**Title**

Movement of the People: Teacher Development in a Teacher-ï¿½led Inquiry Group and the Application of Teacher Generated Knowledge

**Permalink**

**Author**

Martinez, Antonio Nieves

**Publication Date**

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Movement of the People:

Teacher Development in a Teacher-led Inquiry Group and the Application of Teacher

Generated Knowledge

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Antonio Nieves Martinez

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Movement of the People:

Teacher Development in a Teacher-led Inquiry Group and the Application of Teacher

Generated Knowledge

by

Antonio Nieves Martinez

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Tyrone Howard, Chair

In an attempt to identify ways to develop effective urban teachers, this study examined a

grassroots form of teacher development.  This year-long study examined the efforts of a

grassroots community based organization creating teachers-led professional

development for teachers. Teachers' perceptions were explored to understand how this

approach to professional development impacted their pedagogy and the ways they

believed they were able to more effectively serve their students. Utilizing critical

pedagogy and postcolonial theory as analytic frames, this study deconstructed the

complex process of teacher development in bi-weekly inquiry group meetings. The

findings from this research suggest that this teacher-led inquiry group supported

participants in developing the critical capacity to make sense of hegemonic discourses as they engaged in humanizing spaces for learning. Findings also reveal that participants leverage this teacher-led space for learning to build their network of support and create curriculum that honored the lives and communities of Black and Latino students. The participants were a convenience sample of seven educators that voluntarily attended a bi-monthly teacher-led inquiry group during the 2012-2013 school year, worked in public and charter schools in South Los Angeles, and taught across academic disciplines. This qualitative case study drew from ethnographic approaches relying on traditional data collection strategies such as field notes, a review of teachers' curriculum and other artifacts, and teacher interviews.

The dissertation of Antonio Nieves Martinez is approved.

Jeffery M. R. Duncan-Andrade

Megan Franke

Ernest Morrell

Tyrone Howard, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

This dissertation is dedicated to HTZN. You have shown me a new and more

meaningful purpose for life. My hope is that through the collective work of people

organizing for a just society, young people will have the kind of education and teachers

that you need.

# Table of Contents

## Acknowledgements

As a public school student that barely graduated from a high school where I was tracked into some of the lowest academic classes the school offered, it's important to acknowledge the collective of people that showed me I had the potential to learn and the potential to be an educator, scholar, and organizer. I'd like to first thank Mestre Urubu because of the ways you have been a model of what it means to truly take all those that come. Your hard work as a dedicated teacher and your compassion and insight about the learner in all of us is what I try to model in my teaching. Through the art of capoeira you've shown me life skills like how to escape, attack, and balance and I will continue to draw from your teachings in all aspects of my life. And thank you to the cohort of capoeiristas that I learned so much from: Formiguinha, Bodinho, Montanha, Lobo, Pula, Suado, and Abelha.

Also, I am thankful to Dorrie and the AcroSports family that trusted and believed in me enough to bring to fruition the idea of developing performing arts programs in low-income Black and Brown communities in San Francisco. Being a young ambitious "kid" at the time with a lot of ideas, you all supported me in developing the capacity to think from a programmatic perspective. This combination of ambition and program building allowed us to be successful which in turn provided communities with a great resource and opportunity for all of us to learn.

Jeff and Nicole, who knew taking one course at SFSU could dramatically change a person's life. When it came time to apply to graduate school and having conversations with the two of you about my next steps I can clearly remember both of you encouraging me to think about a doctoral program and my reaction to that idea was that I'd be too old by the time I was done. Well, I'm done, and yes I'm older but extremely thankful that I had the two of you there at that time to encourage me, challenge me, and support me through the process of getting to this point.

Uprooting and moving to Los Angeles was no easy task but thanks to the Council of Youth Research family - all the high school students but especially the Locke crew, Ernest, LT, Mark, Nicole, Antero, Mel, Katie, Eddie, Ebony, Arlene, Dart - you all made the transition a little less alienating. Locke students ya'll taught me so much about Gramsci and how to organize and deliver a presentation.

MOP organizers: RE, MER, EB, CV, HD, PD, KS, DK, NT, GM, LT, MS, you all have taught me the importance of building authentic relationships with one another as integral to making changes in the community. We've celebrated huge life moments with each another that has brought many of us closer. It is exciting to think about the ways you all will continue to shake up, organize, and empower the communities you serve.

PRC, I'm not sure where I would be right now without the support you offered me. It was truly a representation of the kind, loving person you are.

Dr. Franke and Dr. Gomez thank you for the considerable insight you have offered me throughout the project. Dr. Howard and Dr. Morrell, thank you for always being supporters and asking me those hard questions during office hours so that I would be prepared to answer them in the "real world". The work you two have done to create supportive environments for graduate students is a testament to the kind of impact people can have on shifting the culture of an institution. Thank for paving the road for many of us.

Mom, Adrian, Amanda, and Aunt June thank you for being understanding about my choices to usually do something different. Throughout all this you all have remained supportive and continue to show me the unconditional love that one gets from their family. Chris without your trips to Los Angeles I would not have had the time to write and travel; thank you for time and energy.

This last thank you is so much more than "thank you." It is more of an appreciation of what the culmination of this dissertation represents; what it means to love. Jerica, you were supportive when I was teaching young people to "flip out." You inspired me to go to back to school at CCSF, you advised me to look into research opportunities when I got to SFSU. When the idea of applying to a doctoral program was on the table you told me to go for it and then you helped me reach that goal at each step of the way. I can't express how much you mean to me and how much this accomplishment is a reflection of our relationship. I continue to admire you and love

you deeply. You're an amazing teacher and an amazing mother and together we can be the kind of parents HTZN needs. Thank you for dealing with me through the struggles of writing this dissertation. I look forward to the next chapter of our life together. Here's to continuing to grow <u>with</u> each other.

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Liou, D.D., & **Martinez, A**. (Under Review). Students of Color and the role of teacher mentoring. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.*

**Martinez, A**., Valdez, C., Cariaga, S. (Under Review). The People's Education Movement: Community organizing in Los Angeles and the application of decolonizing pedagogies for teaching and healing.

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA)
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**Martinez, A**. (2014). *Who Are We Waiting For? Teacher-Led Inquiry to Develop and Support Critical Educators*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Philadelphia, PA.

**Martinez, A.** (2013). *Movement of the teachers: Developing a decolonizing pedagogy in a teacher activist circle*. Paper presented at the Critical Ethnic Studies Conference, Chicago, IL.

Liou, D. D., & **Martinez, A**. (2013). *The importance of mentoring as an effective teaching strategy for low income Students of Color*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

**Martinez, A.** (2013). *Movement of the teachers: Tenets of a teacher activist circle*. University of Irvine, California Chapter – National Association of Multicultural Education conference, University of California, Berkeley.

**Martinez, A.** (2012). *Towards an unapologetic pedagogy of race: A critical race pedagogy framework for K-12 teaching*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Vancouver, Canada.

Mirra, N., Morrell, E., Scorza, D., Garcia, A., **Martinez, A**. (2011). *Toward a grounded pedagogy of youth civic agency: A comparative analysis of four projects*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Invited Presentations

Martinez, A. (2013, October). *The beauty within: Developing an asset-based perspective and having love for the community*. Community Programs Office Student Association. Keynote speaker. University of California, Los Angeles.

Martinez, A. (2013, February). *Towards developing a consciousness of transformation*. Community Programs Office, Education Townhall Caucus: Era of Consciousness: Struggles and Opportunities. Keynote speaker. University of California, Los Angeles.

Martinez, A. (February, 2013). Strategic Planning and Direction, Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Invited panel participant, Los Angeles, CA.

Martinez, A. (2012, May). *Path of a transfer student*. MEChA de UCLA Raza Transfer Day, Keynote Speaker, University of California, Los Angeles.

## SERVICE TO PROFESSION

Professional Conference Organizing
    Graduate Student Forum Committee-Chair,     Aug 2012 - May 2013
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**Chapter One**
**Statement of the Problem:**
**An Education for What?**


"When you control a [person's] thinking, you do not have to worry about [their] actions."

- Carter G. Woodson


In his book, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson reminds us of the power that comes with the ability to shape what people think or believe. Woodson's critique of the education system in the U.S. is grounded in the argument that people of color are (mis)educated to adopt Eurocentric values and customs as the standard of success and therefore uphold this system of belief even if it is not in their own self-interest. For this reason, as a society, we must be critical of a student's schooling[1] experience because it is filtered through state-sanctioned guidelines and a teacher's own personal beliefs and values; both of which are constructed within a hegemonic discourse. As educational theorist have pointed out, teaching is a political act (Freire, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and as such, schools and their classrooms become sites of contestation (Giroux, 1989). Therefore, teachers have the potential to provide students with an education that supports dominant discourses or one that provides a counter-narrative to unjust systems of power.

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[1] Gramsci (1971) saw schooling as the process used to socialize students into maintaining the status quo.

This study investigated the ways teachers undertook the task of developing a pedagogy that gets closer to meeting the academic needs of their students while also encouraging students to be involved in their communities. To begin framing this work, I will discuss the ways schools act as sites of cultural and social reproduction and how in-service teacher development, in most cases, does not allow teachers to move away from recreating the status quo. Then, I describe the research questions associated with understanding the phenomenon of a teacher-led inquiry group, a grassroots form of teacher development led by teachers. From here, I identify some of the literature on teacher inquiry groups and provide a brief overview of my study, participants, and theoretical framework. In concluding this chapter, I provide the significance and rationale as to the importance of studying a teacher-led inquiry group because of its potential to provide a counter-narrative to the discourse on teachers and teacher development.

**Problem**

In today's society, limited access to a critical and academically rigorous education continues to leave segments of the population disenfranchised in the United States. The conditions under which low-income, dispossessed youth of color in public schools are expected to learn and thrive should be of great concern to policymakers and education researchers. Patterns of school failure persist (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999) despite far reaching federal legislation such as

*No Child Left Behind*; Black and Latino students consistently do not graduate from high school at alarming rates (Losen & Wald, 2005; Swanson, 2009), demonstrating the historical continuance of institutional neglect for these populations. Progressive critiques of this oppressive schooling often center around the academic achievement gap instead of acknowledging the *education debt* (Ladson-Billings, 2006) which takes into account the socio-political, economic, historical, and moral debt created by structural inequality and racism. This understanding of student achievement and schools is important because both are mediated by the factors associated with understanding the education debt. For instance, it is because of the education debt that young people of color attend racially segregated schools where lack of access to resources mirrors much of what Willis' (1977) research with working class students suggests; schools are sites of social reproduction.

