JoLLE@UGA®
JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Trusting Students' Voices in Critical English Education

Charity T. Gordon

Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how secondary students at an urban high school perceived and experienced critical English education. This study is situated within a larger ethnographic study in which the researcher employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) orientation to collaborate with an English teacher who was implementing critical literacy in her classroom for the first time. Critical sociocultural theory provided a framework for understanding how students' words and actions shaped and were shaped by the classroom environment. Critical discourse analysis was used to interpret observational and student interview data that was collected across three school semesters from three different groups of students. Patterns in students' talk when sharing their perspectives on critical English education provide valuable insights on the affordances and challenges when enacting critical literacy in the secondary English classroom.

Keywords: critical English education, high school, urban education, students' perspectives

Charity T. Gordon is a post-doctoral scholar at Georgia State University with a Ph.D. in Teaching and Learning from the Language and Literacy Unit within the Department of Middle and Secondary Education Department. She was a high school English teacher for nine years in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Through her research and scholarship on critical literacy and teaching for social justice, she aims to promote educational equity and excellence in urban schools. Contact her at: charitygor@hotmail.com.

Introduction[1]

The classroom is one of the few places where ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse individuals with varying social identities, cultural practices, and political views all come together to accomplish shared academic goals. For this reason, the classroom can play a significant role in cultivating a critical democracy in which multiple perspectives contribute to the construction of knowledge. Specifically, teachers and students can construct knowledge about the world that challenges inequity, reflects diverse worldviews, and promotes a more equitable society. Unfortunately, schools do not always trust teachers and students to participate in the knowledge construction process for fear that learners will not arrive at sanctioned academic knowledge. As a result, these schools often rely on the "banking" model of education (Freire, 1970/2000) to transmit standardized knowledge to students, which inevitably undermines teachers' pedagogical expertise and narrows students' learning outcomes (Marshall, 2009).

In contrast to the banking concept, critical pedagogy centers around dialogue and trust as teachers and students critically analyze subject matter, collaboratively construct knowledge about the external world, and actively seek ways to improve the human condition (Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994). More specifically, through critical English education, teachers and students explore the historical and political contexts of literature, examine dominant ideologies underlying canonical texts, and create their own critical texts that advance social justice goals (Morrell, 2005). Essentially, the critical English classroom can put in motion the critical, democratic principles necessary for nurturing an equitable society.

I was drawn to critical pedagogy before ever reading any theories or research on the approach. I personally felt the impact of systemic inequity in my family, my community, and the urban high school where I taught English for almost a decade. I observed firsthand how inequities in our healthcare system, legal structures, and public schooling caused individuals that I cared deeply about to suffer or, worse, lose their lives. For example, I observed how economic and racial injustice played out in an urban school as my Black and Brown students received harsher discipline than their White counterparts for the same infractions within the same school district. When one of my students was shot and killed over the summer break, I began to explore ways in which my classroom practices could be used to critique systemic inequities and promote a safer and more equitable society. My experiences with social injustice created in me a passion for addressing these issues in the classroom, or what hooks (1994) describes as "the passion of experience" (p. 90). As a classroom teacher, I understood the importance of not only critiquing social inequities but also exploring ways to dismantle them. Through critical pedagogy, my students and I explored solutions to the real-world problems that we encountered on a regular basis.

In my classroom and in the research on critical pedagogy, students' personal stake in this approach to learning has often been viewed as a given (Janks, 2013; Morrell, 2005). Researchers often describe how teachers enact a critical approach, the affordances and constraints teachers face while implementing critical pedagogy, and/or the student learning outcomes. However, students' perspectives on

[1] I acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that I can use when referring to individuals in my writing. Throughout this article I use pronouns to refer to individuals that correspond with the pronouns that they use to refer to themselves.

critical pedagogy are rarely deeply explored. The instruction that takes place in critical English classrooms should be shaped by the voices of students for whom classroom instruction is meant to benefit. In this interview study, taken from a larger ethnographic study, in which the researcher collaborated with an English teacher who was implementing a critical English pedagogy in her classroom, I endeavor to include a wider range of perspectives when constructing knowledge about classroom practice. The present study was conducted in an urban English classroom, where the voices of historically marginalized Black and Latina/o youth were amplified not only in the classroom as students engaged in critical dialogue, but during interviews as students talked about their experiences with a critical approach to learning. The research question guiding this study was: What are students' perspectives on critical English education? During interviews, students shared vital perspectives on the affordances and constraints of a critical approach to learning.

"What are students' perspectives on critical English education?"

This study is grounded in three distinct bodies of work: critical sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy, and critical English education. These frameworks offer ways to think about and address issues of power in the classroom. In the sections that follow, I offer brief explanations of each.

Critical Sociocultural Theory

Critical sociocultural theory combines both sociocultural theory (Smagorinsky, 2001; Street, 1995; Vygotsky, 1962/2012) and critical theory (Apple, 2013; Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994) to make sense of how context shapes and is shaped by individuals and groups. By combining critical and sociocultural theories, critical sociocultural theory takes into account how the local context of the classroom reflects the dominant ideologies of the larger society.

Lewis and Moje (2003) extend critical sociocultural theory to include issues of identity, power, and agency within the sociocultural context. Regarding identity, the authors assert that "people enact a particular version of self that is appropriate to a time, space, relationship, or activity" (p. 1983). In the classroom, teachers and students enact particular identities that have been influenced by their lived experiences and that are continuously shaped by the present moment. Students also exercise agency through their "*strategic* making and remaking of selves; identities; activities; relationships; cultural tools and resources; histories" (Lewis & Moje, p. 1985, emphasis in original) during classroom discourse. Finally, during classroom interaction, power relations also come into play as students share interpretive authority and challenge dominant ideologies. Lewis and Moje explain that "power is produced and enacted in and through discourse, relationships, activities, spaces, and times as people compete for access to and control of resources, tools, and identities." (p. 1986).

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy provides a framework for teachers to address the sociocultural, sociohistorical, and sociopolitical contexts of academic knowledge during classroom instruction. This approach to learning is rooted in critical theory, which argues that there is no such thing as a neutral approach to education (Apple, 2013; Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994). Schools can either "perpetuate the needs of an unequal society through its reproduction of acritical students" (Gutiérrez & Larson, 1994, p. 23), or

schools can promote social equity by raising students' critical consciousness and nurturing praxis (Freire, 1970/2000). Freire defines praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). In other words, schools that nurture praxis identify problems in the real world and then take action to ameliorate them.

Critical pedagogy utilizes a multicultural curriculum, critical dialogue, and critical text production to equip students with the knowledge and skills to improve their realities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994; Morrell, 2003; Shor & Freire, 1987). First, through a multicultural curriculum, critical pedagogy provides students access to both dominant and historically excluded forms of knowledge. By providing access to diverse perspectives and knowledge forms, critical educators are able to present a fuller understanding of the power structures that exist in society, in order to combat systemic oppression (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013). Second, critical pedagogy encompasses dialogue, "where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it" (Shor & Freire, p. 13). Aukerman (2012) writes that the most popular critical approaches either situate the teacher as the authority, directing students toward predetermined outcomes, or situate students as authorities, often leading to acritical readings of texts. Aukerman argues for critical pedagogy that utilizes dialogic engagement, in which the teacher shares interpretive authority with students as they critically evaluate academic knowledge. Dialogue in the critical classroom entails multiple, contradictory perspectives on the same topic (Bakhtin, 1981). This dialogue is considered critical because it "reflects a view that knowledge and understanding come from testing evidence, analyzing ideas, and explaining values, rather than unquestioningly accepting somebody else's certainties" (Alexander, 2008, p. 32). Third, critical pedagogy not only entails the consumption of knowledge but also the production of critical knowledge (Morrell, 2003). Through critical text production, students are encouraged to communicate powerful messages to a broader world with the hopes of enacting positive social change.

