonly considered a conservative state,

and not necessarily employee friendly. When one considers the inherent complexity of educational administration and the combination and potential clash of ideologies in this environment, it was particularly striking to hear 21 progressive participants, from three different levels, compliment their organizational leadership. Several participants noted that they had purposely chosen to work in their current districts *because of* the district or school level leadership. The participants and their leadership may or may not embrace precisely the same goals, but the leadership seems to be willing to allow their professional subordinates to practice unfettered. As Timar and Kirp (1989) have stated, "If states are serious about improving the quality of education and striving for excellence they must create a context in which organizational competence at the school level can develop" (p. 511). It seems that the leaders in the site districts are seeking to create this context. They seem to understand the notion, advanced by Rost (1993) and others, that successful management and leadership often requires an observation-on, but hands-off approach.

Since I was not seeking a reason for the contentment among the participants, I cannot provide it as a finding, but I can speculate based on the comments of the participants. The acquiescence on the part of the leadership in the study sites could be a result of the more conservative leaders simply giving up in dire times, but it could also be the result of the efforts of educational reformers, over the course of several decades, to convince traditionalists that alternative actions might yield better results. Whatever the cause, this catalytic leadership seems to be working quite well for the site school leaders and their subordinates, and other districts might do well to consider a similar application.

No specific knowledge of critical pedagogy. As I presaged in the findings reflections, I believe it is notable that though all participants in this study work with low SES populated schools, only the highest level educators, the associate superintendents, were specifically familiar with critical pedagogy – a pedagogy that was developed specifically *for* low SES marginalized populations. This notation should not be seen as an indictment of the participants who lacked knowledge of critical pedagogy, but as additional evidence that the institutional structure of public education does not yet offer it as an option, and is in fact turning a blind eye toward alternative pedagogical activities and their possible benefits for low SES student populations.

While the majority of participants could not describe critical pedagogy in a comprehensive manner, that same majority was enthusiastically willing to implement key tenets of it, and had already been, sometimes clandestinely, and perhaps intuitively practicing many of them. This is an example of what critical pedagogy should be; according to Freire (2002), critical pedagogy should be a mindset, not a model. It should be an overarching philosophy. Several participants in this study were perhaps unknowingly implementing their pedagogical mindsets through the use of particular critical pedagogical techniques.

The majority of the participants hungered for more professional engagement with each other and more personal engagement with the students. They expressed a desire to reduce lecture time and increase dialog in the classroom. They all emphasized the need and value of discussing the course content in the context of the surrounding community and the students' home lives. They cited the need to connect personally to each student. They did not shy away from facilitating classroom discussions of power relations in

society. And, they noted that the discomfort students sometimes experience as a result of these “unconventional activities” is often the driving force behind their advancement. All of these stated desires could be taken from any critical pedagogy primer, and they suggest that the participants understand the critical pedagogy in practice, if not in theory. The participants in this study, though self-identified as progressive, represent a mixed cross-section of educators, and therefore, the same response could be expected from other representative samples.

Critical consciousness and critical thinking development. The majority of the participants in this study were in favor of attempting to develop critical consciousness and critical thinking skills in their students. The participants were certainly strong advocates for critical reflection in general, but they noted that it is a challenge to convince students to engage in it. Critical reflection is at the heart of critical pedagogy and critical consciousness development. This reflection can begin to remedy a number of experiential ills. In an education system that offers primarily a one-size-fits-all pedagogy, reflection can illuminate even that fact and encourage the individual students to make their education an individual endeavor. In circumstances where students do not have a supportive home-life, reflection can help them realize that they can get support at their school or elsewhere. In schools that are underfunded and poorly administered, reflection can make that fact more tangibly obvious and inspire the students to seek supplemental education to gain the knowledge they need for success after graduation. If a student is about to give up and drop out of school, reflection can provide the evidence needed for that student to reject that option and finish high school. Reflection can not hurt; it can

only help. However, reflection must be followed by action. Reflection without action serves very little purpose.

Because humans can develop the ability to “think abstractly” between the ages of 15 and 20, (Piaget, 1972, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999: 140), developing critical thinking skills in high school students is clearly possible. However, while many high school students could be considered adults based on their experiential maturity (Halx, 2010c, Kasworm, 2003), many are still bridging the gap between childhood and adulthood. While most literature on critical thinking in adolescents focuses on literacy for the purposes of improving reading test scores, Mendelman (2008) suggests that accountability requirements should not be seen as a hindrance to critical thinking development in adolescent high school students. In fact, she contends that since some standardized tests require critical thinking, they will *encourage*, not discourage critical thinking development in the classroom.

Pescatore (2008) also insists that the development of critical thinking in high school students does not have to be sacrificed for standardized testing. She notes, that on the contrary, engaging students with critical thinking “is a helpful technique for my high school students, who are faced with exit exams” (p. 327). Pescatore also contends that developing critical thinking in adolescents through critical literacy results in the “formation of citizens who are empowered and emboldened to act as a result of their conscious enlightenment” (p. 326). She offered a simple equation to illustrate the value of critical thinking development in her high school students, “critical literacy + current events = empowering literacy” (p. 334). This equation is clearly compatible with the engagement levels of critical consciousness development. Pescatore sums up her

advocacy for critical thinking development in her students by saying, “engaged students become engaged citizens” (p. 339).

Falk-Ross and Hurst (2009) suggest that critical thinking in adolescents can be stimulated by simple “classroom talk” that includes questions that require “personal analysis,” “higher-level responses,” “negotiated meaning,” and “scaffolding connections” (p. 165). This sort of classroom discourse could also build toward stimulating critical consciousness development, and it is another example of the hand-in-hand nature of both.

As the participants in this study admitted, students will need critical thinking and critical consciousness abilities after they graduate, though many students are not aware of this while they are in high school (Halx and Ortiz, 2010). It is up to the teachers to create the expectations that students have not yet come to demand because they do not have any real sense of their future.

Educators can and should consider the needs and the sometimes unstated expectations of the students. If those expectations are not manifestly expressed, it is the job of the educator to draw them out. Encouraging students to reflect on their expectations, and take action as a result of that reflection, begins to create much needed student agency in their own education. Interestingly, the means by which the participants in this study believe critical consciousness and critical thinking can be developed most readily, by simply “making it happen,” is also reflected in the literature. The participants unknowingly agreed with the teachings of Freire (2002) on critical consciousness, and their thoughts on critical thinking skill development reflect those from a study by Halx and Reybold (2005). Moreover, there is an interesting commonality with the means of development in both of these literature sources. The dominant mechanism behind Freirian

critical consciousness development is literally and figuratively meeting the students where they are at the moment and figuratively *forcing* them to step outside their comfortable (or uncomfortable) assumptions about their life circumstances, and future chances for success, in order to allow them to reflect upon, voice, and take action to improve those chances. Similarly, with regard to critical thinking development, Halx and Reybold discovered that faculty members teaching undergraduates frequently had to *force* students to question their experientially-based assumptions and think critically about their lessons and the world around them. The discomfort that results, as students contemplate revising their life views, disrupts habitual rote “thinking” and allows for burgeoning critical consciousness and critical thinking abilities to begin to take on firmer shape. Students often resist when they feel this discomfort, and that resistance can only be challenged with benign, yet unyielding, *force* on the part of the educators. Conflict is the harbinger of growth (Reybold, 1999), and intellectual growth should be an integral part of the knowledge-gaining public school experience. While the students at the heart of the present study were high school students, they are *potentially* only one year away from being undergraduates, and as was noted earlier, intellectual growth potential is not determined strictly by chronological age.

Together, principals and teachers can “create a critical counter-culture in their classrooms and their programs” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 172) which could allow for counter views to be presented and debated. Students are not inanimate objects; they are subjective individuals with individual contributions that just might be worth considering. Those individual contributions will be made to the world professionally and

socially after the student graduates from high school, so why not engage them during high school?

Employing a more humanly relevant and respectful pedagogy now could reverse the standardized-testing-inspired trend that is draining the humanness out of education. It is much more difficult for students to ignore their lessons when those lessons are delivered by a teacher who displays a real sense of appreciating the student as an individual (Valenzuela, 2005). The participants in this study all repeatedly stated that attention and enthusiasm in their classrooms jumped markedly when the content-based discussion also touched on real-life issues that were relevant to the students' real lives.