Given the reproductive nature of schools, students must navigate the tumultuous waters of an educational system that sorts them into their respective social class (Willis, 1977). In the current educational system, schools are doing exactly what they are designed to do; maintain the status quo (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). In the end, schools are mere reflections of a larger unjust system existing within society. To emphasize this point, one can look at the so-called attempts at educational reform where instead of meeting the needs of students, educational reform efforts center on meeting the needs of businesses and corporations (Gelberg, 2007). When seeking to

understand teacher training in its current manifestation, it is important to first examine the intended purpose of schools. For this reason, a close examination of the ways in which schools reproduce social inequalities and the role of the teacher in this process is warranted.

To further this discussion, I will conceptualize how schools can act as sites of social and cultural reproduction. Then, I will highlight how in-service teacher professional development, often times, is primarily focused on building teacher expertise to increase student achievement on standardized tests rather than allowing teachers the space to learn skills to provide an academically rigorous education that encourages young people to be involved in their communities.

*Schools as Sites of Social Reproduction*

Schooling in the United States has centered on creating a citizenry that falls in-line with the dominant discourse through what Gramsci (1971) refers to as coercive and non-coercive methods. For Gramsci (1971), coercive methods refer to how the State uses threats of force and violence through institutions such as the military and police to manipulate the will of its citizenry. However, knowing that a society would unravel if it merely relied on the use of coercive force to maintain itself, Gramsci (1971) points to non-coercive tactics used through institutions such as schools and religion which are places where dominant ideology is maintained and promoted. The notion of schools as

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a non-coercive tactic to maintain the hegemony of the State speaks to what Spring (2008) describes as the reasons schools were initially developed in the U.S.

Looking back at the original intent of schools, we can see that the "founding fathers" of the U.S. were influenced by the ideas of Prussian leader, Johan Fichte (Spring, 2008). As Spring (2008) highlights, Fichte believed that schools should prepare students to conform to government laws and that this was necessary in order to maintain society. To achieve this goal of creating a citizenry that falls in-line with the demands of the government, former U.S. president George Washington created a national university that would select those students who were seen as the highest achievers in their schools from all over the country and train them to go into government positions (Spring, 2008). Along these lines, former U.S. president Thomas Jefferson sought to create an equal education system for all except the "commoners" Spring (2008). The so-called "commoners" were to only receive a basic education. This basic education was provided with the assumption that in order to prevent strife and chaos, there is a need for society to hold some commonly held political beliefs in order to unite the people Spring (2008). Apple (1990) points out that a consequence of socializing students around a common political belief is that schools then become the site where social norms, which were largely based on white middle-class values, are transmitted and learned. To reproduce these social norms in the U.S., schools are heavily monitored and *what* is taught is heavily influenced by the political sphere

(Spring, 2008). This transmission of values and beliefs is commonly referred to as *social reproduction* (Bourdieu, 1977). Researchers argue this process of social reproduction has taken on two forms: class and cultural reproduction.

From this brief description of the purpose of schools in the U.S., we can see the foundation of schooling in the U.S. is one that seeks to provide a basic education to the general population whereas the elite are afforded a different type of education. The elite education is intended to recreate systems of power for the elite while providing the masses with a basic education (see Anyon, 1981). In the following sections, I will highlight how schools work to reproduce white middle-class values through a process of social and cultural reproduction.

*Schools and Class Reproduction*

To understand the ways schools reinforce class reproduction, it is important to draw from Bourdieu's (1977) social reproduction theory. The premise is that working class children usually have a tendency to end up in working class jobs because of the nature of the education they receive in school. Therefore, the class structure is reproduced from one generation to the next as a result of their schooling experience (MacLeod, 1987). Here is it important to discuss the two competing areas when it comes to "free choice": the social structure and individual decisions. While individual choices are important to take into consideration, it is necessary to look at the societal factors influencing them. There is a contradiction in the way "free choice" is understood in

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society. On the one hand, the working classes go to work at low-wage service jobs like Wal-Mart and see it as their own free choice; however, this "choice", influenced by their past educational access and attainment, and as Willis (1977) argues, inadvertently works to uphold their social status and class oppression. MacLeod (1987) also points out that resisting institutions such as school is thought to be an act of "choice." However, this choice to resist authority and obedience that is associated with attending school comes with consequences. The by-product of moving away from institutions such as school is that it has the potential to ultimately leave working-class students with fewer opportunities of employment which further replicates their social class (MacLeod, 1987). Today, as we transition out of a manual labor workforce here in the U.S. and as corporations and businesses look to expand globally, there remains an urgency for control over school regulations to meet the needs of the new business market (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; Lipman, 2013). This manifests itself in training students in *soft skills* such as attendance, timeliness, work ethic, obedience, etc. (Yang, 2009). These are the set of skills the business world requires and therefore considers important for students to learn as they enter the workforce. In the end, public schools are sites that attempt to leverage political and economic ideologies in order to further establish the status quo (see Au, 2009).

*Schools and Deculturalization*

To understand the ways schools continue to be sites of social engineering,

Spring (2004) describes what he understands as the complete annihilation of the beliefs

and customs of "un-American" cultures. Since the beginning of U.S. history, laws and

government policies have been put into place to neutralize those considered

"dangerous" or "different" from the ruling class. Through a process of deculturalization

defined by Spring (2004) as "the educational process of destroying a people's culture

and replacing it with a new culture" (p. 3), political leaders seek to recreate a unified

culture centered on Eurocentric values and beliefs. Cultures that do not fit within this

narrow scope are thought to be uncivilized and are met with extreme efforts to do away

with these *Othered* beliefs and practices (Spring, 2004). A clear example of the way

deculturalization has taken place in U.S. schools is the Indian Schools. In the 1800's

Native American children were forcibly sent away from their homes and families to

attend Indian Schools where they were taught "American" cultural values (Spring,

2004). Over time, researchers have documented the ways schools have been used as a

site to transmit cultural "norms" to Black, Chinese, Irish, and Latino peoples in order to

extinguish their cultural practices, languages, and beliefs. Schools were key in the

process of deculturalization as the U.S. government sought to create a "united" culture.

*In-service Teacher Professional Development*

Within schools, it is imperative to look at the role of the teacher in the process of

cultural and economic reproduction. Research has highlighted the importance of

teachers and their connection to learning outcomes for students (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, if we know that schools are sites of social reproduction, then what is the role of the teacher in creating or disrupting this process? To understand this, it is important to look at the ways in which teacher professional development is constructed. Looking at professional development gives this study further insight into what teachers are being trained to do in the classroom.

Professional development is generally defined as the activities used to enhance professional career growth. These activities can include peer coaching or mentoring, individual development, continuing education, in-service education, peer collaboration, and/or study groups. When thinking about the kinds of professional development that teachers are offered, the kinds of institutional support teachers are given must be carefully scrutinized and critiqued in order to fully understand the intended outcomes.

In many schools across the country today, teachers are not given the opportunity to develop a pedagogical practice that responds to the needs of students in their classrooms thereby leaving teachers to feel that their professional development is not useful (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006). Teachers and students are faced with a considerable dilemma when research has shown continued learning for teachers to be related to teacher improvement (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Much of the disconnect with professional development in most schools is that it is a top-down model that does not speak to the everyday reality of a teacher's classroom (Corcoran,

1995) and does not connect to how teachers can work to meeting school improvement goals (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Kennedy, 1998). As school administrators look for ways to enhance teacher development for beginning and veteran teachers, one of the main challenges administrators face is engaging teachers in effective on-going professional development (OECD, 2005). Researchers have examined the importance of professional development that is directly related to teachers' planning and instruction (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Knapp, 2003; Weiss & Pasley, 2006), sustained over time and takes into account the local context (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001), connected to larger goals of the school's improvement plan (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Supovitz & Christman, 2003) and provides space for teachers to build supportive collegial relationships with other faculty (Hord, 1997; Joyce & Calhoun, 1996; Pérez et al., 2007). Effective professional development is important because of the positive effect it can have on teacher knowledge and motivation while improving students' learning (Holland, 2005). However, it can be argued that much of the current teacher professional development is driven by federal education reform policies like Race to the Top. Race to the Top guidelines state professional development must be aligned to state academic content standards, student achievement standards, and standardized assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

As a result of an increase focus on student achievement on high stake tests, much of the current discussion surrounding teacher professional development looks at how

teachers can improve their practice in *professional learning communities* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2010). Research highlighting professional learning communities point to the ways teachers benefit from their participation in these communities because of the group collaboration, the focus on student learning, examination of student test data, and using the process of inquiry (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012; DuFour et al., 2010). Nevertheless, much of the literature on professional learning communities draw from students' scores on standardized test as ways to identify how teachers can improve their practice which increases control and regulation over how professional development operates (Boardman & Woodruff, 2004; Delandshere & Arens, 2001; Skerrett, 2010).

As a result, many school districts respond to federal mandates to standardized testing and implement a one-size-fits-all professional development that is not grounded in the day-to-day happenings of a teacher's classroom (Skerrett, 2010). This means teacher development is primarily focused on building teacher expertise to increase student achievement on standardized tests. While improving students' test scores raises a school's adequate yearly progress (AYP) score, the increasing attempt to align teacher professional development to standardized testing has narrowed the scope of what is offered to teachers. Instead of developing pedagogy and content knowledge, many teachers are trained to teach to the test and therefore do not assist students in

developing the skills necessary to matriculate through the highest levels of schools in the U.S. much less to engage civically (see Darling-Hammond, 2010).

**Explanation of the Study**

While research has documented the failure of public schools in urban areas, there is a growing body of research highlighting how teachers, in spite of larger systems of social reproduction, engage urban students through a curriculum that is culturally responsive (Howard, 2010) and challenges dominant discourses (Camangian, 2008). Using race, culture, and class as a starting point for organizing instruction and curriculum while at the same time providing students with the tools to effectively navigate and transform society has proven to increase achievement and engage students in the learning process (Bartolomé, 1994; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The teachers described in these various studies are seen as models because of their effective practice working in urban schools. To build on this scholarship, this study will provide an examination of *how* teachers can develop teaching practices drawing from the richness students bring with them to the classroom.

This study examined teacher-driven attempts to create spaces that develop curriculum and instruction that honors the lives and communities of the students and provided a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse. This study drew from my

participation in an organization called *Movement of the People (MOP)*[2]. MOP is a

community based, grassroots teacher-led organization that focuses on educational

equity issues affecting students and teachers in Los Angeles. I was among a group of

approximately twelve teachers and graduate students that worked to co-found MOP

over the months of April through September 2012.