Critical English Education

The English classroom is the perfect environment to enact critical pedagogy because English teachers can find language in virtually everything (Applebee, 2002). All manner of topics can be interrogated in English classrooms and in a variety of ways. Morrell (2005) writes, "critical English education encourages practitioners to draw upon the everyday language and literacy practices of adolescents to make connections with academic literacies and to work toward empowered identity development and social transformation" (p. 313). Drawing from critical pedagogy, critical English education provides students opportunities to explore diverse perspectives and knowledge forms and to produce critical texts that may potentially enact positive social change in their communities (Morrell, 2003, 2005). In critical English classrooms, dialogue and trust between teachers and students engaged in dialogue are central to increasing critical awareness and moving toward praxis (Freire, 1970/2000). Freire argues that without trust, intellectual freedom cannot exist and teachers potentially reinstate hegemonic practices that deny students access to certain knowledge forms. According to Freire, a trusting environment is one where students' voices are central to the learning process, where their lived experiences matter, and their perspectives are valued. Essentially, students' voices are vital to accomplishing the social justice goals of a critical English education.

Fueled by my passion to improve the social and academic outcomes of historically disenfranchised students of color in urban schools, I partnered with

an English teacher, and we decided to implement a critical approach to English instruction. However, a central question throughout this study was: Are students equally invested in this critical approach to learning? Rather than assuming that all students would benefit from critical pedagogy, this study explores students' perspectives on critical English education in an effort to construct more inclusive knowledge about this instructional approach. The literature on critical sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy, and critical English education helped frame the classroom instruction and research methods throughout this study. Both critical pedagogy and critical English education guided the instructional practices used in this study. Critical sociocultural theory was used to frame students' talk during class dialogue and during interviews. I used critical sociocultural theory to draw informed conclusions about how the immediate classroom context and the broader context of society might have shaped students' views on critical English education and vice versa. Through their talk, students enacted versions of their identities, demonstrated agency during class discussions and interviews, and disrupted traditional power relations by acting as partners in the construction of academic knowledge in the classroom and in the development of research knowledge about classroom practice.

Diverse Perspectives on Critical English Education

In my review of the literature, I examined empirical research on critical pedagogy in English classrooms and out-of-school contexts to understand how students' voices have been positioned in these spaces. To locate relevant literature, I searched for peer-reviewed articles in JSTOR, ERIC, and Google Scholar using the keywords "critical English education," "critical pedagogy," and "critical literacy." I then conducted a database search using the phrase "students' perspectives" and combined each of the aforementioned keywords with this phrase. I identified additional studies in reference sections that matched my search criteria. After reviewing the literature, I selected several studies that served as a good representation of the research on critical English education and students' perspectives on classroom instruction.

A growing body of research has explored critical approaches in English language arts classrooms (Aukerman, 2012; Flint & Laman, 2012; Gordon, 2017; Kinloch, 2012; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Singer & Shagoury, 2006) and in out-of-school contexts (Ball, 2000; Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016; Muhammad, 2015; Rogers, 2002; Sepúlveda, 2011). Many of these studies describe critical approaches to English education with diverse learners, primarily from the teacher's perspective. For example, Flint and Laman (2012) characterize the critical writing pedagogy of two elementary teachers by describing the tenets of critical literacy represented in their students' writing. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) present a unit implemented in a high school senior English course that used hip-hop music to develop students' literary interpretation and analysis, raise their critical awareness, and promote student agency. In another example, Singer and Shagoury (2005) describe a themed curriculum on social activism in a ninth-grade English classroom. The authors discuss a poetry workshop in which students produced texts that reflected their perspectives on social issues that were central to their lives. These studies demonstrate how critical pedagogy can be enacted in the English classroom and how it contributes to students' critical awareness and academic outcomes. However, these studies do not explore how students perceived this instruction.

Further, outside of the classroom, researchers have examined students' perspectives on a variety of

topics while enacting critical pedagogies. For instance, Muhammad (2015) explored the perspectives of eight African American girls participating in a summer critical literacy as they wrote about relevant, social topics related to their identities. In a similar study, Edwards et al. (2016) utilized a critical media pedagogy with Black girls to explore representations of Black women and girls in popular culture. In another example, Sepúlveda (2011) collaborated with a group of Mexican American boys who shared their perspectives on the topic of "border crossing" and produced texts that reflected their experiences and opinions on this subject. These studies make a strong case for student voice in critical education. For instance, Edwards et al. (2016) make the case that teachers should avoid co-opting students' voices when constructing knowledge about critical pedagogy. Instead, they encourage teachers to affirm student's voices, to connect instruction to students' lived experiences, and to allow students to name their realities. However, Edwards et al. (2016), Muhammad (2015), and Sepúlveda (2011) each examined students' perspectives on social issues rather than critical pedagogy itself. Still missing from the literature are students' perspectives on the affordances and limitations of implementing critical pedagogy in the English classroom.

"Student perspectives play a vital role in shaping educational policy and practices that affirm their ways of knowing and being and doing."

Student perspectives play a vital role in shaping educational policy and practices that affirm their ways of knowing, being, and doing. Cook-Sather (2002) called for educators and researchers "to count students among those who have the knowledge and the position to shape what counts as education" (p. 3). Cook-Sather argues that student perspectives can potentially help educators understand who students are as learners, help teachers understand how to make learning accessible, and bridge relations between communities and schools. Several studies have examined students' perspectives on their educational experiences (Alvermann et al., 1996; Behizadeh, 2014; Connolly & Smith, 2002; Edwards et al., 2016; Howard, 2001; Nieto, 1994; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Zoss, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007). In their research investigating 54 students' perspectives on schooling, Phelan et al. (1992) found that students and teachers generally agree on effective schooling. Students revealed that they need caring and knowledgeable teachers, active engagement, peer interaction, and a safe school environment. In Alvermann et al.'s (1996) study, five student focal groups from five middle and secondary English and social studies classes were interviewed about their experiences with class discussion. Students discussed the factors that contributed to productive discussions, the topics and instructional activities that made them want to participate, and the impact that class discussion had on their reading comprehension. In a study on authentic writing instruction, Behizadeh (2014) maintains that because of the subjective nature of authenticity, student perspectives on what makes instruction authentic, or connected to their lives, is crucial. Based on interviews with 22 middle school students, Behizadeh found that students choosing their own writing topic, having opportunities to share their work, and being able to focus on content and self-expression instead of conventions, all contributed to the authenticity of writing tasks. These studies demonstrate that students are highly capable of ascribing meaning to their experiences and naming the things that might advance their learning. However, the majority of the empirical

studies on students' perspectives did not focus on student experiences with critical pedagogy.

The research conducted by Howard (2001) was an exception. In Howard's study, the author interviewed 17 African American elementary students in four different elementary schools about what aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy enhanced their learning experiences. Culturally relevant pedagogy can be viewed as an extension of critical pedagogy because its goals include helping students become "academically successful, culturally competent, and sociopolitically critical" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pp. 477-478). Similar to the findings in Phelan et al.'s (1992) study, the elementary students in Howard's study said they learned best from teachers who cared about them as individuals, valued their cultural practices, and made the learning experience fun. Howard's study was, however, limited to elementary students, and while culturally relevant pedagogy does have a critical element, the students in this study did not share their perspectives on a critical approach to learning. Nevertheless, similarities amongst the studies that focus on students' perspectives contribute to understandings about the types of learning experiences that students benefit from the most. Still, too few studies have examined students' perspectives on critical pedagogies to be able to draw sound conclusions about how students are experiencing this particular approach.

The present study examines students' perspectives on critical English education in an urban, high school classroom. The broad nature of English language arts and the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity of students in urban schools (Milner & Lomotey, 2014) make the urban English classroom a rich environment for critical pedagogy. Culturally and linguistically diverse students experiencing critical pedagogy can shed light on the possibilities for this approach for a variety of student groups from diverse backgrounds. By examining the unexplored perspectives of urban youth, this study contributes to the existing literature on critical pedagogies, and it also provides implications for future research, teaching, and policy related to critical approaches to learning.

Methods

This study was drawn from a larger ethnographic study, in which I collaborated with an English teacher to implement critical pedagogy. The teacher and I believed that critical pedagogy could benefit students by increasing students' critical awareness, improving their academic outcomes, and promoting social action. However, I still wondered, what were students' perspectives on critical English education? To answer this question, I used methods from ethnography (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) to systematically observe classroom instruction and to interview students about their classroom experiences. Finally, I also transcribed, coded, and analyzed class discussions and interview data using critical discourse analysis (CDA) methods (Fairclough, 2015) to better understand teacher and student perspectives on critical English education.