Critical consciousness and critical thinking development must be tied to what teachers do anyway. Several participants in this study struggled with the notion of striking a balance between content delivery and critical consciousness and critical thinking development. However, if teachers are to be transformative instructional leaders, they must develop a critical capacity in their students and assist the students in building on it. A critical pedagogy truly is, as one associate superintendent participant described it, "a pedagogy of expectations." With this alternative pedagogy, the students themselves are expected, at some point, to take charge of the individual education, and they are also expected to help other, sometimes lower performing, students to get up to speed as part of enhancing their own learning process.

Below, in Table 3, I revisit to the critical consciousness aspects presented earlier in Table 2, but with the addition of the present study participants' collective perspectives regarding the degree to which each critical teaching technique could be implemented.

(Table 3)

Key Goals of Critical Consciousness Development	Teaching Technique to Accomplish Goal	Degree to Which Teaching Technique Could be Implemented
Student must understand her or his place in society	Reoccurring classroom discussion of place	Frequently
Student must understand her or his SES	Reoccurring classroom discussion of SES	Frequently
Student must understand her or his political power	Reoccurring classroom discussion of political power	Somewhat frequently
Student must understand the inequities in society	Reoccurring classroom discussion of societal inequities	Frequently
Student must voice and name status and political issues	Class discussion naming the issues	Frequently
Student must take action against the inequities	Class projects and papers that are action oriented	Somewhat frequently
Educators must assist the student in this action	Educator support offered at all stages	Frequently
Student must reflect on the results of the action	Reoccurring reflection opportunities in the classroom	Somewhat frequently

As can be seen in the table, all participants believe that the specific teaching techniques that are most likely to accomplish the development of critical consciousness in students can be implemented at least somewhat frequently, but the majority could actually be offered frequently. The participants contended that teachers should make critical consciousness development just another part of the teaching day, but it must be a consistent part.

With regard to critical thinking development specifically, all participants admitted that it is lacking in their schools. This was not surprising, but nonetheless it was disturbing. In addition to the parallels with critical consciousness development listed about, the findings of this study confirm that, at least in this sample of schools and districts, critical thinking development is still espoused, but not realized because, according to the participants, it is not emphasized. Several participants noted, in most cases wishfully, that “more critical thinking is probably taking place than we realize,” but all agreed with the statement of an associate superintendent who said, “We could do

much better.” The majority of participants noted that everybody talks about critical thinking development, but most do not do much about it.

Stimulating self-motivation in students. Several participants noted the importance of simulating self-motivation in students as a pre-condition to both critical consciousness and critical thinking development. These participants noticed that allowing students the freedom to choose some of their assignments, where to sit in the classroom, and with whom they were periodically grouped, was well received. Low SES students sometimes do not have control over much of their home life. Being given some direct control of their education in the classroom serves inherently as a motivator.

The driver of self-motivation certainly varies by individual, but also by class. Many low SES high school students are experientially mature beyond their years, and by virtue of that maturity, they are virtually adults and should be educated as such (Halx, 2010c). In that virtual adult position, the factors that self-motivate may be counter to those of a middle- or upper-class student. Teachers should consider this experiential maturity, and rather than ignore it, capitalize on it. Students do “learn to live by living,” but they can also be assisted in learning by engaged co-learner teachers (Pearl & Knight, 1999, p. 17). Teachers emphasize the positive and/or substantive knowledge the students have gained in their sometimes challenging personal lives, and show students how to use that environmental and experiential knowledge for their own success, and perhaps with that success, ultimately change those environments for others. In other words, critical consciousness development can “break the cycle of disinvestment of human capital in urban communities by creating graduates who recognize their potential agency to improve urban centers rather than seeing them as places to escape” (Duncan-Andrade &

Morrell, 2008, p. 7). There is value in experiential maturity, and low SES students have more often than not been faced with challenging life circumstances that have forced them to make decisions that middle- and upper-class students do not have to make until several years later. At the very least, the factors that motivate low SES students can be distinctly different from those that motivate middle- and upper-class students, and teachers must maintain a heightened awareness of this fact.

Ripley (2010) reported the results of an innovative cash-for-performance student motivation program that was started three years ago in several large metro areas across the country. Low SES students in this program were paid for earning high grades, reading books, and ultimately graduating from high school. The results of the program so far have been mixed, but the noted successes that have occurred were when students were paid for actions that were in their *direct control*, such as reading a book, rather than for accomplishments that are out of their direct control, such as earning particular grades. Participants in the present study responded positively to the notion of developing critical consciousness in their students because they see that consciousness as just one more action toward student-directed/student-motivated learning. Self-motivation and self-directed learning is a central tenant and goal of critical pedagogy and critical consciousness development. Self-motivation learning works with low SES students.

Lack of federal, state, and district policy influence. Surprisingly, no participant could name a federal, state, or district policy (other than the ubiquitous standardized testing that is required to satisfy state and federal accountability expectations) that helped or hindered the notion of creating pedagogical partnerships or developing critical thinking skills and critical consciousness. Several participants advanced the notion that

we are in a new educational environment era of educators who understand and accept accountability as just part of doing business. According to several participants, this acceptance and tacit accommodation, of what was formerly considered a very intrusive policy, has allowed educators to become better at that accommodation which in turn allows for more energy and effort to be expended elsewhere, such as on innovative and alternative initiatives for their specific student populations. And, as one participant noted, for the most part, a simple comprehensive awareness of most district, state, and federal policies frees one from being burdened by them.

It is also worth noting that not one principal participant in this study related any district policy that significantly hindered her or his current or anticipated future actions toward advancing alternative pedagogies or programs. All of the principal participants stated that their district officials allowed them the freedom to run their schools and programs per their discretion as long as positive results were ultimately achieved. The associate superintendents confirmed that they prefer to allow their principals significant freedom to implement school-specific initiatives that are deemed in the best interest of a given school. The teachers also noted that their principals seemed free to create an individual school culture based on school-specific programs.

Going into this study I wondered how much independence principals actually have to run their schools. It became quite clear that these principals have a considerable amount of freedom to develop managerial *and* instructional programs and policies that fit best in their individual schools. The question then became: since no policy hinders them, are they willing to partner pedagogically with teachers for the purpose of developing critical consciousness and critical thinking skills in their students. Of course the answer

turned out to be yes. This discussion seems academic at this point, but without willingness and freedom from policy hindrances, pedagogical partnerships would be difficult to initiate.

However, while it is encouraging good news that district, state, and federal education policy does not unduly hinder on-the-ground educators, it is less than encouraging to learn that education policy also does not directly help or encourage innovative educational activities or programs. This is especially notable when one considers the number of state and federal policies that have been created *specifically to assist* low SES student populations. Perhaps those policies have become as entrenched as the accountability policies, and as a result, they are no longer noticed, and hence they would not come to mind during an inquiry of this nature. And, of course, many education policies are at work behind the scenes, but it is surprising that not one individual out of 21 participants could specifically name a helpful federal, state, or district education policy.

Inductive Findings

The inductive findings of this study provide a glimpse of both the problems and progress that are occurring in low SES population high schools. The participants expressed strong professional perspectives on the problems, but at the same time they alluded to confidence in the progress that has been made and hope for even greater advancement in the future. The findings that will be discussed in this section include: the unstoppable critical mass of hope, the elective teacher's sense of obligation to help in areas where the content/tested teachers cannot, teaching as entertaining, special devotion

to the students, and disrupting complacency. I also offer a few final thoughts on the findings as a whole.

Hope: The unstoppable equity-focused critical mass. The majority of the participants in this study suggested very clearly that the seeds for equity in public education that were planted decades ago, and movements for reform and social justice in public schools that soon began to grow from them, are finally coming to some form of notable fruition. Counterintuitively, in the face of so many discouraging educational statistics that are presented through the popular media daily, the participants in this study indicated that there are also strong signs of hope for optimism. The majority of participants in this study suggested that there is now a critical mass of students, teachers, and educational administrators that has become an unstoppable force with which school districts, states, and federal departments must reckon. Several participants admitted that there have always been small groups who have made a difference for marginalized and low SES student populations, but those groups have finally matured into fully functional organizations. And, students, parents, and other community groups have finally become more viscerally aware of the previously ignored gross educational inequities that have not given low SES and other marginalized student populations the same opportunities to learn and succeed. The majority of the participants also suggested that formerly oppressed students in those populations have, with guidance, stood up to inequitable treatment by their education systems, and taken action on behalf of themselves and their fellow students. In other words, a tangible and serious hope was evident in the words and tone of all participants in this study. These participants were strangely confident that change is on the horizon.