For this dissertation, I investigated an aspect of MOP's organizing efforts in the

Education Working Group[3]. Specifically, I examined the work done to create a teacher-

led inquiry group and how participants believed participating in this group was useful

to them personally and professionally. This teacher-led inquiry group turned out to be a

grassroots form of teacher development that took place for two hours, over two

Saturdays each month beginning in January 2013 and ending in June 2013. Because of

time constraints, this study only focused explicitly on the experiences of participants

that attended all twelve meetings. Focusing on the participants that attended all the

meetings allowed this project an in-depth analysis of the happenings in the inquiry

group. The unit of analysis of this project is the teacher-led inquiry group and

participants perceptions on how their participation in the inquiry group supported their

learning to develop their teaching practice to be critical and culturally relevant.

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[2] A pseudonym is used to protect the identities of participants.
[3] See Appendix 1.1 for organizational flowchart.

The need for this approach to teacher development came from the members of MOP who expressed discontent with the limitations of the professional development provided to them at their schools. The teachers wanted a space to develop their teaching practice in a manner that is more culturally responsive and critical with the goals of improving academic outcomes and overall engagement in the classroom and community for all students.

While research has highlighted the various ways that inquiry groups can be used as a systematic and intentional inquiry into a teacher's practice (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) this study examined a teacher-led inquiry group coming together as part of a community organizing strategy to empower students, teachers, and communities. My aim was to explore what happens when teachers come together and create a teacher-led inquiry group as an equity-based grassroots model of professional development and the kind of impact this had on teacher's classroom practice.

The specific questions of this research project were:

- *What is the usefulness of this teacher-led inquiry group for participants?*

  - *Is a teacher-led inquiry group humanizing? If so, how and why?*

- *What impact does being involved in a teacher-led inquiry group have on participants' social consciousness?*

- *What impact does being involved in a teacher-led inquiry group have on participants' pedagogical development?*

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Over the course of this study I participated in the Education Working Group which was a one-hour meeting, once per month where the planning was done for the inquiry group. In the planning meetings and in the inquiry group I played dual roles; MOP member and graduate student researcher. As a member of MOP, I gave input to the structure of the inquiry group, suggested scholarly articles, books, and media for the group to engage as part of their work. As a researcher, I acted as a participant-observer taking copious field notes and paying close attention to the interactions within the group.

Since I relied on the Education Working Group from MOP to create, promote, and recruit participants for the teacher-led inquiry group, I used a convenience sample. Inquiry group facilitators thought it would be best to keep the group open to the public which allowed the space for participants to attend as little or as much as they wanted. Over the six months there was an average of eleven attendees. To choose participants, I based the criteria on attendance, which brought me to identify seven participants that attended all twelve inquiry group meetings. The participants worked in public or charter schools in Los Angeles that served predominantly low-income Latino and Black students. Moreover, participants taught across a broad range of academic disciplines; humanities to science. All of the participants for this study voluntarily attended the inquiry group meetings during the 2012-2013 school year.

To carry out this study, I used a case study approach, while also using some ethnographic methods and collected data in the following ways during the 2012-2013 school year:

- Participant observation -This gave me an opportunity to closely observe the interactions and dialogue of the teachers in two areas. First, I was able to capture the dialogue in the Education Working Group as we planned for the inquiry group. Second, I attended all of the inquiry group meetings and closely capture the dialogue and happenings in these meetings.

- One-on-one interviews with teachers – Thirty to ninety minute interviews with participants were conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year to gain insight about their involvement with the inquiry group. The interview questions sought to understand their experiences in the inquiry group and their perceptions about how participating in the group influenced their classroom practice.

- Collection of artifacts - I examined hundreds of pages of artifacts that included teacher lesson plan and student work.

**Teacher Inquiry**

Through my research questions and study design I explored how the process and practice of a teacher-led inquiry group can be used as a method of professional development for teachers in urban areas like South Los Angeles. Specifically, this study

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provides insights about teachers' participation in a teacher-led inquiry group and begins to shift the conversation about teachers beyond the binary of "effective" and "ineffective" to a more nuanced understanding of a teacher's practice as something that is always in a process. This echoes Nieto's (2003) notion of teacher development, she states, "Excellent teachers do not emerge full blown at graduation; nor are they just 'born teachers.' Instead, teachers are always in the process of 'becoming'" (p. 395).

To make sense of the teachers' experiences in the inquiry group, I drew from the literature on teacher inquiry groups (TIG) to understand the similarities and differences of this community to what the research indicates as normative. I looked to this body of literature on TIG because of the ways it has been described to embody the characteristics of effective professional development for teachers: TIG are on-going, provide opportunities for demonstration and feedback, are collaborative, and connected to content areas. Research on teacher inquiry groups suggests it is possible for teachers to interrogate their own classroom practice as a way to improve their teaching to meet the needs of their students (Duncan-Andrade, 2005) beyond preparing students to achieve on standardized tests (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1989; Weinbaum, 2004).

Research on the characteristics of effective professional development indicates that teachers need to be active agents in analyzing their own practice and their own students' progress (OECD, 2005). As an approach to teacher development, the literature on teacher inquiry groups over the past two decades has highlighted the importance of

teachers interrogating their own classroom practice as a way to improve their ability to meet the needs of their students (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Nieto, 2003), engage in collaborative inquiry (Bray, 2002; Weinbaum, 2004) and develop as teacher researchers (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1989; Mohr & MacLean, 1987). Moreover, through the use of teacher inquiry groups, schools and teachers can create the spaces to define what professional development can look like within a specific context in order to create the needed support for teachers to effectively work with their students.

The underlying premise of an inquiry-based approach to teacher development is that teachers are repositioned as the kinds of intellectuals Giroux (1988) envisions. Within this practice, professional development can begin to take on Freirean-like attributes of respect and mutual dialogue where people are humanized and knowledge production is encouraged. Just as teaching is both a social and political endeavor, an inquiry approach for teacher development can begin to challenge hierarchies of power at school sites and universities. Challenging hegemony is at the basis of an inquiry approach (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Picower, 2007) because it "involves making problematic the current arrangements of schooling; the ways knowledge is constructed, evaluated, and used; and teachers' individual and collective roles in bringing about change" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 18). Inquiry groups can be seen as a way to empower teachers to deeply understand their craft and build expertise as participants in knowledge creation and therefore becoming

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legitimized as powerful, thinking, participants in their schools. It is through challenging systems of power that teachers can begin to push their administrators and educational research to better meet their needs and the needs of students.

Furthering the scholarship on teacher development, this study will interrogate comprehensive approaches on *how* teachers work towards developing a critical and culturally relevant teaching practice. To make sense of how teachers developed their teaching practice, I drew from the literature on teacher inquiry groups (TIG) because current scholarship in the field highlights the efforts and successes of teachers participating in an inquiry group to shift students' attitudes and beliefs about reading (Aguilar, 2005), the process and purpose behind an effective urban teachers' pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade, 2005), and how an inquiry approach can be used across a district to identify what keeps teachers in the profession for the long haul (Nieto, 2003). These examples are only a few of the many ways teacher inquiry groups can be used in schools as one form of professional development that serves the interest of students, teachers, schools, and districts.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Critical pedagogy and postcolonial theory give this study the ability to make connections to the immediate problems and concerns of the participants in the teacher-led inquiry group as they gained control over their teaching practice, fight against

oppressive systems, and engaged in imaginative practices of thinking, feeling, and learning.

The use of critical pedagogy in this study is used to identify and examine the ways state and institutional structures are themselves mechanisms of cultural and economic reproduction. Through an understanding of how power maintains itself, we can see that transforming institutions such as schools is necessary if we are to impact all aspects of society to one which is grounded in equity, love, and a place for healing (Battiste, 2004). Critical theory of education was born out of the need to better understand how hegemony, masked in education policy, curriculum, and assessments, marginalizes and/or silences students - especially those from working-class backgrounds (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2000; McLaren, 1994). Critical pedagogy provides this study a way of seeing, analyzing, and intervening into operations of power.

Postcolonial theory provides a framework to explicitly discuss how colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism impacts social institutions that affect the lives and working conditions of teachers (Hickling-Hudson, 2004). Postcolonial theory provides a theoretical anchor to analyze the oppressive conditions that many teachers face and provide a lens as to why institutions reproduce inequities and how some teachers respond to these conditions.

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Along with this, postcolonial theory and critical pedagogy examine resistance of people living under domination. Even under hegemonic rule, there are sites of resistance that educational researchers can draw from to understand educational settings that empower students and teachers. Spaces created outside of the dominant discourse, or what Spivak (1988) calls *subaltern* spaces, can offer a critique of hegemonic forces, while creating a space to move beyond critique to a place of action like this teacher-led inquiry group. Therefore, understanding the ability of teachers to come together and create an inquiry group on their terms pushes the conversation about how teachers developed their teaching practice outside of the traditional structures.

**Significance and Rationale**

This project examined the context in which teachers talk, think, and build collaboratively around their teaching and the ways this impacted their classroom practice. Through a teacher-led inquiry group, teachers created the conditions that allowed them to develop their pedagogical practice to get closer to meeting the academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs of their students. Documenting this group of teachers' processes was important because they work in schools in Los Angeles that mirror many other failing urban schools across the country. By exploring how teachers in South Los Angeles developed their teaching practice and engaged students through a pedagogy that met the complex needs of the students, I am looking to establish some guidelines that can be implemented in other urban school settings and

classrooms across the United States. Through this project, I identify the ways in which teachers challenged traditional notions of schooling by seeking to build a transformative teacher-led space for learning that supported them in developing a teaching practice that challenges hegemonic ideologies, engages students in their community, and does not replicate oppressive systems for dispossessed young people. This is important because it is a pedagogical practice specific to the social context in which students live and uses students' empirical knowledge as an asset rather than a point of deficit or dysfunction. To clearly define how educators become effective in low-income, urban communities is important so that schools are better prepared in supporting teachers to reach a level of high-quality instruction. The expectation is that this can give students access to highly effective teachers by putting forth a framework for schools, districts and pre-service teacher programs to strive towards.

While there is much theory on critical pedagogy, there still remains few examples of practical application especially for teacher professional development. Teacher-led inquiry groups can be seen as the praxis of Freirean pedagogy because of the ways the process of humanization is leveraged as the vehicle for teacher development. Bridging critical pedagogy, postcolonial theory and research on inquiry groups as a means of professional development it is possible that a teacher-led inquiry group will support urban teachers understand the context they work in while also developing curriculum that disrupts the status quo.

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What can be unique about this teacher-led inquiry group is that it differs from the current literature on teacher inquiry groups in that teacher-activists lead the inquiry group at the center of this study. Given that these teachers are involved in a community-based organization that seeks to address educational inequities, these teachers have a broader infrastructure of support to develop a pedagogy that provides a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse in schools. As a result of this study, findings suggest that decentralized decision making around what teachers are taught has the potential for the following: fostering empowerment and intellectualism, encouraging teachers to ground their practice in research, critical and rigorous classroom practice, developing political clarity, engage teachers in the process of humanization, and provide teachers with a community of authentic support.