I conducted the study with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) orientation, in which the researcher and participants act as equal partners as they apply solutions to problems in repeated cycles (Glassman & Erdem, 2014). Critical sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy, and PAR all work together to ensure the voices of participants are prominent throughout the entire research process. The students' voices both shaped and were shaped by the sociocultural context, their voices were centered during instruction and shaped the direction of classroom dialogue, and students' voices were brought front and center during interviews and played a pivotal role in the direction of the study. For three school semesters, or three PAR cycles, the teacher and I

Table 1

Student Participants

Pseudonym	PAR Cycle	Grade	Ethnicity/Race	Gender
Chris	1	12	Asian	Male
Cozie	1	12	African American	Female
Irma	1	12	Hispanic	Female
Katie	1	12	Hispanic	Female
Kierra	1	12	Hispanic	Female
Landon	1	12	Vietnamese	Male
Stephen	1	12	Hispanic	Male
Terez	1	12	Black	Female
Yasmin	1	12	Hispanic	Female
Alisha	2	12	Black	Female
Juanez	2	12	Hispanic	Male
Maya	2	12	Hispanic	Female
Meech	2	12	Black	Male
Nacia	2	12	Hispanic	Female
Nancy	2	12	Hispanic/Latino	Female
Vickie	2	12	Native American	Female
Wanda	2	12	Afro Latina	Female
Grace	3	12	Multi-racial	Female
Jurrell	3	12	Black	Male
Luz	3	12	Hispanic	Female
Messi	3	12	Hispanic	Male
Rose	3	12	Black	Female

enacted critical pedagogy as a "solution" to expand the learning opportunities and to improve the academic outcomes for urban youth. Employing a PAR orientation, I conducted research with the teacher and interviewed both the teacher and students at the end of each PAR cycle to inform our next steps. The teacher and I studied transcripts of class discussions to evaluate what worked and what didn't work for each PAR cycle. Student input was limited because we worked with a new group of students each semester. However, I interviewed students at the end of each semester about their experiences and what they thought could be improved. Ms. Cason and I modified lessons for each subsequent cycle based on observational data and student interviews.

Research Context and Participants

I conducted the research study at a large, urban, public high school in the Southeast United States from the spring of 2016 to the spring of 2017. The site for this study was purposefully selected because of its ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity. Based on the goals of this study, I viewed such diversity as a valuable resource because of the potential for varied viewpoints during critical dialogue and during teacher and student interviews about classroom instruction. The school consisted of mostly Latina/o (59%) and Black (32%) students during both 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. Additionally, 83% of the school's population was eligible for free and reduced lunch. Many of the students in the school also spoke multiple languages

and dialects. For example, close to 20% of the school's population were in the English Language Learner (ELL) program. Over half of the students participating in this study spoke at least two languages, including Spanish, French, Vietnamese, and Mam, to name a few. The high school in which the study took place was on a block schedule, in which students attended four 90-minute classes each day for a semester.

I purposefully selected the teacher in this study, Ms. Cason (all names are pseudonyms), based on her willingness to use critical English education. Ms. Cason identified as a Black woman, held a Master's degree and, at the time of the study, had 19 years of teaching experience. Ms. Cason believed that knowledge is socially constructed and that students need opportunities to engage in critical dialogue in order to evaluate existing academic knowledge in context. Even though the school overall was a high-stakes environment, where school administrators often heavily emphasized the importance of improving test scores and the school's graduation rate, Ms. Cason had relative curricular freedom in her classroom because her courses were not associated with any high-stakes exams.

A total of 21 high school seniors (see Table 1) in Ms. Cason's classes volunteered to talk about their experiences with critical English education. Before each interview, students provided pseudonyms and identified information about themselves, including their grade level, race, and gender. I was also able to learn more about the students through informal conversations before and after class and during my class observations in which I was an active participant, serving as a second teacher in the classroom.

Data Collection

The data sources that I gathered for this study included: 1) lesson plans; 2) observational field notes supported by audio recordings of class discussions; 3) transcripts of class discussions 4) student assignments; 5) teacher and student interviews. While lesson plans and student assignments were not formally analyzed for this particular study, I used them to provide the instructional context for the study and support my understandings of how students perceived critical English instruction.

Observations. I regularly observed three of Ms. Cason's 90-minute classes across three school semesters for a total of 67.5 hours. In the spring of 2016, I observed Ms. Cason's AP Language class, and during the fall of 2016 and the spring of 2017, I observed Ms. Cason's Multicultural Literature classes. During my observations, I actively participated, audio recorded, and took detailed ethnographic field notes.

Interviews. I interviewed 21 students about their experiences in Ms. Cason's class. I asked students to respond to three prompts, and each interview lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes per student. I asked students to 1) describe their experiences with critical English education, 2) to share their opinions about the instructional approach, and 3) to give advice on how teachers could best meet students' learning needs in the future. I then ended each interview by asking students if they had any additional comments they would like to share. The interviews were open-ended so that students could share as much as they wanted about their classroom experiences. I also encouraged students to elaborate on their ideas when necessary. Individual student interviews took place in Ms. Cason's classroom outside of instructional time. A total of eight students volunteered for interviews during the first PAR cycle, eight students volunteered during the second

PAR cycle, and five students volunteered during the third PAR cycle. I audio recorded and transcribed each interview. I analyzed the observations and interviews in three distinct phases to understand how students perceived classroom instruction in Ms. Cason's class.

Lesson plans and student assignments. Lesson plans and student assignments (See Appendix A) served as secondary data sources, providing the instructional context that students experienced and then discussed in subsequent interviews. At the beginning of the study, Ms. Cason and I explained terms such as critical literacy and dialogic pedagogy to students. Ms. Cason and I also spent a considerable amount of time at the beginning of each semester exploring students' life experiences through an autobiography project, teaching students about critical approaches using Deborah Appleman's (2015) critical lenses and establishing historical and political contexts of the anchor texts using the PBS documentary *Chicano!* (Ruiz, 1996) and Ava DuVernay's (2016) documentary *13th*. We collaborated with students to create guidelines for class dialogue and then engaged in critical discussions, applying various critical lenses to video clips, articles, poems, and short stories. We then read the anchor texts, Josefina Lopez's play *Real Women Have Curves* (1995) and Ta-Nehisi's memoir *Between the World and Me* (2015). Ms. Cason and I selected these texts because the authors explore several social issues and apply a critical lens to understand these issues. The texts served as models for students and provided students with ideas on how they might take action on issues that were relevant to their own lives. As we read, we critically examined social issues that impact historically marginalized Latina/o and Black communities in the U.S. We drew on previous texts and discussions as we engaged in critical dialogue on topics presented in the anchor texts. Class dialogue remained open-ended as the teacher, students, and I critically explored all aspects of each discussion topic. Finally, students produced their own critical texts centered on a social issue that resonated with them.

"We collaborated with students to create guidelines for class dialogue and then engaged in critical discussions, applying various critical lenses to video clips, articles, poems, and short stories."

Data Analysis

The first phase of data analysis involved open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) transcripts of interviews and class discussions. During the open coding phase, I selected segments of data that represented a single idea and then created descriptive codes about what was happening in these segments. Through open coding, I identified 56 themes that represented students' experiences with critical English instruction. These codes included: analyzing texts, broadening worldviews, considering student interest, developing personal ideologies, discussing social issues, preferring critical dialogue, utilizing funds of knowledge, and valuing multiple perspectives.

Next, I examined transcripts a second time using axial coding to find similarities amongst the codes. During axial coding, I used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) method of "constant comparison" and created categories for groups of interrelated codes. I collapsed the initial 56 codes into seven general categories that related to the theoretical framework and illustrated students' perspectives on classroom instruction. These categories entailed Lewis and Moje's (2003) three frames for critical sociocultural theory: identity, agency, and power. Additional categories included students' perspectives on: topics

and texts, content mastery, collaboration, and the teacher's role. Appendix B outlines the frequencies of all the codes generated during data analysis, the categories under which they fell, and examples of each code.