This optimism and hope could also be a (preliminary) result of the recently noted successes of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Congressional hearings held for the re-authorization of ESEA reported successes in *elementary* school student performance for all children, however the reports for *secondary* school students were not as positive (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2010). The critical mass to which the participants refer has the potential to continue to grow as elementary students' progress. However, the improving outcomes in elementary school can be quickly diminished if they are not continued in secondary school.

The addition of critical consciousness and critical thinking develop to this current educational environment can only help this critical mass of student groups make even greater strides toward assuring that they and their fellow students are provided with an equitable education that is verified by outcomes, not just by "equal opportunity." Hope lies in the notion that a confident critical mass of students, school staff, teachers, and school leaders has finally coalesced, and it is unstoppable. Those of us who seek to hasten the improvement of public schools should employ pedagogies that advance the cognitive and social development that will provide younger students the requisite understanding and purpose of education, and allow older students the opportunity to take charge of their own educational experience and facilitate more positive outcomes. This inductive finding suggests that there could not be a better time to attempt to develop critical consciousness in all students.

Elective teacher: A sense of obligation. Several of the elective teachers in this study stated that they felt obligated to "step up to the plate" and deliver extra content, critical thinking skills, and develop critical consciousness, etc. because the core subject

(tested subject) teachers simply do not have the time due to the preparation requirements for the all-important standardized tests. In this era of entrenched accountability, even the elective teachers have accepted standardized testing as just another part of the educational environment in which they work. All of the elective teachers in this study noted that they would have to play a key role in any attempt to develop critical consciousness or critical thinking in their students, and they were all quite willing to take on this extra responsibility. Several principals in the study also noted that many of their elective teachers were willing to put in the extra time to accomplish the principal's initiatives, especially when the core teachers were preparing for an upcoming test.

This willingness on the part of the elective teachers provides a convenient and viable opening for critical consciousness development. Many scholars, such as those cited in the literature review above, would contend that critical consciousness could be developed in core content classes as well, but elective classes are at least a good place to start. As one teacher noted, what occurs in the elective classes has a way of infiltrating the core classes. Students don't change between classes. This finding suggests that any initiative to comprehensively implement critical pedagogical activities could start with the elective teachers.

Teaching as entertaining. Several participants noted the need to keep students entertained in the pursuit of keeping them interested in the lessons. While traditionalists would no doubt find this to be an unnecessary concession to ill-behaved students, the teacher participants in this study considered it vital to the success of their teaching, and most were happy to oblige by using a popular film as the basis for discussion, taking the class to the site of a historic event, or even analysis of a particular pop music song. The

principals and associate superintendents also supported the notion of incorporating course-content-based entertainment activities to help keep the students engaged. As noted earlier, low SES students often do not see the value of education and they are therefore easily distracted from traditional pedagogical activities. The bottom line for several participants was: any action that can keep their students interested and involved in the classroom discussion is worth pursuing.

Pogrow (2009) supports this view with his notion of “outrageous instruction” (p. 379). He contends that the techniques of outrageous instruction, a form of entertainment, will not only fascinate students, but that they will lead students to learn *any* content more deeply. As Pogrow explains:

What do you do when students are bored? How do you explain content that seems too abstract for most students to understand? You could rely on the old standby: "You need to learn it because it's on the test." You could make the lesson "authentic" and tell students, "You'll understand why this is important when you're older." But the best solution is to convert those lessons into learning experiences that are so fascinating that students cannot help but be drawn into them and hang onto every word and gesture. That is, you can teach the same content outrageously.

This alternative pedagogical technique, “links teaching specific objectives to students' sense of imagination and how they view the world... to draw all students deeply into any content” (p. 379). Pogrow contends that these techniques work on even the “oldest and most jaded students who are the most resistant to learning” (p. 379).

The objective of the participants in the Pogrow study was to use various forms of entertainment to develop both basic and problem-solving skills, but in the context of authentic problems that are of interest to students. The majority of participants noted that when the class discussions were about the real lives of the students, they could hardly contain the enthusiasm, which sometimes created a learning problem itself. The participants did caution that enthusiasm must not be allowed to devolve into random self-expression that no longer contributes to the overall learning of the lesson at hand. Striking a good balance between pure content delivery and entertainment activities presents a challenge, but according to the participants, it is a challenge worth taking on.

This is notion of entertaining students in order to teach them is a departure from traditional pedagogy. It is in fact an alternate pedagogical technique that has proven to be successful with low SES and other marginalized population students, and the literature and the participants in this study both attest to that success.

Special devotion to students. All participants in this study displayed and expressed a real heart-felt devotion to their students. Most participants related stories of multiple beyond-the-workday efforts to engage with students. While this personal involvement may be a common characteristic of progressive and innovative educators such as the participants in this study, it is also an integral part of critical pedagogy and critical consciousness development. Teachers and/or at least one administrator or staff member must develop a personal relationship with each student. The participants' readiness to do so, and willingness to encourage others to do the same, would be vital to the success of implementing alternative critical pedagogies. One of the principal participants even noted that she makes sure that this personal connection happens with each student in her school.

Personal connections not only make it more likely that students will stay in school, but they also allow for trusting relationships that in turn allow students to challenge and question the world around them and their place in it.

As noted earlier, Sergiovanni (2000) suggested that “leadership is stewardship” (p. 270). However, teaching is also a form a stewardship of the individual student. The participants in this study are keenly aware of this, and they are working tirelessly to steward their students through educational and life circumstances that are often not ideal. Several of the participants noted that because of the less-than-favorable life circumstances of the students in the study site schools, they are ethically bound to put forth the extra personal and professional effort necessary to attempt to offset those circumstances. This extra effort often consisted of developing close relationships with each of their students. Bartlett (2005) might describe this as a “friendship strategy” in which the teachers work hard to “create a climate of friendship, trust, and equality inside the classroom” (p. 351). Several of the participants related stories of how they used such strategies on a daily basis to make it clear that they cared not only professionally, but also personally, that their students were successful. Freire’s (1997) view that pedagogy must come from the heart if it is to be successful is supported by the real-life experiences of the participants of this study. However, friendship and caring must serve only as a foundation in the pursuit of the goal of educational achievement, not a goal in itself (Bartlett).

Disrupting complacency. Critical consciousness can have a significant effect on classroom dynamics. It can shake up that dynamic and disturb the complacency that currently hinders learning. As most teachers will attest, learning can be an extraordinary

and exciting experience. In fact, all learning should be an extraordinary experience. With critical consciousness and critical reflection, it can be. When students begin to re-experience, in an *extraordinary way*, learning that was once ordinary and routine, a richer education is the inevitable result. Schools then become a virtual think-tank for students and teachers, not a compulsory discipline- and structure-based daily attendance requirement. With a more critical alternative pedagogy, the classroom becomes a “venue for the construction of knowledge, not merely of its inculcation” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 88).

By the notion of “disrupting complacency” I mean not only disrupting indifference in students, but also shaking up the status quo and disrupting practice among educators. I am clearly interested in disrupting student apathy, but I am not suggesting that students are completely at fault for their circumstances. As I have noted throughout this paper, it is the system and traditional pedagogy that is oppressing the students. Nonetheless, the students do possess the power to overcome that oppression. Critical consciousness development will reveal that power.

There is a distinct tension between the highly structured traditional pedagogy and the more liberally ordered and more critical alternative pedagogies. Some scholars might contend that the differences are irreconcilable. I agree that reconciliation is not possible, and in fact, it is not the hoped-for goal of advocating for critical alternative pedagogies. Accommodation might be a better way to consider the encounter between traditional and critical alternative pedagogies. By accommodation I mean an allowance for transitional use of critical alternative pedagogical techniques within a traditional setting, especially in schools and districts where such alternatives will engage students and disrupt currently

unsuccessful programs. This could be viewed as the allowance of a concurrent pedagogical mindset, even if just for experimental purposes. If critical educators can find accommodation for critical pedagogical alternatives, even partial accommodation, I believe that the burgeoning critical mass that was noted by the participants in this study will continue to grow and the notion of reconciliation will be rendered moot.