**Chapter Two:**
Literature Review: Teaching as Intellectual Resistance

"To study is a revolutionary duty"

- Freire & Macedo

As stated in chapter one, this research interrogated some of the challenges, tensions, and outcomes that came as a result of teachers creating their own space for learning. This chapter will outline the ways critical theorists conceive notions of power in order to have a clear sense of the ways dominant discourses in society impact teachers and what they teach in the classroom. Specifically, I first draw from critical theorists and postcolonialism to lay out the ways power manifests itself in society, then, I go on to review the literature on critical pedagogy, teacher inquiry groups, and teacher professional development.

In the following sections, I will first describe how critical theorists conceive notions of power to understand the ways teachers are creating their own professional development that attempts to disrupt cycles of schooling. Drawing from postcolonial theorists, I discuss the varied ways power is created and maintained in society and point to the work on subaltern[4] spaces to better understand teachers coming together to collaborate with one another. I apply this understanding of power to examine the processes within a teacher-led inquiry group to develop a pedagogy that disrupts

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[4] Spivak (1988) defines subaltern as the social, ideological, political, or geographical spaces people occupy outside of the dominant power structure.

systems of domination. While critical theory outlines a political and ideological position that challenges schooling in the U.S., I will highlight the literature on critical pedagogy because of its emphasis on attainable realistic goals for social transformation through a liberatory education. I believe that teacher-led inquiry can be seen as an attainable plan of action to further develop a teacher's learning. Through a critical theory framework I provide an in-depth analysis of a teacher-led space for learning in hopes of offering a unique contribution to educational research.

**Power**

As we find ourselves in an era where standardization is the dominant approach to reforming public schools (Au, 2009), we must consider the ways schools are complicit in maintaining the social, economic, and cultural values of the elite (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). To reconceive the purpose of schools and the role teachers play in the classroom, critical theory provides this study with a lens to understand the power dynamics found within educational structures as I look to highlight the agency of teachers as they challenge the professional development that is offered to them.

This discussion of power will first interrogate the ways dominant narratives are created and maintained through coercive and non-coercive consent. Next, I bring to light the ways culture is in constant flux, open to interpretation of signs and symbols and the result of both a top-down and bottom-up melding together to form an individual or society's notion of *culture*. I aim to make the case that people are not

simply servants of hegemony but rather people have the agency to create a space for themselves that is counter or even outside of the hegemonic discourse altogether. It is important to understand this framework of power in order to make sense of the teachers' experiences in the inquiry group and in their school setting.

Drawing from a Marxist perspective, scholars from the Frankfurt School put forth a critique of dominant ideology as they look to understand how the state and capitalism converge to create and maintain hegemony (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2000). For Gramsci (1971), hegemony is a term used to describe a political concept where the dominant class controls the moral and ideological perceptions that maintain the interests of those in power. Gramsci (1971) provides an in-depth analysis of the ways messages, created by those in power, are embedded in social institutions through overt and covert ways, generate and reinforce dominant ideology.

The premise is that in order to maintain domination in society there must be a general level of consent by the masses. According to Gramsci (1971) there are two ways consent is maintained. The first, direct domination is orchestrated by systems such as the judicial system and the military. The overt use of force is thought to be a last resort in order to maintain social order because if only direct force was used that society would eventually unravel. In contrast, hegemonic ideals are preserved on a daily basis through the second means of consent; a non-coercive approach (Gramsci, 1971). This non-coercive approach can be understood as the institutions that impact the ideological

beliefs of the people such as family structures, schools, and religion. This method of control is thought to be an implicit way to maintain power without resorting to explicit force.

Gramsci (1971) reminds us that teaching is a political act and that education is a tool used to maintain the status quo or subvert it. To illustrate this point, Lipman (2009) highlights a group of Chicago public school teachers that admit, in some cases, they must do things they do not agree with in order to meet administration and state requirements. Through school policies, evaluations, and mandated curriculum, teachers are stripped of their agency to act on behalf of the students (Lipman, 2009). Accountability to local and state policies ensure teachers are mired in a system that dictates many aspects of school life.

*Maintaining Power*

As a non-coercive approach, the creation of cultural hegemony binds members of the non-dominant class to the ideological beliefs of the prevailing power structure and builds a sense of consent among society (Storey, 1998). It is this maintenance of ideological belief through coercive and non-coercive structures which maintains general consent among the masses. Consent, Gramsci (1971) argues, is what keeps the masses from revolting and thereby maintains the status quo. As mentioned, schools are one place where cultural hegemony is vigorously produced and enforced (Spring, 2004).

Using dominant narratives as the starting point, culture is then broadly defined

in relation to the values and beliefs that maintain the status quo, which in the case of the

U.S., are grounded in white middle class values. Critical theorists saw the production of

culture as that which was going to take away a sense of individuality and would

establish universal "conformity" in society (Storey, 1998). Adorno and Horkheimer

(2000) put forth some of the first critiques of the "culture industry" that sought to

explain the ways in which culture is manufactured. Adorno and Horkheimer (2000)

write:

> "... the culture industry, it is in fact forced upon the latter by the power of
> society, which remains irrational, however we may try to rationalize it; and this
> inescapable force is processed by commercial agencies so that they give an
> artificial impression of being in command. There is nothing left for the consumer
> to classify. Producers have done it for him" (p. 6).

The idea is that reality is constructed within certain parameters and that one's notion of

choice is confined within pre-existing dominant views. This Fordist[5] approach to

manufacturing society assists in the streamlining of humanity in a "cost-effective"

manner which is standardized and continues to perpetuate the status quo. Much like

what Willis (1977) found in his seminal work, students from low-income communities

receive an education that prepares them to fill low wage jobs; continuing the cycle of

poverty. It is through institutions of education controlled by the state apparatus where

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[5] Gramsci (1971) uses the term *Fordism* to describe the assembly-line production, managerial hierarchy,
and technical control introduced by Henry Ford.

citizens are explicitly and implicitly given norms of cultural codes. Through these messages, behaviors are normalized and even constructed in an attempt to rationalize the power held by the dominant class. Critical theorists believe culture is pre-packaged for consumption under the veil of one's perceived ability of "free choice" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2000). Since schooling in the U.S. is compulsory, mostly all citizens enroll into schools which means schools become the primary ground for manufacturing culture and consent. From here, we can begin to understand the ways dominant society looks to re-create the systems that assist in maintaining its power; for the purposes of this study I will focus on how this is done through the educational system and the ways teachers fight to disrupt this process.

*Culture as Manifestations of Power*

Culture can be understood as something that exists in relation to, and in spite of power. Stuart Hall (2003) points to the way power can be thought of in terms of "direct physical coercion or constraint" but must also be connected to the ability to "mark, assign and classify" (p. 259). Thus, power must be understood to lie in the ability to represent someone or something in a particular way. This representation of someone or something is done within what Hall (2003) calls a *regime of power*, which is expressed in stereotypes. Culture, in the eyes of Hall (2003), is concerned with the production and exchange of meaning and depends on the participant's interpretation of social and political arenas (Hall, 2003). This concept of culture for Hall (2003) includes the idea that

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non-dominant members of society also participate in the creation of culture. Gramsci (1971) would go so far to say that people possess the agency to create counter-hegemony; the ability of people to create their own narrative in response to the dominant discourse. Morrell (2008) writes the goal is, "... to understand culture in all its complex forms and to analyze the social and political context within which it manifests itself" (p. 156-157). This contemporary view of culture looks to the intersectionality of the ways people live in and outside of the constraints of hegemonic ideology. By taking into consideration the nuanced ways people participate in society, we can begin to have a deeper understanding of the roles power and agency play in the creation of culture.

In order to maintain social control, the ruling class makes small concessions to the non-dominant group to quell their dissatisfaction. Power is believed to not only be a top-down process from which elites control all aspects of meaning. Instead, we must understand power to have a *3rd space* (Soja, 1996) or a place of interaction between subordinate and dominant groups where a melding of the two take place. It is in these 3rd spaces where I examined the ways a teacher-led inquiry group created a supportive space for teachers outside of traditional institutions.

*Power and Liberation*

For this project, postcolonialism can provide a deep understanding of the ways colonialism has impacted people in the U.S. and across the world and shifts the label of "problem" away from individuals and communities to institutions. In education,

teachers, students, and families are seen as the problem but instead we must look at the educational system itself to understand the factors that contribute to, in many instances, low-quality teacher development. To analyze this teacher-led inquiry group, postcolonialism was used to understand how systems of power and manifestations of liberation exist at the same time.

To gain deeper insight into the ways schools reproduce economic inequalities postcolonial theory provides the framework to look at the ways the modern manifestation of colonialism has developed alongside a complex relationship with capitalism (Loomba, 2007). Through capitalism, economic destabilization has given colonial powers the ability to root itself to the financial infrastructure, thereby, institutions are forced to comply (Loomba, 2007). Because of economic domination, direct rule is no longer necessary to maintain control (Loomba, 2007; Young, 2001). The notion that society governs itself to fit within state structures is the next step to understanding the impact colonization has on shaping the minds of the oppressed (Fanon & Philcox, 2005; Young, 2001). In turn, the culture and history of minoritized[6] people is seen as contrary to the "norm." By establishing Eurocentric values, the dominant group can then use its power to dehumanize anything outside of what has been established to be "normal" as barbaric and primitive (Fanon & Philcox, 2005).

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[6] "Minoritized more accurately conveys the power relations and processes by which certain groups are socially, economically, and politically marginalized within larger society. This term also implies human agency." (McCarty, 2002, Footnote 1, p. xv)

Those with power can justify oppressive actions as saving the colonized from their animal-like state (Fanon & Philcox, 2005). Through psychological warfare that is reinforced through most schooling experiences, minoritized groups are made to feel inferior and continue the cycle of oppression (Fanon & Philcox, 2005; Fanon, 1994). This manifests in what is taught in most elementary and secondary schools, teacher credential programs, or even teacher professional development and mostly reinforces dominant culture. I drew from this analysis of colonization to understand how hegemonic structures create the conditions dispossessed youth and teachers face on a daily basis and how dominant notions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and language centered around Eurocentric values further solidify systems of power for the ruling class.