The third and final phase of data analysis entailed selective coding, in which I interpreted select interview excerpts for each category. I selected excerpts based on how frequently codes overlapped. For example, across the 21 student interviews, the code "valuing multiple perspectives" appeared 43 times. Next, I read each segment in which this particular code appeared and, using an inductive analytic approach, determined the central idea that students discussed about "valuing multiple perspectives." For this code, the majority of students asserted that they learned from the perspectives of others, so this assertion became the central idea for the code. I chose excerpts across all three PAR cycles that provided the richest data about the central assertion. For instance, I chose excerpts in which the student interviewees spoke for an extended time about valuing multiple perspectives, provided examples from classroom practice, and shared their opinion of this aspect of critical English education. I then used tools from Fairclough's (2015) CDA to analyze the vocabulary, grammatical features, text structure, and context of students' words as they discussed their experiences with critical English pedagogy. First, I analyzed the formal properties of student talk. That is, I studied how vocabulary, grammar, and text structure were used to convey meaning. Next, I used CDA to analyze social interaction in the classroom. Importantly, I wanted to see how interpretive authority was shared, how conflicts arose and were resolved, and how consensus was reached. Finally, I used CDA to interpret how classroom talk related to the broader context of the school and society. Tools from CDA were also useful in framing issues of identity, agency, and power (Lewis & Moje, 2003). I organize my findings around the central assertions for codes that appeared most frequently within each category across all student interviews.

Findings

During interviews, students provided insights on several topics in critical English education. I used critical discourse analysis to interpret the central idea reflected in the statements that each student made. For each topic that students discussed, I generated a key assertion. Each assertion represents shared student perspectives on a particular topic in critical English education. The seven assertions that I present in my findings are as follows: 1) Students learned from the perspectives of others; 2) Learning topics should be relevant to students' lives. 3) Teachers should consider student identity; 4) Students became more critically aware of power relations; 5) Critical dialogue deepened students' understandings; 6) Students demonstrated agency beyond the classroom; and 7) Teacher involvement is necessary. Each assertion is supported by student interviews across all three semesters. I selected a number of excerpts that represent each assertion, and I interpreted how the sociocultural context potentially shaped student participation in critical English pedagogy.

Students Learned from the Perspectives of Others

The majority of students interviewed asserted that they learned from the perspectives of others. The code "valuing multiple perspectives" appeared in 18 out of 21 student interviews. It was also the most frequently occurring code across all semesters. After learning about critical lenses (Appleman, 2015), students were given several opportunities throughout the semester to critically evaluate class texts, to make personal and real-world connections, and to engage in dialogue with the rest of the class

(See Appendix A). 10 students discussed the tensions that arose when navigating diverse viewpoints. For example, Juanez shared, "some people get really offended when they hear other people's perspective" (interview, December 2, 2016). Meech made a distinction between arguing and having dialogue, explaining "You won't learn when people arguing" because "you only trying to prove your point and your point only" (interview, December 2, 2016). Meech was referring to exchanges, such as the heated debate he initiated about then president-elect, Donald Trump. When Meech stated that he would rather a president openly declare controversial views on race and immigration, like Donald Trump had done, Meech felt that his classmates attacked his ideas and were not open to hearing him out (field notes, November 11, 2016). This particular conversation stemmed from a discussion about the political, historical context, and cultural context of the book *Between the World and Me*.

"I found that even though students pointed out tensions while navigating critical conversations, they largely talked about the positive effects of listening to diverse viewpoints."

Students made real-world connections to the presidential race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, which was taking place at the time of study. Meech's statement highlights the importance of having an open mind during dialogue, an opinion shared by several other students interviewed. Through careful analysis, I found that even though students pointed out tensions while navigating critical conversations, they largely talked about the positive effects of listening to diverse viewpoints. Wanda explained, "it's uncomfortable when you speak up about issues that not everybody wants to speak about. It brings out very different perspectives, and that's important" (interview, December 2, 2016). Wanda believed that although hearing different perspectives on an issue may cause discomfort, it is still an important part of the learning experience. Chris shared that he felt more at ease speaking with his peers versus talking directly to the teacher about his opinions (interview, May 16, 2016). Landon shared, "Everyone who puts their input in, someone learns something new as we discuss" (interview, May 16, 2016). Vickie expressed, "it helped me look at other people's point of views besides my own" (interview, December 2, 2016). These comments highlight how multiple perspectives during class discussion broadened students' understanding of the world around them. Kierra offered the following explanation:

> I feel like class discussion should be utilized in education instead of testing because it allows students to have a different perspective, and it being so structured and making someone think one way, it should be—I think education should be more centered on learning from other people and learning different perspectives and applying them toward how did you read the text in terms of how I felt about it. (interview, May 16, 2016)

In her response, Kierra started out by dichotomizing class discussion and testing. She stated that class discussion should be used *instead* of testing rather than in conjunction with testing, demonstrating her preference for class discussion. Kierra elucidated that the structure of testing promotes "one way" of thinking whereas class discussion encourages multiple ways of thinking about a text. Her words support classroom interaction in which interpretive authority is shared by all members of the class. Kierra also recognized how the broader context of society shapes what happens in the local context of

the classroom by describing education in general. By describing how education *should* be, Kierra was also critiquing the current state of education, which, in her experience, had promoted a monolithic view of the world. Additionally, classroom dialogue provides teachers opportunities to know their students and cultivate learning activities that connect to their lived experiences.

Learning Topics Should Be Relevant to Students' Lives

There were 51 codes related to the learning topics and texts that students preferred. Out of the 21 students interviewed, six students said that learning topics should be relevant to their lives, five students said that learning topics should be based on current, real-world events, and 13 students preferred discussing social issues. It was not surprising that when I asked students to talk about their experiences with a critical approach, several of them mentioned topics related to social issues. The code "discussing social issues" appeared in the data 20 times.

This was to be expected because the teacher and I intentionally used social issues texts to spark critical conversations. We chose the texts *Real Women Have Curves* (Lopez, 1995) and *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015) as anchor texts because they offered diverse perspectives on gender, race, and social class that we knew would encourage debate. However, what is noteworthy is that most of the students said they enjoyed the robust discussions on social issues, such as race, gender, and social class. For instance, when asked to elaborate on the specific topics he liked, Chris stated he really enjoyed talking about "What's going on like racism and anything like that. Economic stuff. Just problems in the world, like society stuff" (interview, May 16, 2016). Terez and Messi noted that the primary reason they liked talking about issues such as racism and immigration laws was because they had a personal stake in these issues and felt passionately about them. Further, Rose and Terez cited specific social issues texts that they enjoyed discussing, including *Between the World and Me*, *Real Women Have Curves*, "Nina Simone's Face" (Coates, 2016), and "On Dumpster Diving" (Eighner, 1992). These texts explored a range of social issues from race and gender to immigration policy and social class. Kierra explained:

> In order to make someone participate more, I feel like you have to have a topic that they're interested in and that just goes back to having something that connects with their life. Everyone's life is different, but I feel like in order to have people more into the discussion, it has to be something about what is going on today. A lot of students just disconnect with history books or a lot of students disconnect with fictional texts because it's not something they live or—it's not something that connects with their life so they're uninterested. It's just like when they read it, they're like, "I'm not reading this." They feel like it's more a chore than, you know, actually learning something. (interview, May 16, 2016)

Kierra explained that when students cannot personally connect to learning topics, that it feels more like a "chore" and less like "actual learning," which illustrates a view that authentic learning is inextricably linked to students' curiosity in relevant topics. Ms. Cason created a learning experience in which the learning purposes aligned with the needs and interests of her students. When discussing relevant topics with students, teachers should also take into account student identity.

Teachers Should Consider Student Identity

During interviews, students shared that class discussion provided them with an outlet to represent their identities and develop their personal ideologies. The tensions and conflicts during class discussion created rich learning experiences and shaped student identity (Lewis & Moje, 2003). When asked what advice they would give teachers, 12 out of 21 students stated that teachers should consider student interest when creating lessons. When I asked Wanda to elaborate on why teachers should consider student interest, she explained:

> It has to do with us. Just like when we learn in biology or anything, any other stuff that we learn in school really, we can always just take it back and use it on our own, and so understanding these things helps us understand ourselves and others better and that way we approach things in a different way. (interview, December 2, 2016)

Wanda's comments emphasize the role of identity during the learning process. First, she explained that all learning should be both relevant and useful to students, not just in the context of the classroom, but also outside of the classroom, or "on our own." She also speaks to the importance of being able to understand oneself and others as a result of classroom learning. Wanda's words suggest that the classroom can be a space that shapes and is shaped by student identity.