With this study I sought to discover viable opportunities to infiltrate traditional pedagogy with the more progressive and humanistic components of critical alternative pedagogy, starting with critical consciousness and critical thinking development. The results of this study suggest that now is the time to continue to push such an agenda. As educators, we must consider *the now*. The students live in the moment. And, the students themselves should be encouraged to think about the current moment of their education process. We should consider not only what we do *for* students, but also what we block them from doing. Dewey (1916) noted that if “ordinary experience does not receive the enrichment it should, [if] it is not fertilized by school learning,” it becomes “half-understood and ill-digested material” that weakens the “efficiency of thought” (p. 161). Aiding and encouraging students to reflect on their past and current life experience as a mechanism to understand class content material (much of which is, theoretically, to be used in some future life application) seems only to be a prudent use of resources that are not only available, but already entrenched and at least partially understood by the students. As Freire (2002) admonished, we must teach within the students’ realities, not within some ideal professional standard.

The additional professional insights provided by three principal participants are illustrative of complacency disruption in action. One principal simply reversed well-

meaning problem-solving initiatives that failed to solve the problem. Another principal encouraged “learning noise” in the face of the traditionally quiet and orderly classroom. And, another principal rides a bus on the weekends to literally pull students out of bed and bring them to Saturday School. These individuals are fine examples of the educators who make up the critical mass that is out there shaking up the status quo. With educational professionals like these, complacency does not stand a chance. It is up to the rest of us to support these individuals and develop others like them who will assure that the unstoppable critical mass becomes a critical majority.

A Few Final Thoughts on the Findings

The findings of this study clearly indicate that critical thinking skill and critical consciousness development are currently lacking in the representative sample of low SES schools in this study, and yet, ironically, the educators in these schools all believe that both *should be* emphasized routinely in the classroom. And importantly, the vertical alignment of participant agreement suggested that such an initiative is viable, especially through principal/teacher pedagogical partnerships. In fact, the participants noted that pedagogical partnerships could serve to enhance almost all other student developmental activities and teacher and administrator morale as well. In view of these findings, it seems clear that a critical thinking/critical consciousness raising initiative would be welcomed in many similarly populated schools. And, based on the overwhelmingly positive results such development has achieved in multiple isolated programs (as supported by multiple research studies noted earlier), state and district education policy makers should strongly consider including critically-based, student-focused initiatives their current pedagogical programming.

While the original development of many alternative critical pedagogies was inspired by the desire for radical social change (see Freire, 2002; Giroux, 2004; Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren, 2003) it is important to stress again that I am not necessarily advocating the creation of student activists, nor are many current-day alternative and critical pedagogy advocates. I accept that a more critical pedagogy, which instills a critical consciousness in students, could certainly inspire activism, but that is not the goal of my advocacy. And, counter to a recent editorial by Stanley Fish in the New York Times (New York Times, May 18, 2010), critical pedagogy is not a pedagogy of indoctrination. It is a pedagogy of awareness. Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of teaching and learning, not a set list of teaching techniques. The hope of critical pedagogues is only to develop student awareness of their surroundings, and the tacitly accepted inequities, so that they may be better prepared to take action toward moving into a more equitable circumstance. Critical pedagogy does not suggest that students simply criticize their education and social circumstance. It insists that they think critically about it, consider what might be wrong with it, reflect on possibilities to improve it, and take action to make those possibilities a reality. This form of “activism” should certainly not be seen as objectionable.

In an era with the achievement gap widening for low SES students, and the dropout rate increasing to levels that are beginning to be noticed even by the otherwise content and complacent middle and upper classes, education policy makers should at least consider taking some action to address this emerging crisis. However, even if federal, state, and local education policy begins to take into account the need for additional programs and the additional funding needed to accomplish equitable additional

educational outcomes in low SES communities, it will take time to bring any such new policy action up to speed. Therefore, even with a policy shift, it is still vital to change the mindset of the students who are in the pipeline today. The effort needed to make permanent change remains, at least partially, in the hands of the students themselves. Until institutionalized change is realized, it is up to the students to remedy the current and past inequities. If the students are not an integral part of the process of change, the egregious educational circumstances of many low SES students will get only worse and, perhaps as some point, become unsolvable.

Fortunately, according to the participants in this study, there is hope. Some administrators, teachers, and students *are* playing an integral role in the process of change. They are taking action in their individual schools, and they are not taking no, or no action, for an answer. They are standing up for themselves *and* for others. And, in the opinion of the participants in this study, they are unstoppable at this point. The critical mass of individual educational stakeholders and reformers is speaking loudly. It remains to be seen if education policy makers will finally listen.

Chapter 6

Implications and Conclusion

The implications of this study are significant at many levels. In this chapter I will discuss these implications from two perspectives. First, I will talk about public education policy implications that include the synergy of conflicting education ideologies, policy implementation, organizational resistance to change, the dynamics of public education policy and the unstoppable critical mass, traditional resistance to traditional pedagogy, and what can be done *now*. Then, from a societal impact perspective, I will talk about the social implications of pedagogical change. I conclude the chapter with final thoughts on the study.

Public Education Policy Impact

The findings of this study, if disseminated and used successfully at the school level, could have a significant effect on education policy at the district level. By this I mean if school principals read and accept the perspectives put forth by the participants in this study, they might begin to partner pedagogically with their teachers and advance critical consciousness and critical thinking development in their students. Then, as they see the anticipated improved student achievement, through standardized and accepted measurements, these principals, along with other educational stakeholders at the local district level, like associate superintendents and parents, etc., would have the evidence they need to advance these notions beyond their districts, and a tide of success might be felt at the state level and even federal level.

Though no participant in this study could name a specific federal, state, or local policy that significantly impacts, either positively or negatively, critical alternative

classroom activities, education policy makers, nonetheless, cannot be ignored. As Cahn (1995) noted, “[policy] players will increase their chances of winning to the extent that they have knowledge of the policy bureaucracy (bureaucratic knowledge), access to individuals within that bureaucracy (network), citizen backing (size of constituency), money for political contributions, and the resources to mount an effective public relations (media) campaign” (p. 333). However, this means of increasing one’s likelihood of “winning” a policy change requires a greater sense of the whole of the policy arena in which one is functioning. Cahn warns that, “it is also necessary to understand the culture of the policy environment” (p. 333). And, this understanding is often illusive because cultural and environmental factors are not fixed in time; they are in a state of constant, if slow, change (Birkland, 2001, p. 48). One of the participants in the present study noted the importance of policy awareness, and she credited this knowledge as being largely responsible for her current success. Other participants acknowledged the distinct advantage of intimately knowing the culture of their districts and surrounding communities when the need arose to gain support for large or small initiatives. This acknowledgement implies that even though federal, state, and district education policies may not be placing an undue burden on educators, at least those represented in this study, maintaining a solid awareness of those policies and policy trends is prudent and beneficial to the ultimate success of any program for which educators might wish to advocate. The educational leaders who participated in this study, especially the principals, are in a prime position to effect both micro and macro education policy.

McGough (2003) noted several years ago, “Consistent with the perpetual ebb and flow of thinking about educational improvement, principals are once again considered

critical contributors to superior school operation” (p. 451). Today, in 2010, principals can be much more than critical contributors. They can in fact be the conduit through which a refocused education policy gives the power back to the local level administrator and puts the principal once again in the primary position to affect change.

Experienced school leaders are already in place. And, this study (among others) suggests that many of these leaders are willing be the conduit through which comprehensive educational change is delivered by advancing alternative pedagogies in their schools and partnering with teachers to accomplish it. But, how can the critical mass of principals, who are ready and willing, be mobilized into a more cohesive force? How can pedagogical partnership, alternative pedagogy, and critical consciousness and critical thinking development initiatives rise to the top of the State’s education policy agenda?

I believe that this issue will advance on the policy agenda spectrum if just a few local principals, in several cities, take advantage of their regulatory rights to take charge of their local *pedagogical* agenda. No vigorous pressure group is needed. The principals themselves can “act as an impetus” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 105) simply by successfully applying alternative pedagogies in their schools. Local school district policy makers (often elected officials) will get on board quickly when they see evidence of success. Local policy makers, especially those who hold political offices, understandably love a rising tide. And, they will ride it all the way to re-election, so the timing for seeking their support is critical.