But even under hegemonic rule there are sites of resistance that educational researchers can draw from to understand educational settings that empower students and teachers. Postcolonial scholars also highlight the resistance of people living under colonial domination. Through multiple voices (Spivak, 1988) and voices from the margin (Bhabha, 1985), the tradition of postcolonialism offers a critique of hegemonic forces, while seeking a space to move beyond. It is postcolonial writers that have used concepts such as ambiguity and hybridity (Bhabha, 1985) to challenge essentialized notions of the spaces created outside of colonial structures or what Spivak (1988) calls "subaltern" spaces. Therefore, postcolonial scholars push the conversation about how to

build one's own humanity outside of the dominant discourse in-spite of colonization (Cabral, 1966). The through line for these authors is an understanding of what it means to live under and actively resist colonialism. For this project, postcolonial theory provided a lens to understand the power and agency associated with teachers creating a space to develop their teaching practice outside of normative institutions.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Moving into theories of pedagogical practices for the classroom, critical pedagogy is heavily influenced by the work of Franz Fanon (2005) and Paulo Freire (2000) and offers educational theory a framework that sees education as a vehicle to challenge hegemony. Critical pedagogy was birthed out of critical theory as a tangible, on the ground method of subverting oppressive schooling structures. Central to understanding critical pedagogy, is the idea that there is a need for education to challenge social domination while developing literacy skills (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freire, 2000). This critical theory of education highlights the need to better understand how hegemony marginalizes and/or silences students - especially those from working-class backgrounds (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2000; McLaren, 1994). It is from this perspective critical pedagogy provided this project a way of seeing, analyzing and intervening into operations of power at the school site level.

Education as a structural institution has historically enacted many obstacles that stifles personal growth, development of critical consciousness, and creativity (McLaren,

1994). To counter this, critical pedagogy can be asserted as a pedagogical practice that works for the liberation of oppressed people throughout the world (Freire, 2000; McLaren, 1994). Problematizing current knowledge, critical pedagogy calls for students and teachers to challenge the status quo by drawing from the resources they bring with them to the classroom (Freire, 2000). This is important to the development of one's critical consciousness through a process of humanization where teachers can begin to articulate for themselves the ways in which hegemonic forces constrain their lives (Freire, 2000; H. Giroux, 1989). Critical consciousness or as Freire (2000) refers to it, conscientization, is the process of developing an awareness of the social, cultural, and historical realities and hierarchies of power that make up society. It is from this perspective one may develop a deeper understanding their social location within those realities. For this research project it means that in order for teachers to situate their experiences in relation to other teachers and their students, they will need to develop their critical consciousness in order to make sense of the ways power also impacts the lives of others; Freire (2000) refers to this process as humanization.

    According to Freire (2000) this process of humanizing can transform education into a practice of freedom, which means working towards treating students and teachers as complete human beings. For this project, the idea is, if teachers are engaged in a humanizing process they, in turn, will humanize their students. Often, teachers and pre-service teachers are asked to create a humanizing and liberatory classroom for

students. However, it is important to point out that this can be difficult if teachers have not had the opportunity to experience what a humanizing and liberatory classroom looks and feels like. Therefore, it is important to look at the ways Henry Giroux (1988) envisions critical pedagogy can inform a vision to reclaim and redefine the role of teachers in an effort to work towards a more humanizing education.

Giroux's (1988) concept "teachers as intellectuals" examines the importance of providing students with educational experiences that are meaningful through an approach that develops their critical consciousness. According to Giroux, instead of developing students to read the world critically, schools simply train students to adhere to the status quo. In contrast, Giroux believes the role of the teacher is to create empowering, libratory, and democratic spaces for students. Teachers then, must act as reflective practitioners and become agents of moral discourse and radical transformation. Giroux's work is important for this study because of the ways participants are working towards developing their political clarity in order to better serve their students. Additionally, the inquiry group itself is a model of the kinds of learning spaces that teachers can draw from when looking for models of humanization.

To further build on practical applications of critical pedagogy it is important to identify k-12 exemplar models. Recent scholarship suggests that research on critical pedagogy must also include descriptions of meaningful hands-on approaches in the classroom or put in another way *critical praxis* (Allman, 1999; P. Camangian, 2008;

Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Educational researchers have documented the

importance of drawing from the experiences of teachers seeking to build their pedagogy

to meet the needs of young people and engage them in an education that motivates

them to participate civically while also acquiring literacy skills (Camangian, 2008;

Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fisher, 2005). It is through a curriculum that reflects

students' lives that research suggests can engage youth in their education (Camangian,

2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fisher, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

*Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom*

The idea is that creating spaces for teachers to develop a teaching practice that

challenges the dominant narrative can lead to opening the space for necessary critical

conversations in the classroom setting. A pedagogy that challenges the status quo can

be especially important for dispossessed youth of color because it pushes back on deficit

notions of marginalized communities. As Freire (2000) has highlighted, learning is most

powerful when it is connected to the reality of the learner. Because of this, teacher-

researcher Dr. Patrick Camangian (2008) explores the power of using spoken word as a

vehicle to examine privilege, hegemony and oppression in the U.S as it relates to the

lives of high school students. He examines the process by which students use

performance poetry and empirical information from their every-day lives and how it

allows them to acquire academic literacies while also building an analysis of hegemony.

Through a multi-layered process of meaning-making and literacy development the

pedagogical approach described in this piece echoes much of the critical pedagogy literature. Camangian (2008) draws from the students' cultural backgrounds through the use of Hip-Hop and poetry which allows students to understand the power of literacy in multiple contexts. From their experience in the performance poetry unit students become active agents in knowledge creation. Camangian (2008) reports on his own work in an English Language Arts classroom where he created a space for students to access and participate in the course content and share their understandings. A fine exemplar of critical pedagogy praxis, it encourages teachers to draw from students' cultural wealth thereby challenging dominant notions of what is considered worthy of being included in an English classroom.

Expanding their students "standard" view of the world, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell's (2005) work on the critical use of popular culture to develop a critical understanding of their world is another example of a critical pedagogical praxis. This research looks at notions of what it means to be literate and how new technologies and popular culture can be utilized to develop an analysis of power in society. It is because of the central position popular culture holds in the lives of young people that (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005) use these forms of media to get their students to participate in a dialogue about how hegemonic narratives are created and can be distributed through these pathways. In their urban English classrooms, Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2005) used a variety of popular media texts such as movies and Hip-Hop lyrics to teach

California English content standards and more. In their work we can see how critical

pedagogy can be used in the classroom to develop students' ability to "read the world"

starting with what students already know. By seeing the assets students bring with

them, teachers and schools can begin to foster academic success instead of impeding the

process.

The teachers previously mentioned found that a critical pedagogical approach

made learning meaningful and motivating. In the case of Duncan-Andrade and Morrell

(2005), they cite a student from their class as saying, "That's just like if you learn popular

culture, you can come back and learn how to use canonical culture" (student interview,

2000 in Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2005). From this quote we get the sense of the

deep and profound impact of starting from what the student already knows to build the

confidence of students to engage in more "traditional" curriculum. The method of

using what is familiar to the student is what she attributes to peaking her interest. Now

this student sees herself as a learner, empowered to apply this method to other

domains.

Instilled with a sense of understanding the potential agency they hold within,

students begin to develop a "knowledge of self" and begin to understand the forces of

oppression that create the conditions they live under (Camangian, 2008). In

Camangian's (2008) poetry unit, high school student "Vituous" is quoted as saying:

"I feel that I was a voice for those who are still struggling and that I can motivate [others] to have a voice of their own. [Performance poetry] helped me have a way to speak about social change... in a way that makes us feel comfortable... It helped me voice the pain and problems of our society and provide different solutions and ways to overcome our obstacles" (p. 46).

The student expresses the ways in which she felt empowered as part of her learning process. Reading and writing poetry not only led to a powerful expression of her lived experience, but also developed her ability to articulate social conditions and speak up for those who are silenced.

Instruction through a critical pedagogical approach allows students in these studies to see the important role education can play in their lives and in their community as a form of resistance (see Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Students were able to use learning as a vehicle to engage in co-constructing knowledge and no longer see themselves as passive recipients of information. Instead students began to authentically participate in constructing meaning and engaging in the world around them.

As existing scholarship in the field reinforces the importance of critical and culturally relevant teachers in urban schools, the way in which we seek to develop teachers' pedagogy must be at the forefront of teacher development. Just as the exemplar teachers mentioned above were able to reach students through a pedagogical practice that was critical and culturally relevant, that approach must also be applied to the ways teachers are developed. Participants in this study were able to make the

connection to the ways their learning in the inquiry group was relevant to their classroom practice and curriculum.

In order to understand the ways critical pedagogy can be used as a theoretical lens to support teacher development, next, I will highlight an example of research that examines the importance of developing political clarity for teachers.

*Critical Pedagogy for Teacher Learning*

Just as it is important for students to engage in a critical pedagogical approach in the classroom, teachers too can benefit from credential programs or professional development grounded in critical pedagogical principles. Bartolomé (2004) writes of her work with four teachers who were identified by administrators as effective educators when working with predominantly Mexicano/Latino students. A key aspect for the development of teachers, according to Bartolomé (2004), is that teachers have *political clarity*. The idea is that if teachers have political clarity, they will then be able to walk students through the steps of developing their own political consciousness as they engage with their worlds. In order for teachers to develop a critical pedagogical approach, Bartolomé (2004) believes that courses in teacher education programs must explore the relationship between power and knowledge. As an example of teachers drawing from a critical framework, Bartolomé (2004) highlights how the teachers involved in her study moved away from deficit motions of their students and associated the academic and social success of formerly under-performing students related to the

efforts of a committed school staff that sought to create a caring environment for

students. Additionally, these teachers did not subscribe to meritocratic notions of

students and schools nor did they hold white middle-class values as the model of

success. As an example of how teachers leveraged their own social capital in the

interests of their students, Bartolomé (2004) points to the ways teachers act as advocates

for students as they look to assist them navigate schools and mainstream culture in

general. Teachers in Bartolomé's study said that through this process of supporting

students allowed them to assist them in becoming confident and empowered learners.

However, Bartolomé (2004) points out that when students did achieve institutional

success, teachers did not have strategies that encouraged students to further develop an

ideology that was counter to the dominant narrative. For Bartolomé (2004), it is

important that teachers are explicit to students that when institutional success is

achieved those students do not become complacent but instead work towards

something similar to what Morrell (2008) describes as a pedagogy of access, dissent, and

liberation where students are prepared to not only access but transform systems of

inequality.

This body of work highlighting the praxis of critical pedagogy suggests there must

be a shift in the purpose of education for students and teachers. Approaches to teaching

and learning must be counter-hegemonic in structure, outcomes, and processes. From

here the discussion of school must shift from something that is used to escape "the

hood" to one that sees school as a place that, through the use of critical pedagogy, promotes academic literacy, college readiness, and addresses inequities in the community (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). To accomplish this, schools and teachers must depart from the ideology of individual achievement to one of community development.

In the next section, I will discuss the notion of teacher inquiry groups as a form of professional development that allows for teacher voice and direction to develop the skills they believe they need to best support their students' learning.