Through classroom discourse, students at times positioned themselves in a way that contrasted with dominant ideologies. Ten students discussed how critically analyzing topics either helped strengthen their ideologies or caused them to shift their thinking. As an example, Juanez revealed that the audiovisual content, readings, and discussions on homelessness during the course shaped his personal ideology:

> Well the good things about the class discussions, I guess, when we saw the video about the homeless guy, and a lot of people were saying, "There's jobs everywhere." But there was a lot of people saying that it depends on the community you live in, and for me that was true, it does depend on where you live. Because if you live in the city, you can't just go to the gas station and get a job like you would here. (interview, December 2, 2016)

During the particular discussion that Juanez references in his interview, Ms. Cason and I asked students to share their opinions on homelessness before reading the text "On Dumpster Diving" (Eighner, 1992). Before reading, two students shared the opinion that homelessness was a result of laziness and, as an example, explained how people in their community can just go to the gas station and ask if anyone needs help with painting or construction (field notes, November 2, 2016). Ms. Cason and I then showed a YouTube video of an interview with a homeless man who described how he lost his job and ended up on the streets. Students then read Eighner's text describing a similar experience. Several students changed their views on homelessness as a result of the subsequent dialogue. Juanez contended that this ideological shifting amongst his peers was one of "the good things" about a critical approach to learning. He identified the diverse viewpoints presented during the discussion that some student had not considered before. Juanez recognized how geographic location may limit a person's access to social goods in society. This recognition was an important first step of Juanez becoming critically aware of certain social conditions in society.

Students Became More Critically Aware of Power Relations

Nearly half the students interviewed for this study described an increased critical awareness of the external world. Juanez, for example stated, "it opened my eyes to more things, like now if I see something… I look at it from a different perspective than I used to" (interview, December 2, 2016). Alisha added, "it just showed me into detail about how the world could be" (interview, December 2, 2016). Yesenia described how her critical awareness of the external world increased after discussing the topic of race in the U.S. She explained, "your eyes open up more and you can see the reality" (interview, May 3, 2017). Kierra shared, "I just take it into my own hands to learn the things I want to learn, not just what people tell me I should learn" (interview, May 16, 2016). By contrasting her learning goals with the school's learning goals, Kierra established a power dynamic between what she wanted to know and what those in power wanted her to know. She then demonstrated agency by choosing to take control over her learning instead of accepting sanctioned academic knowledge at face value. She also ascribed agency to academic knowledge, defining it as what *people* believe she should learn. Although she did not specifically identify or name those in power, Kierra still recognized that academic knowledge had been socially constructed by individuals in power and that this sanctioned knowledge did not represent an indisputable truth.

When asked to describe her experiences with critical English education, Rose also indicated an increased critical awareness, stating, "I can't even watch TV normal no more" (interview, May 3, 2017). I then asked Rose if that was a good or bad thing. She replied:

> I feel like kids should learn that. I started learning that in eighth grade in history class, because I had a teacher, [name omitted], she said, "They don't teach us a lot of things that we need to learn, and then we walk around basically ignorant without knowing the truth," so she told us and then ever since then I just started seeing things differently. This class helps a lot, because you guys teach us like… You show us different things, you show us articles and videos, and then we discuss, and then everybody else sees. You know, how other people's opinions actually impact other people? So, I think that helps a lot. (interview, May 3, 2017)

"Rose's experiences with critical pedagogy in the past and in the present study helped her recognize power relations in educational settings and provided her access to diverse knowledge forms."

In her statement, Rose first avowed that raising students' critical awareness was a necessity. Rose then revealed that even though the learning opportunities in Ms. Cason's class contributed to her critical consciousness, her critical awareness of power relations in society began in middle school. Rose, then a high school senior, was able to rearticulate the words of her middle school teacher, which demonstrates the long-term impact a critical education can have on a student's life. Rose then compared her middle school experience with Ms. Cason's critical instructional approach, citing the variety of knowledge forms that were used in the course and the multiple perspectives during class discussion as factors that shaped her critical awareness of the external world. Borrowing from the words of her middle school teacher, Rose intimates that certain knowledge forms have been historically excluded in school settings. Rose's experiences with

critical pedagogy in the past and in the present study helped her recognize power relations in educational settings and provided her access to diverse knowledge forms. Diverse perspectives and knowledge played a pivotal role in deepening students' understanding of subject material.

Critical Dialogue Deepened Students' Understandings

A number of students asserted that engaging in critical dialogue deepened their understandings of curricular content. Five students said dialogue improved their comprehension of texts while three students spoke in more general terms and said classroom dialogue helped them understand concepts. For instance, Katie admitted, "it's sort of somewhat difficult to understand certain things, so I might need other people's help in order to understand it more" (interview, May 16, 2016). Stephen felt more comfortable trying to understand topics in a dialogic setting, stating, "It's open. No one judges you or nothing. It's very—it allows students to comprehend stuff. You kind of find a simpler way of understanding topics" (interview, May 16, 2016). Wanda agreed that multiple perspectives broadened her understanding of subject material, explaining, "I think it helps us really develop the skill of really trying to thoroughly understand things. Not just seeing it from one perspective but from many perspectives" (interview, December 2, 2016). Vickie elaborated on this idea:

> I think that's important because when you're looking at something you should be able to analyze it and look at it from all points of views, so it doesn't look like it's just your opinion and—I don't know. So, you can look at it at all point of views and get a better understanding for yourself and for the people who are reading whatever you're talking about or whatever you're writing. (interview, December 2, 2016)

Vickie shared the belief that multiple viewpoints contribute to deeper understandings of topics and texts. She believed the result of examining content from multiple perspectives is a better understanding for both readers and writers. She argued that individuals should avoid analyzing content from a single point of view. Across several interviews, students often juxtaposed their preference for dialogic learning with a disinclination for monologic teaching, or instruction that promoted a single or dominant viewpoint. They understood the importance of understanding both dominant and historically excluded knowledge forms and exercised agency in seeking out answers to critical questions not provided in educational settings.

Students Demonstrated Agency Beyond the Classroom

Each semester at least one student mentioned how the lessons learned in Ms. Cason's class extended beyond the four walls of her classroom. Students demonstrated agency when discussing their ability to effect change in their personal lives and communities. During the first semester, Kierra stated, "I like to use literature in order to make a difference. I think every time I read a book, I try to apply it to like—especially like the positive parts, to my real life" (interview, May 16, 2016). The second semester, Wanda shared, "Listening to other people speak about things kind of… It changed my perspective on some parts or made me research more or question my own beliefs" (interview, December 2, 2016). The third semester, Jim shared that as a result of one of the critical conversations on social class, he felt compelled to give a homeless man five dollars. Ms. Cason asked him what part of the conversation moved him to take action, and he responded, "It was when you Ms. Gordon said

'people are valuable whether they have money or not'" (field notes, February 3, 2017). These statements demonstrate how students' ideological development was often linked to taking action on a personal or local level. Students also expressed aspirations to take action on a broader scale. For example, the third semester, Messi stated:

> I would say that in this class I realized to become a lawyer, which is my passion before, but in this class I know where the racism exists, where it starts, are we able to end it or not. So, about the law; are we able to change laws or we can't. But in this class I have learned so many things, which in my opinion, now in the future I am going to change the law with immigration issues. (interview, May 3, 2017)

Messi explained that while reading *Real Women Have Curves* (Lopez, 1996), he gained a better understanding of the racial context of immigration laws, which helped him redefine his career goals. Messi had immigrated to the U.S. two years prior to the study and endured mistreatment based on his undocumented status. In his comments, Messi expressed a passion to pursue social justice and transform what he believed to be unjust immigration laws. He demonstrated agency beyond the context of the classroom and the present study. Ms. Cason's critical approach not only advanced his learning, but inspired Messi to take social action, which points to the important role of the teacher in critical English education.