However, gaining the support of local policy makers is not an end in itself (Fullan, 1991). Authorization for the bulk of public school funding, not to mention the implementation of new state-wide innovations, requires the agreement of other policy

players, i.e., state funding entities – the legislatures, and the appropriation committees within those legislatures. Negotiating progressive education policy in state legislatures requires extraordinary resolve, a high degree of patience, and a sensibility to the conservative nature of many politicians and policy players. Developing this negotiating ability is understandably not the first priority of front line educational leaders like high school principals; however, it must be a constant consideration if principals hope to affect state-policy initiatives that help or hinder their pedagogical goals. Federal and state education policy has a “purposive orientation” (Salisbury, 1995, p. 34), and though the specifics of that purpose are often at odds ideologically, there is little doubt that both entities are dealing with the “authoritative allocation of values for the whole society” (p. 34) through the allocation of funds and the declaration of particular education policies.

Real, on-the-ground, successful practice must be achieved and documented before state education policy makers will listen to entreaties for change. As has been noted by Mulcahy and Irwin (2008), “federal education policy is virtually closed to scholarly debate” (p. 202), and the situation is not much different at the state level. Politicians, not education scholars, too often drive policy decisions. These decisions are frequently based on economic concerns of the moment, or on popular political ideology of the era, rather than on sound educational research. And again, due to the dynamic and changing nature of low SES population schools, even policy based on sound educational research of the moment is in fact research of the recent past that has been conflated into an artificial present (Kaplan, 1993).

Apple (2009) notes, “Many economic, social and educational policies, when actually put into place, tend to benefit those who already have advantages” (p. 33).

Corporations, that are “concerned with profit rather than people... are increasingly promoting rhetoric and implementing policies to define and constrict the entire field of education” (Hinchey, 2004, p. ix). Critical consciousness raising among students, their teachers, and their principals could open the education debate to those it impacts most. Once the students more fully understand their inequitable educational circumstances they can help their parents understand, and their parents are constituents to whom local officials and state legislators are more likely to listen. This “trickle up” action could also have a dramatic effect on state education policies, and that effect could be realized much more quickly once legislators realize that the desire for change is based in the students themselves.

Alternative pedagogies, like critical pedagogy must be proven on the ground, i.e., in the classroom with the students. As Apple (2009) laments, “The sometimes mostly rhetorical material of critical pedagogy simply is unable to cope” (p. 37) with the established nature of traditional pedagogy. Apple goes on to say that only when critical pedagogy is “linked much more to concrete issues of educational policy and practice – and to the daily lives of educators, students, and community members – can it succeed” (p. 37). The participants in this study suggest that this linking (not yet replacing) action is in fact unavoidable because of the entrenched nature of traditional pedagogy. The problem, as the participants see it, is that many teachers and administrators allow the dominant traditional pedagogy to displace any alternatives.

Though critical consciousness and critical thinking must sometimes be benignly forced upon students, principals cannot employ alternative pedagogies by force; they must first earn the trust of the teachers. As noted in the sections above, there are several

methods to inspire compliance in the process of pedagogical change, but most importantly, the new policy should be employed in a non-coercive fashion (Anderson, 2006) if a principal hopes for sustainable change.

Slow but sure repair of flawed educational policy can be sought for the low SES student populations. Policy makers can authorize pedagogical change, but principals and their teachers must implement it. As the present study has made clear, principals cannot be just school managers; they must be pedagogical leaders. However, since principals are guided, and sometimes constrained, by state mandated leadership standards, state policy makers must bring those standards to life by directing the state education agencies to emphasize local responsibility and local leadership for solving local problems and place that responsibility in the hands of their school principals. Living, viable policy must fit the lives of the people to whom it applies, not be imposed by policy makers who think they know what is best for populations they in fact do not know (Dumas & Anyon, 2006). If policy makers can step out of the “canonical discourses” (p. 168) of existing policy implementation theory, but still use that theory in the “service of freedom, rather than the service of itself” (p. 168), sustainable change is possible. In other words, we can theorize and speak of the problems of low SES students, but we should not attempt to force-fit their counternarrative lives into the narratives generated by middle- and high-SES policy makers (Dumas & Anyon). It is of course understandable that policymakers end up “bound by a circle of conventions” (Kaplan, 1993, p. 171); however, conventions are well known to be inherently limiting, and for the wellbeing of all policy stakeholders, thinking outside of them for a moment would likely be beneficial to all. The dominant narratives are already in place, and in fact, entrenched. Students need to be made aware

of the juxtaposition of the counternarrative so that they can fully understand the entirety of the narrative-driven world in which we all live.

The Synergy of Conflicting Ideologies

Traditional pedagogy and alternative more critical pedagogy are inherently at odds with each other. Conservative conventions are, by their nature, a barrier to innovative change, but not an insurmountable barrier. Because “every meaningful political object and person is an interpretation that reflects and perpetrates an ideology” (Edelman, 1995, p. 388), ideological conflict is routinely a part of any policy change activity. And, that conflict is not only a part, but it is a vital part. As Schattschneider (1960) noted, conflict is *necessary* for successful change. Advocates of localized educational leadership authority and alternative pedagogies should keep Schattschneider’s notion of conflict in mind when they are contemplating a course of action to move macro policy in their preferred micro direction. In other words, they must be patient as conflict divides the opposing positions, and have confidence that this conflict will ultimately result in stronger re-unification that is most likely the best and most enduring solution to the policy problem (Schattschneider). Patience *is* often a virtue, and, as was alluded to by the associate superintendents in this study, an awareness of how to channel conflict toward favoring one’s desired education policy result will also make that result more likely to occur.

Policy Implementation

If a policy is a potential promise, policy implementation is potentially fulfilling a promise. As with many promises, sometimes they are not fully realized, or they are not

realized as originally intended. This could be caused by insincere intent, or sincere intent that was thwarted by intervening individuals and/or circumstances (Birkland, 2001).

Implementation (and the entire policy change process for that matter) should be an interactive process (Birkland, 2001). While the variables are many, and the interplay of those variables might seem intractable, recognition of that interplay is vital to the change process (even if total control of the interaction may never be achieved). Blind faith in the noble purpose or expertise-created quality of a particular policy as a mechanism to achieve policy change success is dangerously complacent (Birkland).

Breaking out of policy-making routines is also important (Kingdon, 1995). The world is constantly changing, as are individual nations, states, and local communities. Past policy routines fast become out of date. Policy implementation plans sometimes even become out of date by the time the implementation process occurs (Honig, 2006). The need for timely action and anticipation of the future precludes reliance on routine processes.

Policy implementation can be attempted from a number of directions; however, since the policy change being discussed here is the application of alternative pedagogy through pedagogical partnerships, the implementation mechanism should be sensitive to that theme. As such, avoiding hierarchical, dominant culture, implementation structures that would in themselves run counter to the policy focus (Theodoulou, 1995) would be prudent. Although a more conservative stance on policy implementation might suggest that the on-the-ground administrator cannot be trusted to independently implement policy effectively, a forced or micromanaged implementation from above is often concurrently diminished by that force and micromanagement (Theodoulou). If a principal feels she or

he is under the “arbitrary rule of unreachable authorities” the chances are good that she or he will not take a chance and be innovative (Glazer, 1995, p. 294). An implementation balance must be struck.

Should pedagogical partnerships be implemented as a top-down or bottom-up policy issue? Birkland (2001) describes these two policy implementation methods. He notes that there are plusses and minuses to both approaches. While the top-down approach, when used non-dogmatically, can be functional and successful, the bottom-up model would likely serve more in accordance with sensitivity to the personally expressed concerns of the local community involved. The local principals, or “street level bureaucrats” (p. 182) often know best what they need and how to get it (if given the chance). This somewhat novel leadership pipeline, termed as “backward mapping” by Birkland, is distinctly different from the traditional policy implementation technique that he terms, “forward mapping” (p. 182). This “backward” orientation is sensitive to the notion that the sometimes ambiguous goals of a given policy might conflict not only with other macro goals, but also with the sensibilities of those the policy is designed to help (Birkland). A bottom-up policy implementation approach considers multi-faceted conflicts *first*, and addresses them first, as opposed to the macro-conflict focus of the top-down approach that addresses “big-picture” conflict and pays little attention to micro-level conflicts that are certain to present themselves later (Birkland).