**Teacher Inquiry Groups**

Just as there is a need for theoretical models for the classroom such as critical pedagogy, it is important to highlight the ways teachers come together to develop their classroom practice. Next, I will highlight some of the literature on teacher inquiry groups in an attempt to make the case that teacher inquiry groups informed by critical pedagogy has the most potential to transform teacher learning. I say this because of the ways power can be redistributed in such a space that allows for teachers' voices and concerns to be explored as they also work to develop a deeper consciousness about larger systemic issues.

Describing a form of teacher inquiry, Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1990) define the practice of teachers researching their practice as a, "systematic, intentional inquiry carried out by teachers" (p.3). The authors note that by "systematic" they mean inquiry

groups ought to plan the ways in which they will gather and record their experiences in

and outside of schools. Additionally, they state "intentional" to mean that a teacher's

inquiry into their practice must be a deliberate act (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

Inquiry groups that are grounded in this definition begin to delve deeper into

understanding their own practice. These inquiry groups then become a place where

teachers in a school or from a local area come together to create a question of interest

that the group agrees to answering over time (Weinbaum, 2004). The question is

thought to be the most essential element to the group because it is through seeking to

answer this question that teachers begin to delve beneath the surface of their teaching

practice. The question develops over time as the group of teachers collect evidence and

discuss and reflect on the ways in which to answer the question posed. It is from

engaging with colleagues that these groups are afforded the opportunity to tap into

teachers' knowledge and allows them to build on their questions (Weinbaum, 2004).

In describing *collaborative inquiry spaces*, Weinbaum (2004) points out these spaces

can be places where teachers support one another in evaluating their beliefs about

students and schools, which can assist in changing deeply embedded behaviors.

According to Weinbaum (2004), this is important because these different aspects of

inquiry spaces can enhance a teacher's pedagogy and positively impact their students'

learning. The process of inquiry groups is not a linear process and inquiry questions

proposed by the group may shift as the group learns more about their topic. In the end,

teacher directed spaces have the potential to engage teachers in developing their practice in a manner that is grounded closest to students' needs because inquiry topics can be related to the everyday classroom experiences of teachers (Weinbaum, 2004).

To understand this process of inquiry, teachers must become researchers of their own practice. The body of work on *teacher research* (see Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1989) believes teachers must interrogate their practice as researchers to better understand themselves and their students (Berthoff, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1989). Understanding the process of inquiry as legitimate research begins to shift the paradigm of who is seen as a producer of knowledge. Through a systematic interrogation of their teaching, educators can begin to establish themselves within the teaching profession as capable of learning about themselves through a research process. Taking an active role in developing their own practice shifts the balance of power. Instead of seeing teachers as only capable of providing surface information about their classroom and little else concerning the educational landscape, teachers exhibit their agentic role in creating spaces where they can develop the skills that gets them closer to meeting the needs of their students (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Given that teachers' voices are often not at the decision-making table when educational reform is discussed, teachers have little room to contribute to the way reformation takes shape. University-based researchers not connected to the day-to-day realities of teachers then become the voice for teachers thereby setting the agenda in

terms of what is researched and how; teachers then become objects of a researcher's

gaze. With little say in educational research, teachers are then pushed to implement

findings that, oftentimes, are not rooted in the context teachers face  (Anderson & Herr,

1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990). To illustrate this point, Cochran-Smith and Lytle

(1990) write, "Limiting the knowledge base for teaching to what academics have chosen

to study and write about disenfranchises teachers and relegates their knowledge to the

status of practical information" (p. 1). Teachers are then confined to the parameters of a

research agenda that is set by those not involved in the everyday experiences of the

classroom. From here we can begin to see that the notion of practitioner research pushes

up against the boundaries of university-based research on teachers (Anderson & Herr,

1999).

The potential to transform oppressive schooling structures to ones that are

empowering has led some researchers to argue that teacher research is an important

approach to understand a teacher's practice because teacher researchers are not

obligated to the same processes and procedures of traditional research (Mohr &

MacLean, 1987). What stands out is that teachers have the most potential to put forth

research that does not "emanate solely from theory nor from practice, but from critical

reflection on the intersection of the two" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 6). The power

lies in a teacher researcher's ability to ask specific questions that address the day-to-day

life in their school; this means questions can be asked that address the local context

instead of ones that generalize (Mohr & MacLean, 1987). This is important because it is connected to their classroom and directly impacts students. Consequently, teachers taking a lead role in conducting their own professional development is threatening to traditional schooling structures. Teachers as researchers has the ability to directly speak to the needs of schools, teachers, and students and challenges the role of formal teacher professional development as mandated by schools, districts, and state licensure requirements

Furthermore, the shift in who creates knowledge threatens university-based educational research because the current formula for understanding teachers and their practice is intricately connected to the institutional structures such as schools, districts, and universities. At times, some institutions of education react to teacher-produced knowledge with a disdain that delegitimizes the voice of the teacher (Anderson & Herr, 1999). A dismissive attitude towards teacher-led professional development can be seen as a reaction to protect the perceived power held by administrators or university-based researchers. Anderson and Herr (1999) describe the disregard to teacher-generated knowledge as one-way institutions such as universities protect their power to permit knowledge production. Anderson and Herr (1999) write, "These structures, in turn, create a kind of institutionalized violence that is used to protect the epistemological stances that underlie an institution's perceived legitimacy" (p. 12). This sort of epistemological violence can manifest itself in ways favoring institutional workers and

serves as a gatekeeper to what is considered legitimate and dismisses teacher research altogether because it does not meet university standards. However, Rust (2009) believes it is key to focus explicitly on teachers' thinking and knowledge generated through inquiry groups as a tool for getting teachers' voices heard while using research as a vehicle for civic engagement. Therefore, teacher inquiry groups can be understood as an approach to challenge what counts as legitimate knowledge as teachers work to develop their practice based on the needs of their classroom.

Current scholarship in the field of teacher inquiry groups addresses the efforts of teachers participating in an inquiry practice to shift students' attitudes and beliefs about reading (Aguilar, 2005), how an inquiry group can be used to develop a social justice pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade, 2005), and how an inquiry approach is used to identify what keeps teachers in the profession for the long term (Nieto, 2003). This section will describe the ways an inquiry practice has been used in various settings for teachers to develop their practice around an anchoring question. These examples will underscore the ways teacher inquiry groups can be used in schools as one form of professional development that serves the interest of students, teachers, and schools.

To begin this section highlighting the practical uses of teacher inquiry groups, I thought it appropriate to start with work produced by a teacher researcher. This teacher is asking questions about her teaching practice, student experience, and student learning. Teacher researcher, Elena Aguilar (2005) investigates her practice as a teacher

who looped with her students over the course of three years. As part of her professional development, Aguilar (2005) documents her practice as a middle school, language arts and history teacher in East Oakland through surveys, reflections, videotapes, and journals. The inquiry group's questions centered around student equity so Aguilar's research centered on understanding her students' attitude towards reading because she sees learning to love reading connected to issues of equity. Specifically, Aguilar (2005) writes about one particular student in her piece and describes some of the struggles the student had with literacy and turning points in his attitude towards reading. As a teacher-researcher, Aguilar (2005) writes that her inquiry process allowed her the space to focus on how to better understand and meet the needs of her students. Through this process, we can see that when teachers engage in an inquiry practice they are able to gain a deeper insight about their practice and their students.

To create spaces where teachers teach teachers, Duncan-Andrade (2005) uses a teacher inquiry group model to understand the question, "How to teach for social justice?" (p. 70). Here the author established a teacher inquiry group with seven teachers in the South Central Los Angeles area; the most senior teacher had six years of experience. Duncan-Andrade (2005) highlights the practices of three teachers from the group with the highest student test scores while at the same time critical and culturally relevant. Noting that the three teachers base their notions of teaching on the work of Paulo Freire, Duncan-Andrade (2005) lays out the pedagogical stance of the three

teachers. The work within this inquiry group repositions teachers as intellectuals and seeks to tap into the teacher knowledge of successful teachers to train other teachers in the same school. To develop their teaching practice, the inquiry group was constructed into four cycles: intellectual development, professional development, community development, and holistic growth. Within these cycles, teachers were given the opportunity to be reflective about themselves as achievers and learners. Overall, the collaboration of teachers in this group supported the growth of all the teachers by tapping into the local expertise of teachers to improve the learning of all participants and students.

In this same vein, as a teacher inquiry group facilitator and researcher Sonia Nieto (2003) explores the power of using inquiry as an approach to answer the question, "What keeps teachers going - in spite of everything?" (p. 389). In this inquiry group the author collaborated with eight teachers that had taught for more than twenty-five years in the Boston area; their content areas ranged from math to bilingual classes. Along with this, the ethnic background of these teachers included: African American, Cape Verdean, Haitian, and White. The group provided written responses to questions posed by Nieto (2003) surrounding the readings and their discussions as it related to the challenges they faced in their classrooms. To address the direct need of teachers in their local context, each teacher also came up with a question surrounding an issue they faced in their setting. Drawing from data collected throughout the meetings, Nieto

(2003) identified seven themes surround the question of retaining good teachers. The themes identified are: autobiography, love, hope and possibility, anger and desperation, intellectual work, democratic practice, and the ability to shape the future. Nieto goes on to describe each of these themes briefly and points to the idea that teachers can learn best from others who are committed to teaching and hopeful about the outcomes. Nieto (2003) suggests that through a collaborative inquiry project, teachers remain connected to the teaching profession and engage with their practice on a deeper level. The author advises that teacher preparation programs must move from an emphasis on strategies and techniques to one that encompasses a variety of ways of thinking about learning and one's students (Nieto, 2003).

From these descriptions we can begin to see how teacher inquiry can be used in schools as one form of professional development that serves the interests of students in one classroom, teachers in one school, or teachers in an entire school district. This begins to show the potential of teacher inquiry to challenge the dominant discourse that sees professional development as a top-down model of skills and techniques located outside of the teacher mostly focused on test-taking strategies to one that is more holistic of the teacher's experiences in the classroom. Teacher inquiry groups highlighted above point to the importance of teachers working together to develop theories and practices that seek to address social inequities in education and the community. Still left is a need for further examples of inquiry groups that develop

pedagogy and curriculum with a focus on creating humanizing classrooms and exemplars of groups that assist teachers in developing a pedagogy that is transformational for both the students and the teacher.

**Conclusion**

"Teaching is a political act that is never neutral."

Drawing from theoretical frameworks that address how power plays out in society is important because it provides this study with a lens to understand the social, psychological, and economic conditions teachers and students face while also pointing to the ways communities have created sites of resistance and liberation. Because a teacher's role in society is not a fragmented experience, this study examined the importance of teachers being able to have a voice in how they develop professionally in order to address the immediate problems and concerns teachers faced in their classrooms. Moreover, this study makes a case for teachers to have a voice in their professional training as they work to establish new guidelines that allow them a critical voice in their profession.