Teacher Involvement Is Necessary

Finally, during each interview, I asked students to discuss what they thought teachers could do to increase student participation in the future. There were 12 codes related to teacher involvement. Students believed teachers should use their pedagogical expertise to make learning fun, discuss relevant topics, and establish classroom norms to maximize learning opportunities. Meech, Kierra, Jurrell, Luz, and Vickie each believed class discussions could be more productive with teacher involvement and discussion norms. They resented being interrupted or listening to a single student dominate the conversation and felt the teacher should facilitate class dialogue to avoid these issues. A number of students believed that teachers could use their pedagogical expertise to make content interesting and relatable to students. Grace advised teachers to "get to know each student to know where their interesting points are at" (interview, May 3, 2017). As Stephen put it:

> To me, like how we learn best, it depends also on the teacher. You have the curriculum, but I also understand that you can't be robotic about it. You have to make it fun. You have to kinda—not bend it, but find a way to target people. Like a fun way to kind of make it interesting. Normally teachers that I've had, they make it interesting, and that makes me want to learn. If it's more like we're going to have point A and point B, keeping it simple, it's kind of boring. (interview, May 16, 2016)

Stephen characterized a "robotic" teacher as one who strictly followed the mandated curriculum and did not exercise individual creativity. He encouraged teachers to be flexible when enacting curricula and to find ways to actively engage students in the learning process. Just as Stephen drew from his past experiences with teachers who motivated him, many students who interviewed for this study often drew from the authority and passion of their own personal experiences (hooks, 1994) to support their claims. Their words are also supported by the existing literature on teaching, learning, in addition to critical and dialogic pedagogies.

Discussion

In this study, students' perspectives were central to understanding the process and outcomes of a critical English education. The 21 high school seniors interviewed for this study provided teachers with understandings of how students can 1) learn from the perspectives of others; 2) connect to relevant learning topics; 3) shape their identities through class dialogue; 4) increase their critical awareness of power relations in society; 5) deepen their understandings of curricular content; 6) demonstrate agency inside and outside of the classroom; and also 7) how teachers can facilitate more productive classroom discussions. Students' words align with the existing literature on teaching and learning within critical, educational spaces, which demonstrates that they are highly capable of ascribing meaning to their experiences. The information students shared in interviews provide valuable insights that may positively shape future classroom practice and research.

"Students shared interpretive authority with the teacher and often decided on the direction of class discussions."

Despite decades of research that suggests that students benefit from studying a multicultural curriculum, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and sharing their work with an audience (Behizadeh, 2014; hooks, 1994; Howard, 2001; Muhammad, 2015; Shor & Freire, 1987; Ladson-Billing, 1995), research has also shown that students in urban schools still do not have as many of these learning opportunities as students in other locales (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Similarly, the urban youth interviewed for this study previously had few opportunities to engage in critical and dialogic pedagogies in their classes. Only Rose was able to point to one of her middle school teachers who used critical pedagogy. The urban school where the study took place had been labeled as underperforming by state measurements, which led to a school-wide agenda to improve standardized test scores and the school's graduation rate. Students' classroom experiences typically centered around test-driven instruction with little room for extended dialogue and interrogating diverse perspectives. Lewis and Moje (2003) maintain that power relations influence classroom discourse, relationships, the classroom environment, in addition to the time allotted to educational activities. Gutiérrez and Larson (1994) also argued that students are "socialized *to* particular forms of discourse and interaction as well as socialized *through* the discourse of the classroom" (p. 26). In my personal experiences as an urban classroom teacher, I have found that standardized curricula and testing often take precedence over culturally relevant, critical pedagogies. When teachers do relate subject material to students' lives or discuss social issues, it is often done perfunctorily or as a gateway into the topics that school officials deem important. Aukerman (2012) argues that critical pedagogy is often directed towards outcomes predetermined by the teacher rather than dialogically organized around topics relevant to students' lives.

In contrast, the critical English pedagogy utilized in this study was firmly rooted "in the culture, language, politics, and themes of the students" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 18). Student interviewees expressed that they were personally invested in learning topics because they could relate them to their lived experiences and personal knowledge. Students' responses align with the existing literature that underscore the importance of centering instruction around students' lives. hooks (1994) contends that students "seem more eager to enter energetically into classroom discussion when they perceive it as

pertaining directly to them" (p. 87). Dewey (1938) also maintains that experiences that capture students' interests have the ability to propel their learning forward because they will be driven by curiosity and excitement about subject matter. By understanding how to connect learning to students' lives, teachers can create authentic learning experiences that pique student interest and cultivate deeper levels of intellectual thought.

Importantly, students were trusted to participate in the construction of knowledge. Just as the students interviewed for this study suggested, scholars such as Freire (1970/2000) and hooks (1994) posit that it is imperative that educators make students an integral part of the learning experience. Students shared interpretive authority with the teacher and often decided on the direction of class discussions. Further, Lewis and Moje (2003) put forth that when students re-contextualize texts and frame them using their own lived experiences, "the participant becomes a knowledgeable and motivated reader and the text becomes a legitimate object of analysis" (p. 1981). Through critical dialogue, the teacher, students, and I explored each object of study by "abstracting it from its familiar surroundings and studying it in unfamiliar critical ways, until our perceptions of it and society [were] challenged" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 18). Students revealed that this type of instruction advanced their learning, increased their critical consciousness, and inspired them to transform their material realities.

Furthermore, through a multicultural curriculum, students were exposed to dominant and historically excluded knowledge forms that represented a more complete comprehension of reality. For example, each semester before Ms. Cason and I discussed the historical and sociopolitical context of the play *Real Women Have Curves* (Lopez, 1996), we asked each class of high school seniors if they had ever heard of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement or the Chicano Movement. Across all three semesters, there were no students who raised their hands. This example serves as evidence that certain knowledge had been excluded from the sanctioned curriculum, which limited students' opportunities to understand the perspectives of historically marginalized cultural groups. Several students shared that they learned a great deal from encountering diverse, cultural perspectives, such as the stories of the Latina/o leaders of the Chicano Movement. Many of the students interviewed said they saw the world differently as a result of the multicultural curriculum used in Ms. Cason's classroom. They also revealed that they developed broader understandings of the world by listening to the diverse viewpoints of their classmates.

As students shared their perspectives during class dialogue, they noticed commonalities and patterns amongst their experiences and were able to theorize about why these experiences were taking place. For example, they understood the gravity of mass incarceration while discussing the documentary *13th* (DuVernay, 2016). Students realized that almost every Black student in their class had a family member who had been incarcerated for a nonviolent crime. They noticed that almost every Black male in the class had a probation officer. As students watched the documentary about mass incarceration, they were able to draw conclusions about the role that the broader context of society had on their individual lives and communities. In effect, students became critically aware of the power relations within U.S. society and how the culture of power had shaped their realities.

Additionally, students confirmed that the learning experience was inextricably linked to their identities. Treating students as if they are simply minds to be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994) sends the message to students that their experiences, their emotions, and

their personal and cultural values are not important to the learning experience. On the contrary, validating students' personal and cultural identities is a crucial first step in advancing their learning and increasing their critical awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). During interviews, students repeatedly expressed how they felt it was important for the teacher to consider them as whole human beings, and to engage them in learning topics they felt passionately about. Lewis and Moje (2003) wrote that, in the classroom, students perform "their identities moment-to-moment, shifting and destabilizing classroom power relations" (p. 1981). As students came into contact with different worldviews, they were often challenged to evaluate their personal ideologies and, at times, shift their thinking. For example, Jim and Juanez changed their views on homelessness, and Messi decided on a career in immigration law that would enact positive social change in his community. As Lewis and Moje (2003) put forth, students exercised agency through the "making and remaking" of their identities (p. 1985).

Throughout the study, rather than being viewed as receptacles waiting to be filled with knowledge, students were positioned as critical agents who evaluated existing knowledge, constructed new knowledge, and embodied social action inside and outside of the classroom space (Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994). These are important skills needed for a critical, multicultural democracy. Because most students in the study had prior experience with social inequities, they welcomed the opportunity to discuss topics such as racial justice, immigration, and mass incarceration. Students who have had experience with injustice need little convincing of the importance of critiquing an unequal society. I recognize this as a limitation of the study because, in my experiences as a teacher and teacher educator, not all students are as receptive to such critical conversations. Students from more socially and economically privileged backgrounds with little firsthand experience with injustice may be more reluctant to relinquish their own social privileges to promote social justice for others. More research is needed to explore the experiences of other students across diverse educational contexts who many not embrace critical pedagogy like the students in this study. Delpit (1995/2006) asserts that while those within the culture of power are the least aware or least willing to acknowledge their power, those who are not in the culture of power are most aware of issues of power and equity. As Wanda commented in her interview, "it's uncomfortable when you speak up about issues that not everybody wants to speak about." Wanda also stressed that it is still important to talk about these issues. Wanda's words support the long-held belief of critical scholars that no education is neutral. Educators can either ignore systemic oppression or work to dismantle it through a critical education. Finally, students discussed the teacher's role in critical English education. Ms. Cason often viewed her role as the "hands-off facilitator" who allowed students to talk without very much teacher input (Alexander, 2008).