Schattschneider (1960) would contend that, ultimately the education stakeholder public must choose among conflicts. He framed conflicts not as pure divisions, but simply as separate actions prior to unification. As noted earlier, conflict is a necessary component of advancing public policy. Schattschneider believed that the ever larger

electorate in the United States would pose a problem for the modern day policy maker. The non-voting population is still a highly sought after group. Almost 50 years ago Schattschneider stated, “Anyone who figures out how to involve the 40 million non-voters will run the country for a generation” (p. 103). Many political pundits suggest that the current president of the United States, Barack Obama, won his position by involving a significant number of previously non-voting individuals. Schattschneider noted that it is easier to bring in new voters than to change the minds of the old voters. Just as bottom-up policy is never pure bottom-up, top-down policy it never pure top-down (Healey, 1993). Maintaining an awareness of conflict shifts is critical to policy success. According to Schattschneider, too often policy makers cling to old policy battles and remain oblivious to the new and more relevant issues.

Any new policy should be presented with advance and concurrent consideration of the implementation piece. Additionally, using a modified bottom-up inspiration for policy adoption as a first step in a comprehensive implementation process is often more suitable for educational policy that involves equity issues. Viewing policy adoption from an ends/means perspective (rather than the reverse as some scholars advocate) illustrates more clearly the dominant concerns of the policy beneficiary. It is clear that experts and their technical, historical, comprehensive, macro view, serve in a vital role of the policy creation and adoption process, but they MUST maintain focus on the hoped-for product that will result from that judgment and expertise and integrate it into an advance implementation process plan that will be administered (sometimes much later) via the front line policy administrators/actors.

Hidden issues that cannot be seen or anticipated during the policy formation stage come to light as a matter of course in the implementation stage. Even the issues that are not hidden evolve over time and must be addressed differently at the point of policy implementation. Only a comprehensive and dynamic policy process, with an adaptable implementation stage, has any hope of sustainable success. Top-down models often rely too heavily on coercion and/or later reformulation. Bottom-up models often rely too heavily on the opinion/perspective of the on-the-ground non-expert individual and do not place enough emphasis on the valuable expertise of policy makers/administrators. By that juxtaposition alone, the third model of a more comprehensive all-inclusive process would more likely serve policy makers and beneficiaries best.

It is easy to consider, as did Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) (somewhat ahead of their time with regard to viewing the policy process incrementally), that the period prior to policy implementation is nothing but a limbo period. This is of course an exaggeration, but the notion does emphasize the culminating importance of implementation. A well thought out pre-implementation stage is clearly vital to success in implementation (what would be implemented without it), but neither period nor series of actions can stand alone, and neither serves its full purpose without the other.

Organizational Resistance to Policy Change

There are seemingly infinite numbers of organizational structure concerns to consider when attempting to change public education policy. A student sitting at a desk in a classroom is impacted by a bewildering number of policy making entities. From the federal government to state government, from national special interest groups to state and local special interest groups, from non-profit organizations to for-profit educational

organizations, from corporations to entrepreneurs, from state agencies to local school boards, the educational life of the student can be affected by just one or a combination of actions from any number of policy makers. The unwieldiness of these structures alone points to the prudence of starting “on the ground” and working up. And frankly, it is surely more efficient to provide a direct beneficial action that impacts the student first, *and then* percolates up through the policy making structure for edification. While this “act now, ask for permission later” tactic is not as easy as it sounds, it does serve as a general guide for taking reasonable and professional action at the micro level in order to affect change at the macro level.

Alternative pedagogy is in fact an organizationally tractable policy issue because it frames quite readily. Ease of frameability avoids the sometimes elaborate process of reframing less tractable policy concerns. While opponents of alternative pedagogy may attempt to “nest” the concept and disorient its “proximate context” or contexts, causing confusion among adherents and detractors alike (Rein & Schön, 1993, p. 154), the straight forward action of a dedicated school leader taking charge of her or his school will be difficult to dislodge from the minds of the stakeholders and, by extension, the policy makers. Since the foundation of all school administration was at one time the principal, reverting back to such established *tried and true* local leadership is not as controversial as changing to something utterly new, untested, and perhaps untrusted. As Joel Klein, the commissioner of education for New York City has stated, “When people want to try new and different things in education, it will always stir up controversy” (Ripley, 2010, p. 44). An old well-known model will not require the public to comprehend a new social reality with which they might not be comfortable (Rein & Schön). The obstacle of public

confusion can be surpassed by staying within a shared frame of reference during the policy change implementation process. An awareness of the power of the “epistemological relativism” that is maintained by acting within a shared frame of reference is vital to policy success (p. 148). Presenting a policy issue to “like-minded discussants” (MacRae, 1993, p. 291), i.e., parents and teachers who understand the issues with which their children deal everyday, is like preaching to the choir, and hence, less resistance can be expected. In fact, if an alternative pedagogy policy advocate can garner the support of like-minded “noninstitutional actors” (Cahn, 1995, p. 201) like parents, that advocate can then take the policy implementation a step further by creating a “discourse coalition” (Hajer, 1993, p. 43) that includes also teachers and school staff. It is perhaps the combination of institutional and noninstitutional actors in the policy implementation process that is the strongest coalition. Working through coalitions can create what Nagel (1995) calls “super-optimum solutions” which “simultaneously achieve otherwise conflicting goals” (p. 185). This win-win-win approach allows all stakeholders to come out ahead of even their own best expectations (Nagel). The synergy of a coalition creates an even better solution than any lone part of the group could hope to advance.

Dynamic Policy and the Unstoppable Equity-Focused Critical Mass

No policy lasts forever, hence, policy makers must learn to “build impermanently” (Katz, 1987, p. 119). Education policy, like all policy, is a process not a final solution. As Edelman (1995) notes, “final solutions are for dogmatists” (p. 384), but the “on-the-ground” principal can most readily adjust otherwise-perceived “dogmatic” solutions as issues evolve. Any new policy is really just “somebody’s next move” in an

endless game of policy adjustment (Stone, 1997, p. 259). And as Stone notes, “sophisticated policy analysis will try to anticipate how other players will move in response to a new policy” (p. 259). The local principal knows her or his community and student population. This knowledge is a great advantage in gaining support for new initiatives. As Anderson (2006) wisely notes, state education policy makers “must gain compliance from the target populations” (p.203) the policy is intended to impact. Otherwise, they greatly “increase the likelihood of slippage” (p. 203) of their policy goals back to the status quo.

As a direct implication of this study, prudent policy makers should also acknowledge the previously discussed critical mass of students, teachers, and administrators. Policy business-as-usual is no longer sustainable. Normative policy will be derailed by this critical mass if it does not accommodate it, at least partially. Though this critical mass does not yet constitute a national mood or trend, it is growing in “fertile ground” (Kingdon, 1995, p. 147). The participants in this study believe that this critical mass of individuals will soon be an “irresistible movement that sweeps over our politics and our society pushing aside everything that might stand in its path (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 1). The seed for change can come from anywhere, but as Kingdon notes, “the key to understanding its germination and growth is whether there is fertile ground or an initial receptivity to the ideas” (p. 147). A critical mass, though a minority at the moment, can affect majority change. Education policy makers would do well to heed Stone’s (1997) warning to anticipate the “bandwagon effect” (p. 24) that can occur when the populous begins to act collectively as a result of seeing a group gaining in popularity. People inherently want to support a winner, and critical masses have a way of turning

small movements into big revolutions, and once that revolution gains sufficient momentum, those on the periphery will jump on board in the interest of self preservation.

This impending revolution creates also an open “policy window” for veteran education policy makers who have been waiting for an opportunity to push their ready solutions (Kingdon, 1995, p. 203), and these “solutions” are not necessarily offered to solve the problems of those advancing the educational revolution, but instead serve to advance to ideological- or profit-driven desires of opportunistic entities. Hence, even seemingly helpful solutions should be viewed with skepticism. However, awareness of these policy problem freeloaders can provide an opportunity to turn the tables and use these less-than-sincere players to the advantage of the “revolutionary” cause.

Traditional Resistance to Changing Traditional Pedagogy

Of course, as is the case with all things conservative, even the most well-meaning conservative policy maker is understandably hesitant to break with established tradition, and traditional pedagogy is well-established. As noted above, it will take more than the scholarly debate to convince conservative policy makers to support alternative solutions like alternative pedagogies. Yet, advocates of alternative pedagogy can and should listen to those who oppose it, regardless if their opinion is negative at the outset. As Edelman (1995) notes, “pessimistic conclusions are disturbing but are not reasons for rejecting the premises from which they flow” (p. 384). Advocates for more progressive alternative pedagogies must convince those who doubt them to come to optimistic conclusions. A loyal opposition is vital to successful policy (Schattschneider, 1960). A critiqued alternative pedagogy will almost certainly be a better alternative pedagogy.