Investigating a teacher-led inquiry group was important because it showed what is possible when teachers collaborate, learn, and build while they look to improve their craft. This analysis opens up the possibilities of how to respond to the ways state mandated policies continue to reinscribe and fortify oppressive structures and institutions. By connecting the individualistic nature of colonialism to the racially

oppressive conditions faced by students of color, this project puts forth how teachers created a space for themselves to build a pedagogy that is engaging, relevant, and academically rigorous while challenging notions of hegemony. By developing new ways of thinking, seeing and imagining what is possible, postcolonialism and critical pedagogy allowed this project insight into the ways teachers can come together to create a critical classroom practice that has the potential to engage and enhance student learning.

While some researchers currently seek to provide examples of anti-capitalist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic and anti-racist pedagogies that seek to create engaging learning spaces for urban youth in k-12 classrooms (Bartolomé, 2004; Camangian, 2008, 2010; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005, 2008), the body of work on the process to develop this kind of pedagogical approach remains relatively small. There needs to be a larger body of work that sheds light on the way in which teachers develop this kind of pedagogy. Looking at how teachers developed a pedagogy that meets the need of low-income students of color will greatly contribute to the literature on teacher learning. This study addresses these areas in teacher development and provides examples of how teachers created their space for learning while also providing examples of how this impacted their curriculum development.

**Chapter Three:**
**Methodology for the People**

**Study Overview**

The preceding chapters expatiate the relevant literature that informed the examination of a teacher-led inquiry group. In this study, I investigated teachers creating their own inquiry space, outside of formal structures, in order to improve their teaching practices. The analysis of *power*, as mentioned in chapter two, allowed this project the context from which to begin to examine the roles of teachers as they took on an endeavor to develop their own teacher learning space. For this project, I investigated the experiences of a select group of teachers that attended the teacher-led inquiry group that was developed by the grassroots community-based organization Movement of the People (MOP). My goal is to examine and analyze the collaboration in the teacher-led inquiry group and its dynamics of teachers' thinking and talking about their practice; my unit of analysis is the inquiry group and teachers' reflection about their participation in the inquiry group. The design of this project relied on a rigorous, qualitative approach to data collection.

This project provides a brief glimpse into the work of a teacher-led inquiry group and teachers' reflections as they engaged in a form of grassroots professional development. Seeking to understand the research question posed, I drew from qualitative methodological approaches such as case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) and

ethnography(Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2012; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999) in order to get an in-depth understanding about the setting and participants.

**Research Questions**

In order to deepen my understanding of teachers creating their own spaces for learning I focused on this single case of a teacher-led inquiry group. To achieve this, I documented the teacher-led inquiry group created by the grassroots community based organization, MOP. MOP was the larger entity that sponsored the inquiry group sessions and was responsible for promoting the group to other teachers. For this study, I examined the process of seven members of the teacher-led inquiry group as they voluntarily undertook the process of developing their teaching practice to better serve their students and how the skills and knowledge they developed in the inquiry group manifested itself in the classroom. Through interviews with participants and a review of artifacts I was able to gain insight into how participation in the inquiry group impacted participants social consciousness and curriculum. I explored what happens when teachers come together and create their own space for learning that was equity-based and grassroots. Moreover, I looked at how teachers perceive participating in the inquiry group impacted their teaching practice. The specific questions of this research project are:

- *What is the usefulness of a teacher-led inquiry group for participants?*

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- o *Is a teacher-led inquiry group humanizing? If so, how and why?*
- *What impact does being involved in a teacher-led inquiry group have on participants'*
  *social consciousness?*
- *What impact does being involved in a teacher-led inquiry group have on participants'*
  *pedagogical development?*

These questions allowed my research project to highlight how the process and practice of a teacher initiated inquiry group can be used as a method of professional development for teachers in urban areas like South Los Angeles. This project provides specific information about the nature of changes in teachers' practice and thinking as a result of participating in this teacher-led inquiry group.

**Chapter Overview**

In this chapter, I provide the methodological details of how I approached documenting and analyzing the inquiry group, participants' perceptions, teachers' curriculum and student work. In the remaining parts of the chapter, I first explain why I it is important that I have deep, meaningful relationships with the participants in this study. This then leads into a description of the qualitative method I used for this study and detail the ways a case study drawing from ethnographic methods allowed me to capture the stories of teachers in the inquiry group. I also describe my history with the participants and the setting connected to this study. Following the description of the setting, I provide an explanation of my positionality as a researcher and community

organizer and the ways this may influence the project. Proceeding the discussion of my

positionality as a researcher, I will explain the methods and phases of the data

collection techniques I used with this project. Finally, this chapter concludes with a

discussion of how I conducted an analysis of the data I collected.

**Study Design**

*Relationship with Participants*

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"Nacirema"

- Horace Miner

</div>

Research has been used a tool to reinforce, reify, and/or reinscribe the dominant

discourse in society. Over time, research has depicted communities, indigenous groups,

and/or people in a way that is seen as foreign, different, and inferior (Selden, 1999)

which has painted a distorted picture of whole groups of people (Kelley, 1997; Tuck,

2009). Because of this, I looked to employ a methodological approach that allowed me

to be vigilant and reflexive with the hope of not recreating the kind of research project

that is detached from the lived experiences of the participants.

In my efforts to challenge the researcher-participant paradigm and the so-called

"objectivity" of researchers, I refer back to Horace Miner's (1956) work and the ways he

mocks the idea of a researcher's distance from her participants and how this can impact

one's interpretation of the setting. Miner (1956) describes a North American tribe called

the "Nacirema" (which is "American" spelled backwards) and he takes a purposefully

distant approach in understanding and describing his research participants making the most mundane and everyday activities known to most readers seem exotic and foreign to the point that they are barely recognizable as the practices common in western culture. For example, he uses the phrase "holy mouth men" when describing a dentist who performs an "exorcism of the evils of the mouth involves almost [an] unbelievable ritual torture of the client" (Miner, 1956, p. 505). The position Miner (1956) takes is of one who is unfamiliar with the cultural practices and customs of the Nacirema. What the reader comes to find out is that the people and the cultural practices Miner describes are not foreign at all but are in fact a description of the daily grooming practices of people in the U.S. during the 1950's. Miner's (1956) point is that researchers are bestowed with the power of choosing "what" and "how" to describe once in the setting and just as important, a researcher's interpretation is done within her own limitations of experiences and bias'.

Because power dynamics greatly impact research, I intended to shift the ways in which power was distributed in this study and I drew from the relationships I had with the participants in the inquiry group. I pull from the idea of "critical research" (Morrell, 2004; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006) which moves into an area that honors the meaningful relationships researchers can have with their participants. This position is unapologetically intimate and honors the close relationship researchers have with participants. I see this as important because as Morrell (2004) suggest, it is possible to

collect data that an outsider would not be able to obtain thereby allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the participants and the setting. Along these lines, (Kelley, 1997) writes, "the biggest problem with the way social scientists employ the culture concept in their studies of the black urban poor is their inability to see what it all means to the participants and practitioners" (p. 17). This means that when researchers do not have a deep connection with their participants they are likely to miss salient aspects in the lives of the research participants.

Similarly, as researchers, it is import to understand the communities we seek to "study". Tuck (2009) describes how research continues to frame communities of color as:

> "sites of disinvestment and dispossession; our communities become spaces in which underresourced health and economic infrastructure are endemic … For many of us, the research on our communities has historically been damaged centered, intent on portraying our neighborhoods and tribes as defeated and broken" (p. 412).

This continued pathology of low-income communities of color is one that continues to portray communities of color from a deficit perspective leaving little hope for these communities' existence. For example, much of mainstream rhetoric surrounding education and teachers specifically, is one where teachers are framed as lazy, excuse-making quasi-professionals; in other words, "bad" (Kumashiro, 2012). Much of the general debate surrounding education is whether teachers are getting students to achieve on test scores, the pitfalls of tenure, and the evils of teacher unions; a *Waiting*

*For Superman* based argument on what is wrong with teaching and education. While

there may be "bad teachers" in the educational system, I think it is important to insert a

discussion of teachers that are motivated to learn how to be better teachers for their

students and the communities they serve. Research must also tell the stories of

triumphs, hope, and resistance found in communities of color where they have

struggled in the face of and in spite of oppressive conditions (Tuck, 2009). This is not to

say that there is nothing wrong in low-income communities of color. Looking at the

local context in Los Angeles alone, research shows there are low rates of high school

completion (Swanson, 2009), economic disinvestment (Davis, 2006), and high rates of

crime and violence (Spacek, 2011);  needless to say, there are serious problems. The

trouble with a damage-centered focus is that that is the story most often told which

leaves outsiders to think that these problems are all that communities of color have to

offer (Tuck, 2009). Just as the current discourse surrounding teachers tells us, all

teachers are "bad."

Moving us closer to pushing research to give voice to the multiple experiences

faced by communities of color, Tuck (2009) points out, "We can insist that research in

our communities, whether participatory or not, does not fetishize damage but, rather,

celebrates our survivance" (p. 422). To think about research in these terms moves away

from simply describing the impact a dominant group has over a minoritized group.

Instead, a research approach that seeks to honor the survivance and resistance of

communities of color shifts the dominant narrative of a meek and conquered people

living under imperialist rule to one where participants' strengths are highlighted (Tuck,

2009).

**A Qualitative Research Approach**

To adequately examine the utility of teachers voluntarily coming together I

employed a qualitative methodological approach. From the subfields of qualitative

research I drew on the fields of *case study* (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) and

*ethnography* (Carspecken, 1996; Erickson, 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Schensul

et al., 1999; Wolcott, 1987). In the following sections, I will clearly define these

qualitative approaches, lay out the key theoretical underpinnings of the fields, and then

discuss how I brought these areas together for this project.

*Case Study*

To begin the discussion of my approach to this study, it is first important to

clearly define what is a *case study*. Case studies are "an exploration of a 'bounded

system' of a case or multiple cases over time through detail, in-depth data collection

involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 2012, p. 61). This

idea of a *bounded system* (Smith, 1974) implies the case has a boundary or even a unique

identity of its own. Stake (1995) explains that case studies are investigated because the

researcher is interested in the phenomena for its complexities, uniqueness, and

commonalities. In a sense, the researcher is seeking to uncover the stories related to that

particular case. Yin (2009) defines a case study as "…an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). To put it simply, researchers using a case study approach are tasked with rigorously investigating a problem within a real-life context.

Moreover, Yin (2009) points out how case study methods are best suited when the project deals with trying to understand the behavior of people or systems and that these cannot be manipulated by the researcher. The advantage of a case study is that it can capture an in-depth perspective of real-life situations and check for meaning of the setting directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice (Yin, 2009).