However, students revealed that they desired more teacher involvement during class discussions. Taking students' words into consideration, Ms. Cason did increase her involvement across the three semesters, and this critique was less prevalent in later student interviews. If educators are to cultivate critical classroom environments in which students are equal partners in the learning experience, they should be critically reflective and ever-vigilant about their classroom practices (hooks, 1994). How are we as educators socializing students to and through discourse? How are we validating or invalidating students' identities through our instruction? Are we limiting or broadening students' knowledge of the world? The students in this study provided answers to these questions. Students demonstrated that they are qualified to describe the factors that enhance

their educational experience within a critical classroom space.

Students' voices can and should be trusted when constructing knowledge in and about the classroom. Although there were common themes across three different groups of students, the students in this study represent a limited number of perspectives on critical English education. There is still so much more that we can learn from students. Combining students' voices with others who research and theorize about classroom practice will contribute to a fuller representation of what it means to teach equitably and towards critical ends in the classroom.

References

Alexander, R. J. (2008). *Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk.* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Dialogos.

Alvermann, D. E., Young, J. P., Weaver, D., Hinchman, K. A., Moore, D. W., & Phelps, S. (1996). Middle and high school students' perceptions of how they experience text-based discussions: A multicase study. *Reading Research Quarterly, 31*(3), 244-267.

Apple, M. W. (2013). *Can education change society?.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Applebee, A. N. (2002). Engaging students in the disciplines of English: What are effective schools doing?. *English Journal, 91*(6), 30-36.

Appleman, D. (2015). *Critical encounters in secondary English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Aukerman, M. (2012). "Why do you say yes to Pedro but no to me?": Toward a critical literacy of dialogic engagement. *Theory into Practice, 51,* 42-48.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). M. Holquist (Ed.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Ball, A. F. (2000). Empowering pedagogies that enhance the learning of multicultural students. *Teachers College Record, 102,* 1006-1034.

Behizadeh, N. (2014). Adolescent perspectives on authentic writing instruction. *Journal of Language & Literacy Education*, *10*(1), 27-44.

Coates, T. (2015). *Between the world and me*. New York, NY: Random House.

Coates, T. (2016). Nina Simone's face. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from: https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/03/nina-simone-face/472107/

Connolly, B., & Smith, M. (2002). Teachers and students talk about talk: Class discussions and the way it should be. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 46*(1), 16-27.

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher, 31*(4), 3-14.

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New York, NY: The New Press. (Original work published 1995)

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education.* New York, NY: Collier.

Duncan-Andrade, J. M., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urbans schools.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

DuVernay, A. (Director). (2016). *13th* [Documentary]. USA: Kandoo Films.

Edwards, E., McCarthur, S. A., & Russell-Owens, L. (2016). Relationships, being-ness, and voice: Exploring multiple dimensions of humanizing work with Black girls. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 49*(4), 428-439.

Eighner, L. (1992). On dumpster diving. *New England Journal of Public Policy, 8*(1), Retrieved from: https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol8/iss1/7/

Fairclough, N. (2015). *Language and power* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Flint, A. S., & Laman, T. T. (2012). Where poems hide: Finding reflective, critical spaces inside writing workshop. *Theory Into Practice, 51*, 12-19.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic. (Original work published 1970)

Glassman, M., & Erdem, G. (2014). Participatory action research and its meanings: Vivencia, praxis, conscientization. *Adult Education Quarterly, 64*(3), 206-221.

Gordon, C. T. (2017). Critical literacy and the arts: Using one-act plays to promote social justice. *Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts, 4*(2), 75-89.

Gutiérrez, K., D., & Larson, J. (1994). Language borders: Recitation as hegemonic discourse. *International Journal of Education Reform, 3*(1), 22-36.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Howard, T. C. (2001). Telling their side of the story: African American students' perceptions of culturally relevant teaching. *The Urban Review, 33*(2), 131-149.

Janks, H. (2013). Critical literacy in teaching and research. *Education Inquiry, 4*(2), 225-242.

Kinloch, V. (2012). *Crossing boundaries: Teaching and learning with urban youth*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*, 465-491.

LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing and conducting ethnographic research: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MA: AltaMira Press.

Lewis, C., & Moje, E. B. (2003). Sociocultural perspectives meet critical literacies: Producing knowledge through multiple frameworks. *International Journal of Learning, 10*, 1979-1995.

Lopez, J. (1996). *Real women have curves.* Woodstock, IL: Dramatic Publishing.

Marshall, J. (2009). Divided against ourselves: Standards, assessments, and adolescent literacy. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent literacy research* (pp. 113-125). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Milner, H. R., & Lomotey, K. (2014). Introduction. In H. R. Milner & K. Lomotey (Eds.), *Handbook of urban education* (pp. xi – xxiii). New York, NY: Routledge.

Morrell, E. (2003, March). *Writing the word and the world: Critical literacy as critical text production*. Paper presented at the 54th Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, New York, NY.

Morrell, E. (2005). Critical English education. *English Education, 37*(4), 312-321.

Morrell, E., & Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R. (2002). Promoting academic literacy with urban youth through engaging hip-hop culture. *English Journal, 91*(6), 88-92.

Muhammad, G. E. (2015). Searching for full vision: Writing representations of African American adolescent girls. *Research in the Teaching of English, 49*(3), 224-247.

Nieto, S. (1994). Lessons from students on creating a chance to dream. *Harvard Educational Review, 64*(4), 392-426.

Phelan, P., Davidson, A. L., & Cao, H. T. (1992). Speaking up: Students' perspectives on school. *The Phi Delta Kappa, 73*(9), 695-704.

Rogers, R. (2002). "That's what you're here for, you're supposed to teach us": Teaching and learning critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 45*(8), 772-787.

Ruiz, J. L. (Producer). (1996). *Chicano! The history of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* [TV Series]. Los Angeles, CA: NLCC Educational Media.

Sepúlveda, E., III (2011). Toward a pedagogy of accompañamiento: Mexican migrant youth writing from the underside of modernity. *Harvard Educational Review, 81*(3), 550-572.

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). What is the 'dialogical method' of teaching? *Journal of Education, 169*(3), 11-31.

Singer, J., & Shagoury, R. (2005). Stirring up justice: Adolescents reading, writing, and changing the world. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 49*(4), 318-339.

Smagorinsky, P. (2001). If meaning is constructed, what is it made from?: Toward a cultural theory of reading. *Review of Educational Research, 71*(1), 133-169.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Street, B. V. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy development, ethnography, and education*. London, UK: Longman.

Vygotsky, L. S. (2012). *Thought and language* (Revised and Expanded Ed.). (E. Hanfmann, G. Vakar, & A. Kozulin, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1962)

Zoss, M., Smagorinsky, P., & O'Donnell-Allen (2007). Mask-making as representational process: The situated composition of an identity project in a senior English class. *International Journal of Education and the Arts, 8*(10), Retrieved from http://www.ijea.org/v8n10/.