While teachers unions (or teacher organizations in non-union states) might also object to the increased influence of the principal with alternative pedagogical partnerships, this objection could be alleviated if the principal is careful to include the teachers in any process of change as suggested earlier by Leech and Fulton (2008).

It is also sometimes the case that principals stand in the way of teachers who attempt to make progressive change. Many teachers have experienced this principal resistance and they respond in kind.

Empowering teachers does not dissolve the authority or power of the principal and vice versa. Professional teachers may grumble and fight at the notion of change, but if they become invested in it, their resistance would be commensurately diminished.

Special interest groups are significant barriers to change, and a great variety of such groups stand in the way of pedagogical change. Returning to the notion of conflict, Schattschneider (1960) notes, “Nothing attracts like fight” (p. 1). According to Schattschneider, winning or losing a policy debate is based on a policy maker’s ability to get an audience involved. And, he contends that the “contagion of conflict” (p. 129) is the strongest creator of such involvement. Special interest groups are large block “audiences” that demand, and sometimes instigate, acknowledgement. Within public education, examples of such groups are: teachers unions, professional associations, parent organizations, advocacy institutes, etc. Other than occasional coherence on key policies (Cahn, 1995), special interests often compete with public interests; small coalitions compete with larger and more powerful corporate forces, and political parties compete with all others (Birkland, 2001). As Schattschneider notes, “Today the U.S. government itself competes for power” with other contending groups (p. 118).

Though it might seem less difficult to advocate for change that is in the “public interest,” the definition of the public interest is “highly variable depending on who is defining it” (Birkland, p. 22), and in the case of public education policy, sometimes the public does not know what is in its best interest. To complicate matters further, there are in fact multiple public interests levels, i.e., local, state, federal, international, etc. (Birkland), and any and all can be in conflict with the interest of public education at any given moment.

I believe I have established that conflict is inherent in all public policy activity, and conflict even exists within the individuals who make up that public. As the Schattschneider (1960) notes, “What people want more becomes the enemy of what people want less” (p. 68). On this point Schattschneider seems to disagree with Lowi (1995) who believes that policy is best understood as “cooptation rather than conflict or compromise” (p. 18). Schattschneider addresses the opposing entities of a policy contest rather than the end result of the debate. He notes that the interest on the winning side of a policy battle tends to become insular and does not express interest in external input. The losing interest, however, quickly seeks to widen the scope of the conflict by creating a larger audience such as garnering a larger audience by involving special interest groups. Another means is to involve media outlets that are often only too happy to distort the news in order to increase viewership (Birkland, 2001; Cahn, 1995; Iyengar & Kinder, 1995). Today, the means to “go public” (Schattschneider, p. 101) via an e-mail or Internet campaign has added greatly to the previously limited media outlets of newspaper, radio and television, and of course those options are exercised regularly by public education policy stakeholders.

Schattschneider (1960) suggests that “pressure system” (p. 32) groups such as political parties and special interest organizations are inherently built on, and channel, conflict. He contends that the exclusivity of special interest groups inherently and automatically creates conflict by excluding non-members. Schattschneider emphasizes that this pressure system (of “special” interests) is not accessible to 90% of the public. This lack of access illustrates the relatively small number of people who actually influence public education policy. Interestingly, Schattschneider put forth this illustration in 1960 when the number of special interest groups was much lower, and media outlets were fewer. Today the number of interest groups has increased exponentially, the percentage of the population with direct access to mass media has grown commensurately, so the circle of policy influence is considerably larger. Yet, the access to the pressure system of special interest groups is still limited to a small percentage of the total population that is affected by public education policy.

Schattschneider (1960) noted that special interest pressure groups tend to rationalize their interests as *public interests*; however, he also contends that this is plausible only if anyone can join the group. Once a group excludes particular individuals, which many do, the interest is no longer public. Special interest groups often attempt to divide the public in such a way that *the group’s* interest benefits. Many public interest groups see their mission as countering special interest groups (Birkland, 2001) just as critical alternative pedagogy advocates might see their mission as countering traditional pedagogy.

A heightened awareness of the impact that public and special interest groups can have on public education policy is vital, and in the end, many believe that public

education policy researchers also should be “guided less by contributing to the literature and more by contributing to liberation” (Dumas & Anyon, 2006, p. 167) which can be accomplished by assuring that their research actually has a positive impact on changing pernicious public educational policy. We have all read, ad nauseam, public education policy “innovations,” but these innovations can only be judged by the amount of immediate and tangible freedom that otherwise oppressed individuals experience as a result of it.

So, What Can Be Done Now?

The U.S. education system’s current hyper-focus on testing was set up, theoretically, to control quality. But, the question should be asked: is it in fact controlling mediocrity? Accountability measures certainly provide a generalizable macro snapshot evaluation of the current status of the particular student populations, and it is often broken down by region, district, or school. However, what this quantitative assessment mechanism does not provide is any substantive information about the intrinsically human factors that impact student performance. Those policy makers, who sincerely wish to remedy past injustices and on-going inequities, must supplement the existent assessment measures with qualitative evaluation. The quantitative evaluation numbers are clear: low SES, often minority, student populations are not performing at the level of middle- and upper-class students. That information has been plainly available for several decades. What has also been clear (to some) for decades is “why” these students are not performing at levels necessary for success after graduation. And, it is questionable if policy makers possess the resolve to comprehensively seek an answer. Instead, and perhaps though well meaning, many policy makers in the recent past have sought to

develop an understanding of the overly structured, overly discipline-based “pedagogy of poverty” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 180). This we-know-what-is-best-for-you “help” has not been well-received by low SES students because they are not a mono-culture awaiting a mono-solution. Deficit thinking-based reform only adds to the ill-conceived application of the one-size-fits-all pedagogy belief that caused many of the current performance deficits in the first place (Valencia, 1997).

Revised regulatory legislation is needed in order to require state education agencies to direct urban low SES population school principals to take advantage of alternative pedagogies like critical pedagogy. School principals can lead the way out of the perennially failing one-size-fits-all model of teaching and learning mindset and on to new levels of effectiveness that can be achieved with a new critical or alternative pedagogy. This study suggests that associate superintendents, principals, and teachers are willing. One principal in one school can set the example of positive change at the local level – change from the ground up. Once that change gets off the ground, it is more likely to continue to rise up and be noticed by public education policy makers.

As noted above, additional funding is not needed for this particular policy change. The application of a critical pedagogical philosophy will cost nothing more than the short amount of time needed to enlighten principals in the art of critical (or alternative) pedagogy and its benefits. Once the principals understand these more socially-, culturally-, and student-sensitive teaching and learning techniques, they can inspire teachers to use the techniques routinely in their classrooms. The new pedagogy will then become the educational philosophy of the school. Many teachers are already using alternative pedagogies, but they are restrained by fear of violating district and school

policy to go further. A directive from the legislature, through state education regulatory agencies, to the principals, and on to the teachers, would remove this restraint. Once a legislative policy directive has been issued, and the new policy implementation process begins, the principals and teachers who had been hesitant to adjust their pedagogical activities to their unique student populations would be free to do so. I am confident that the immediate results would encourage sustained use and future authorization that would support alternative school-specific pedagogy.

Now, and in the future, the findings of this study could be used in principal preparation and *inspiration* programs. Principal preparation can be addressed directly with innovative content, current research, etc., in principal preparation programs, but principal *inspiration* can be more difficult. Based on the results of this study, district leaders and teachers could advocate on behalf of a more critical pedagogy, use the findings from this study to support that advocacy, and inspire their subordinates to use such pedagogies in their schools.

Secondary teacher preparation programs too could be enhanced by the addition of more alternate pedagogical instruction. Though many states require several classes on pedagogy for teacher certification, others, like Texas for example, removed the pedagogy course work requirement in the mid-1980s. Pedagogy coursework should not only be required, but it should encompass a broad range of the alternative pedagogies that are often better suited for particular student populations.

The Societal Impact

While the impact of this study on public education policy is significant, its potential impact on social policy and society in general may be even greater. If public

schools begin to comprehensively develop critical thinking skills and critical consciousness in students in low SES communities, the effect on those communities would be profound. Conventional wisdom, and research studies (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2004; Kozol, 1992, Ladson-Billings, 1995), clearly suggest that as the percentage of the education and civic engagement levels go up, crime and unemployment statistics go down. This “side benefit” would be especially well received in low SES communities where crime and unemployment are often high, but improving the life circumstances of low SES marginalized populations will in turn benefit the more affluent bordering communities by reducing law enforcement expenditures while concurrently producing more qualified individuals for employment at above minimum levels.

As I have noted at length above, low SES student populations have been ill-served at best, and many would contend oppressed at worst, by the dominant middle- and upper-class populations that surround them. This is a systemic societal problem, but the middle- and upper-classes do not see it as *their* problem partly because they do not live it daily. Nonetheless, it is their problem, and if it is not addressed, it will only get worse. The dominant population cannot continue to support “the rhetoric of opportunity,” along with the “myth of meritocracy,” and falsely support both claims with a few exceptional students who manage to succeed in a system where such a disproportionate number of their colleagues fail (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 3).

Comprehensive implementation of alternative pedagogies that develop critical consciousness and critical thinking skills can only impact the whole of society positively. Yes, there is a certain segment of the population that fears the potential of competition

(ironically from those who are currently ill-equipped to compete). This is an understandable fear. The philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, believed that self-preservation is an inherent biological characteristic of human beings. However, he also believed that humans are social beings. The social “contracts,” to which humans have adhered for thousands of years, must be equitable if they are to be sustainable. Revolutions have resulted when segments of societies have been pushed beyond their tolerance levels. Though this study revealed hope for the future, that future has not yet been realized.

Those who advocate and employ critical pedagogy and critical consciousness development are pursuing both social equity and the cultivation of a strong individual intellect. As Kincheloe (2004) has noted, “Critical pedagogy is interested in the margins of society, the experiences and needs of individuals faced with oppression and marginalization” (p. 23). However, though it will lose some of its relative power and privilege, the *center* of society will also benefit as a result of the dispersion of critical alternate pedagogy and the development of critical consciousness and critical thinking in marginalized students. Critical consciousness development “fundamentally repositions students as actors and as contributors to the struggle for social change” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 13). Freire (1998) believed that critical consciousness was essential to the human condition and human development. Education’s primary mission should be human development.

The age-old cautionary ethical mantra in student development is: do no harm. What will result if we teach students to think about their thinking, to become aware of being aware, or to step back from their habits, biases, and knee-jerk reactions and question their assumptions? What harm could that do? How beneficial to society would

such open mindedness be? We can only imagine at this point, but that imagined world could become a reality if critical consciousness and critical thinking development are made part of the pedagogical activities through pedagogical partnerships between principals and teachers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential for critical thinking and critical consciousness development in low SES students through pedagogical partnerships between principals and teachers. The participants strongly suggested that such development is not only possible, but also desirable and vital. The key findings of this study were: all participants maintain very individual pedagogical philosophies; all participants were willing to partner pedagogically (some enthusiastically, some from a more measured position) if the school districts allowed the freedom to do so; no participant could name a district, state, or federal education policy that would help or hinder their pursuit of alternate pedagogies (other than standardized testing); all participants suggested the need to disrupt the complacency that is holding back students, teachers, and educational leaders. And finally, perhaps the most important finding in this study was that all participants believe that there is an equity-focused critical mass of students, parents, teachers, and educational leaders who finally cannot be stopped. Because of their perception of the unstoppable critical mass, all of these participants expressed optimism and hope for the future.

As educators, we must also ask ourselves: if students should begin to spontaneously think critically about us as their educators, would we pass muster? Asking the students to walk anew in their own shoes is the bottom line of critical consciousness

development. Putting ourselves anew in *our own* shoes must also follow. Many educators have figuratively put themselves in the shoes of marginalized students in an attempt to help through understanding. But, have they stepped back enough from their own worlds to gain sufficient understanding of those they are serving?

Although student, teacher and administrator complacency may be simply yet another mechanism of self-protection and self-preservation in a hostile world, especially for the low SES students, that complacency must be disrupted. Though this study did not determine if state policy makers in Texas would support such an endeavor, the individuals who currently labor in urban low SES Texas schools certainly support it, and they are willing to make reform happen if given the chance. Although this seemingly small representative sample of educators is reminiscent of David against Goliath, the critical mass factor also identified in this study suggests that these individuals might have more power than is readily evident in their numbers. In fact, as has been noted by Cross (2007) “the biggest and most long-lasting reforms... [in] education will come when individual faculty or small groups of instructors adopt the view of themselves as reformers within their immediate sphere of influence, the classes they teach everyday” (as cited in Tobias, 1990, p. 81). Principals should be encouraged to choose and participate in pedagogical practices that work for their specific student population. Teachers should be engaged by principals not only to work in partnership with their school leadership, but also to work more collaboratively with fellow teachers. Principals and teachers must learn to be open to alternatives from traditional practice because, as has been noted by musician and satirist, Frank Zappa, “without deviation from the norm,

progress is not possible” (Zappa & Occhiogrosso, 1990), and progress is vitally needed in the underdeveloped communities from which many low SES students come.

Several of the principals in this study alluded to the notion that if other principals could experience the students’ response to the elements of progressive critical pedagogy already employed in their schools, and if they could see the hope it provides for those students, the leaders would not hesitate to implement it more fully and comprehensively in their own schools. Maintaining hope is difficult, but it is necessary. As educators and citizens we should question the perpetuation of the status quo and the inequitable assignment of privilege in society that diminishes hope for so many (Freire, 1998).

The goal of a more critical pedagogy really is to create a more democratic classroom. As Pearl and Knight (1999) noted, “a democratic classroom is not treating all students exactly the same, nor is it seeking an equal result, only we must consider all students equally capable and hence encourage them equally” (p. 249), and that “equal encouragement does not require a change in policy or law” (p. 344).

Birkland (2001) notes that the traditional American notion of “equal opportunity for success, but no guarantee of equal outcomes” does not work when the opportunities provided to some individuals are inherently unequal themselves (p. 154). The notion of equity of outcomes is perhaps a more compelling notion toward which education policy could strive. State education systems must provide opportunities to all students who are willing to work hard to achieve success.

Developing a critical consciousness will allow students in marginalized and low SES classes to intervene in, and perhaps disrupt, the unjust world that they did not create. And, that disruption might allow yet one more student to advance. And, that

advancement, when broadly achieved, might disrupt the mindset of the middle- and upper-classes and convince them that allowing *and assuring* equitable educational outcomes for all members of society creates a more productive and livable society for all.

Appendix

Research Protocols for Disrupting Complacency Study

Interview Guide for Principals and Associate Superintendents:

- 1). How involved are you in the pedagogical (teaching and learning) practices of your School/district?
- 2). What is your overarching pedagogical philosophy?
- 3). How have you incorporated that philosophy into the teaching in your classrooms?
- 4). Describe how receptive teachers/principals are to your pedagogical guidance?
- 5). How do you maintain the momentum once you see your pedagogical plan is starting to function as you had hoped/planned?
- 6). How does a students' home life and/or the surrounding community factor into your decisions and planning for pedagogy?
- 7). How have you dealt with any potential student, teacher, and parental resistance or indifference to your pedagogical plan and directives?
- 8). How familiar are you with alternative, more critical pedagogy?
- 9). Would you consider integrating alternative pedagogical activity that has proved to be successful with a student population like yours?
- 10). Would you consider partnering purposely with teachers/principals to facilitate it?
- 11). Do you emphasize critical thinking skill development in students and if so, how?
- 12). What do you think about the notion of developing critical consciousness, a self-awareness, awareness of being aware... of economic, political, and social status... in your students?
- 13). What factors either support or stand in the way of using alternative or critical pedagogy in your school?
- 14). Can you talk about any state or local education policies the help or hinder your pursuit of advancing alternative pedagogical practices, critical thinking, and critical consciousness development?
- 15). With regard to the theme of these questions, and pedagogy in general, what questions would you like to answer that I have not asked? What comments would you like to add?

Interview Guide for Teachers:

- 1). How does your principal play a role in the pedagogy of your classroom?
- 2). What would a strong pedagogical partnership with your principal look like?
- 3). How familiar are you with alternative, more critical pedagogy?
- 4). How do you feel about alternative pedagogies in general?
- 5). What do you think about the notion of developing critical consciousness, a self-awareness, awareness of being aware... of economic, political, and social status... in students?
- 6). Can you think of any factors that help or hinder such development?
- 7). How do you feel about partnering pedagogically with your principal for such development? Is it possible?

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