APPENDIX A

UNIT PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION
- A. Mini Autobiographies
- B. Picture Puzzle Activity
- C. Why Perspective Is Important
- D. Critical Lenses Book

II. CRITICAL LENSES
- A. Reader Response Lens
- B. New Criticism
- C. Psychological
- D. Gender
- E. Biographical
- F. Social Class
- G. New Historicism
- H. Post-colonial
- I. Deconstruction
- J. Archetypal

III. CRITICAL LITERACY/ DIALOGUE
- A. Critical Literacy
- B. Guidelines for Dialogue
- C. Dialogic Approach to Critical Literacy
  - i. Thomas Jefferson – Mini Biography
  - ii. *Notes on the State of Virginia,* Query 14
  - iii. The Declaration of Independence
  - iv. "We Are It"
  - v. TED Talk - "Looks Aren't Everything"
  - vi. "I Want to Be Miss America"
  - vii. "Nina Simone's Face"
  - viii. Writing Assignment – Reflective Essay

IV. *REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES*
- A. *Chicano!* Documentary
- B. Background of *Real Women Have Curves*
- C. Read *Real Women Have Curves*
- D. Critical Dialogue – *Real Women Have Curves*
- E. Writing Assignment – One-Act Play

V. *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME*
- A. *13th* Documentary
- B. Background of *Between the World and Me*
- C. Read *Between the World and Me*
- D. Critical Dialogue: *Between the World and Me*
- E. Writing Assignment –Documentary

APPENDIX B

List of Codes and Examples

Code	**Example**	**Frequency**
Agency		
Being self-motivated	Kierra: a lot of it has come from me taking education into my own hands	3
Having an audience	Rose: …and then when I had the transitional academy came to us and was saying that they liked certain things.	1
Impacting students beyond classroom	Messi: …In this class I have learned so many things…now in the future I am going to change the law with immigration issues.	5
Maintaining personal ideologies	Cozie: I don't like to change my opinions. Unless it's like extremely for the better, then I change my opinion. Mostly I just keep my opinions.	4
Producing critical texts	Rose: I liked the play, because it was different	1
Collaboration		
Arranging classroom setting to promote dialogue	Chris: Circles make kids like really confident. That's what makes me speak more. When we're all looking at each other and it's not like uniform where everyone is facing the same way.	2
Being open-minded	Katie: they started to become more open minded with each other.	9
Comparing discussion to other learning activities	Stephen: When you say it, you can kind of explain more on it than you're writing it down it's like, okay. When you actually say it and then you can elaborate more and more by just talking it out and understanding what people are saying.	4
Defining diversity	Cozie: We have a very diverse school so it's just like- we're really not that diverse because we only have Hispanics and Blacks, so it's like mostly Hispanics kids and black kids in the classroom. There's like this one Caucasian female but you know she's not really there.	1

Developing a sense of community	Landon: It definitely brought me closer to my peers. 'Cause I was able to connect with them on a different level, student-to-student, friend-to-friend.	5
Developing skills for dialogue	Yasmin: I think you should have a practice run before. That might give someone, who doesn't know how to handle them, an idea of what you can say, and how it's run, and stuff like that, before you do the actual one.	4
Establishing classroom norms	Jurrell: I would say that each person in class have a chance to talk so that it can be fair for everybody.	6
Feeling comfortable with peers	Chris: I feel more confident and more comfortable when I'm speaking to my fellow classmates and engaging conversation with them instead of talking to the teacher specifically	4
Having opportunities to engage in dialogue	Messi: So, when you all give me a chance to talk about it, I take out what I feel inside.	8
Motivating students to participate	Stephen: For me? Okay, normally I don't really speak a lot. But with class discussion it makes me want to participate and want to do this.	9
Navigating tensions during dialogue	Meech: You won't learn when people arguing. You can't take it in when you arguing with somebody, you only trying to prove your point, and your point only.	11
Preferring critical dialogue	Kierra: I actually like class discussions rather than being tested or quizzed on something that I read	16
Sharing interpretive authority	Chris: When they respond to you it's no judgment	5
Teaching and learning through dialogue	Kierra: I think education should be more centered on learning from other people and learning different perspectives	2
Valuing multiple perspectives	Landon: I feel like everyone's opinion, when they put in input, they have a different view on it. You learn to respect that.	43
Working in small groups	Stephen: Groups are a good idea because it helps you understand other people's ideas and it makes you tie in together your idea as well.	2

Content Mastery		
Analyzing texts	Vickie: I think that's important because when you're looking at something you should be able to analyze it and look at it from all points of views	6
Comparing types of assessments	Kierra: I feel like tests asks you a specific way how to interpret literature, and class discussions actually helps everybody who has an opinion on literature and taking it and, uh, interpreting it the way they feel about it, not just sitting down and having a, b, c, which one's the right answer.	1
Feeling confident while taking tests	Jasmine: Whenever we did take tests, I was more focused on what it actually said, and the actual answer. I wasn't second guessing myself.	1
Focusing dialogue on specific topics	Jasmine: It wasn't anything like too broad. We basically went into the main ideas of the entire books, or whatever we were discussing.	1
Improving grades	Jasmine: Last year I had a 70 in the class. This year I have an 84 for both grades	1
Understanding texts	Nancy: Well it did help me understand the text and the world better	7
Understanding the author's perspective	Vickie: I can think about well why did the author write this? And why did they choose this path to write it?	3
Understanding topics	Wanda:I think it helps us really develop the skill of really trying to thoroughly understand things.	5
Identity		
Broadening worldviews	Vickie: There's been a couple class discussions that we've had where I used to go into discussion and be like this is my opinion, I'm sticking to it. Then when people showed me their types of sides I'd be like, "Well I never looked at it that way."	11
Considering diverse personalities	Wanda: a lot of people might not be very interested in it because that's just not their personality.	9

Considering maturity level of students	Cozie: I just feel like it's just the level of maturity.	1
Considering student interest	Kierra: I feel like you have to have a topic that they're interested in and that just goes back to having something that connects with their life.	17
Developing personal ideologies	Vickie: I like the challenge of people coming back at me because it makes me feel like my opinion is more, not more stronger, but I've put more thought in it because I've been asked questions.	15
Navigating personal feelings	Rose: Oh, when we watched it [13^{th}], I was getting angry.	1
Speaking English as an additional language	Messi: When I first came I thought that this class would be hard for me because I was still learning English, but then I realized that I am one of those people who can talk more, which that motivates me to keep going with my education.	1
Understanding self	Wanda: …understanding these things helps us understand ourselves	2
Utilizing funds of knowledge	Megan: Yeah, try to take a piece from everybody because everybody… has something that they're deep about- that they feel for. So, try to find that out and then end up talking about it in class.	8
Valuing self-expression	Meech: It just let me get some stuff off my chest and see how other folks think about it.	12
Power		
Challenging dominant ideologies	Messi: Nowadays, people who has been living in this country for 25 years, the president doesn't give them a green card, any chance to get their citizenship or green card, which is not right	4
Expressing dislike for standardized assessments	Kierra: I actually like class discussions rather than being tested or quizzed on something that I read	1
Forcing participation	Student: If you don't know what you read and you're chosen to speak, that's bad.	2
Increasing critical awareness	Juanez: I guess, it just opened my eyes to more things, like now if I see something … I	17

	look at it from a different perspective than I used to.	
Recognizing dominant ideologies	Kierra: …what we saw when we read the passage or the book, not just what someone else saw and what they think we should see.	7
Recognizing the limitations of monologic instruction	Kierra: … I feel like they only cover certain things… it's bare, basic standards and it's so structured, until we don't get to have creative thought.	4
Teacher's Role		
Making learning fun	Rose: I was like okay, I gotta bring it, we gotta make it fun, we gotta make it fun.	3
Relating to students	Wanda: Find a way to make it relate to them. Find something that they're able to relate to, because when people can relate to something, they care.	3
Exercising teaching expertise	Stephen: it depends also on the teacher. You have the curriculum but I also understand that you can't be robotic about it. You have to make it fun. You have to kinda- not bend it, but find a way to target people.	2
Teacher facilitating dialogue	Kierra: I think teachers can help with that by regulating the discussions a little bit more	4
Topics and Texts		
Discussing relevant topics	Terez: …when it was topics I knew, or had a passion about, then I spoke out on it.	7
Discussing social issues	Chris: What's going on like racism and anything like that. Economic stuff. Just problems in the world, like society stuff.	20
Discussing current events	Kierra: It has to be something about what is going on today.	6
Making real-world connections	Kierra: …the perspective that was really important when we were reading the text is, like, real life connections like how does it connect to the world that you live in today.	8
Offering a variety of topics	Yasmin: …not everyone is interested in the same thing…just broaden it up.	1
Providing access to diverse knowledge forms	Messi: …in some classes they have limits, the history what they're going to tell you but in	8

	this class we read about everything. We read about racism, immigration, what happened in the eighties, which sometimes students doesn't know that. In this class we learn about it, so it's like there's no limit of things.	
Reading social issues texts	Rose: ..the discussions about *Real Women Have Curves*, and the one with the article...Nina Simone.	1