Important to ensuring a thorough investigation of the setting, case studies look to verify findings and assertions through the use of multiple sources of evidence. Flyvbjerg (2011) adds that what makes a case study is the demarcation of the unit's boundaries and depth for the unit of study that incorporates multiple forms of data to support findings. With this, a case study allows for the researcher to draw the lines for the individual unit of study (Stake, 1995). For this study, I selected the teacher-led inquiry group and its participants as a case in order to maximize what can be learned over the course of the year's inquiry meetings. This is important because as Stake (1995) notes, creating these boundaries assists in deciding what counts as the case and what becomes context to the case. Since the inquiry group was the case the focus on

participants' experiences and curriculum were the *context* to the case. By clearly laying

out the boundaries of the case, I was able to point to the *cultural systems of action*s or the

sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the teachers in the inquiry group. From here,

a case study approach was useful to understand this group of teachers because the idea

is that each case is similar and unique, therefore, it was important to hear the

experiences of these teachers to see the differences and similarities within this group

and across other spaces created for teacher learning.

A case study allowed me to enter this project with a sincere interest in learning

how the inquiry group functions while also learning about the participants. Through

employing a case study I was able to get closer to examining the happenings in the

inquiry group and the wholeness of the experiences of participants and the ways their

learning manifested itself in their curricula.

The goal of this case study was to explore the particularities of the teacher-led

inquiry. One of the goals for a case study is not so much to "map and conquer the world

but to sophisticate the beholding of it" (Stake, 1995, p. 43). This idea put forth by Stake

looks to an understanding of human experience in space and time more than causal

relationships. Stake (1995) points out, this idea draws from Von Wright's (1971) notion

that explanations are thought to advance understanding and understanding is

sometimes expressed in terms of explanation.

The purpose of using a case study is my attempt at investigating human experiences of the participants in the teacher-led inquiry group. My interest in using a case study model for this project was informed by Merriam's (1998) notion that a case study is useful when the descriptive data collected are used to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions. My goal then was to collect as much information about the setting as possible with the intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about the teachers and the inquiry group. Multiple sources of information were collected and used to provide a rich description of the setting. This allowed my study to focus on the ways this particular group of teachers confronted a specific issue of developing their classroom practice from a holistic perspective. For a detailed description of my data collection methods see the *data collection* section below.

*Ethnography*

For this project, I also drew from the field of ethnography, especially from the area of critical ethnography. Critical ethnography is important for this project because of the ways in which it seeks to shift power relationships between the researcher and participants (Carspecken, 1996).

Many times, ethnography in the traditional sense looks to provide an unbiased analysis of a particular group (Schensul et al., 1999). The work of Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) defines ethnography to be when the researcher participates in implicit and explicit ways in the day-to-day lives of the group for an extended period of time.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe this to include "watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research" (p. 1). Common for the ethnographer is their direct participation in the setting they are observing to accumulate local knowledge (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Because of this, the ethnographer must be constantly self-critical and reflexive to ensure an analytical description and interpretation of the case. Erickson (1996) notes that ethnography must also include an understanding of the researcher's own positionality with and within the observational environment in order to acknowledge her own assumptions and biases. While some ethnographers (i.e., Schensul et al., 1999) view the purpose of ethnography to be unbiased, Erickson (1996) challenges this notion of objectivity and calls for the researcher to be transparent about her positionality being forthright about the kinds of bias's the researcher may harbor.

At the heart of an ethnographic study, the researcher is looking to understand the culture of the setting. The researcher is looking to make meaning of the actions and events as interpreted by the participants. From here, I combined a general understanding of ethnography as mentioned above and drew from the literature on critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 2012; Wolcott, 1987), for moving the study beyond traditional ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Schensul et al., 1999).

In previous chapters, I highlighted the importance of drawing from the field of critical theory; therefore, it is important the methods I choose fall in line with this theoretical framework. Given that critical theory was introduced with the intent of liberating people through the process of understanding and actively addressing patterns of power and domination, it is important to draw from the literature on critical ethnography. Carspecken (1996) considers critical ethnography to be a methodology that allows the researcher and participants to call out systems of power and changing oppressive conditions toward greater freedom and equity. Taking an *activist stance*, Fine (1994) calls for the critical ethnographer to take a clear position in opposition to hegemonic practices and ideas while also offering alternatives and solutions to oppressive conditions. This particular stance acted as a compass for the larger case. Along with this, critical ethnography places an emphasis on knowing or understanding from the participants' perspective. A large part of a critical ethnography is understanding what is happening in the setting rather than the researcher predicting or controlling the narrative.

To provide a detailed account of the site, as with most ethnographies, I relied on my observational field notes as one of the primary research instruments for data collection. The observational field notes consisted of a description of the participants and the setting from which I employed an inductive approach to discover important categories as I moved to code and analyze the information collected. As a member of

MOP and through regularly attending meetings and events, I tried to make my participation in the setting as natural as possible. While I was able to take short notes while in the setting, I regularly produced more in-depth descriptions of the happenings shortly after leaving the setting. This was usually within an hour while my experiences were still vivid in my mind. With detailed descriptions, I hope to enable the reader to determine whether the findings can be transferred "because of shared characteristics" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p. 32). It is from the fields of case study drawing from ethnographic approaches, as described above, which informed the way in which this study was conducted.

*Ethnographic Case Study*

A case method drawing approaches from the field of ethnography was important for this project because of the kind of site and participants involved with this project. Because little is known about what teacher-led inquiry groups offers to teachers it would be hard to justify this inquiry space as representative of what teachers do in their spare time. Instead, this case can possibly be defined as having strategic importance in relation to the general problem of teachers wanting to learn how to better meet the needs of their students which is why it was important to use an ethnographic case study approach. Willis (2007) suggests that case studies are much more similar to ethnography than dissimilar. Both look to provide an in-depth description of the context they are studying. This means that both the field of ethnography and case study

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place an emphasis on making sense of the setting and the relationship the participants

have to that particular place. There are those in the field that believe a true ethnography

must be conducted over a long period of time; much longer than this project could

undertake at the time. However, critical ethnographies are understood to be conducted

over a shorter period of time, which fits within the constraints of completing this

dissertation in a timely manner (Carspecken, 1996). Along with this, instead of gaining

the perspective of all those involved, this project limited its boundaries to focus on the

seven participants that met the selection criteria. This afforded the study the

opportunity to get an in-depth understanding of my unit of analysis of participants'

perceptions. My focus on the participants was purposeful because of the following:

their participation in all inquiry group meetings, their willingness to teach from a social

justice perspective, and they engaged in community organizing as a means to address

educational inequities in their community. Lastly, it is important to note that this project

emphasizes on knowing or understanding from the participants' perspective

(Carspecken, 1996).

**Positionality of the Researcher**

> "The biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values,
> their research questions, and the knowledge they construct"
> - James Banks

As a Latino with working class roots my resistant attitude toward schooling gave

my high school teachers and administrators license to push me to the margins of my

school; my identity is a considerable factor in this project. When I was in school, it was not uncommon to find me sitting in the principal's office during school hours because I "broke the rules." Reflecting back on my experiences as a young Latino student, I can say that I found my education irrelevant and disconnected from my lived reality. As a result of my resistant attitude, I was tracked into non-college prep courses where I was barely prepared with the academic skills to graduate from high school, much less enter a four-year university. Much like what many low-income students of color face today.

My work in education began in San Francisco where I developed and managed a performing arts program that mentored and supported young people who were functioning at the margins of their school communities. As an educator, I understand that it is difficult for young people to learn when they live in crisis or do not regularly have their basic needs met. As a Latino that experienced similar difficulties during childhood, I identify with the students that exhibit a range of resistant attitudes. I am drawn to these young people because I see their potential to become critical agents of change in their communities, yet they are often the least supported to do so. Moreover, as an educator in the urban context, I became frustrated with the continued failure of schools to reach students that I knew had tremendous potential to do well in school. The feeling that schools continue to fail young people, much like my experiences in school, is my impetus to work with teachers to develop critical teaching practices that reach all students.

Moving to Los Angeles from San Francisco in September 2009, I soon began

organizing with a multi-issue focused organization headquarted in San Diego and with

a chapter in Los Angeles called *Latino Council*[7] (LC) whose members consisted of mostly

Latino teachers. The overall goal of the organization is to establish and uphold the

rights and liberties of the Latino community and sees education as an important

foundation for all political and economic progress. Over the course of three years, I

engaged in political education work with this organization. The work in LC mostly

centered on political education. Political education was at times my own development

and other times it was for the development of other members of the organization or the

community. Political education manifested itself in many different ways such as

community forums, teacher inquiry groups, or street protests, to name just a few

examples. In my last year with the organization (2011-2012), I was elected to a

leadership position and was afforded a behind the scenes look at the functioning of the

organization.

In May 2012, I stepped away from working with LC and over the months of May

- September 2012, I was presented the opportunity to engage in creating the

infrastructure of a multi-ethnic, grassroots organization called Movement of the People

(MOP) along with twelve other founding members. MOP is an organization focused on

creating sustainable libratory spaces inside and outside the classroom, to promote

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[7] A pseudonym is used to protect the identity of the participants.

growth, healing, and transformation. It is from the courage and strength of each person involved in the creation of MOP to be open with me, and I with them, that I was given the opportunity to build deep meaningful relationships with like-minded teachers, university students, and community members.

Throughout this study I walked a fine line as an insider/outsider and I played dual roles; MOP member and graduate student researcher. As a community organizer, I have come to know this group of approximately twelve teacher activists through our organizing efforts in Los Angeles. I have built deep relationships with these teachers, especially those in the inquiry group, as we all engaged in political education work in the community through organizing movie screenings and reading circles, attended protest such as May Day, facilitated community forums, traveled to Arizona for teach-ins conducted by Tucson Unified teachers in the Mexican American Studies program, and worked to get policy such as AB 151 passed in California. I have come to know, trust, and love this group of people deeply.

*My position in the inquiry group*

I became involved in the inquiry groups because of my experiences creating inquiry groups in Los Angeles from 2010-2012. As one part of the work that is done in MOP we established a teacher-led inquiry group that was the collective work of the Education Working Group. I was an active participant of the Education Working Group and I provided input in the planning of the inquiry group meetings along with other in

the committee. For example, I supported the committee in creating and disseminating all promotional materials to promote the inquiry group, and suggested and provided readings and videos for the group to analyze. I also made myself available to debrief with facilitators about past and future inquiry group meetings through emails or phone calls.

While I am an insider to the organization that supports the work of creating the inquiry group, I am also now a graduate student and with that carry a certain amount of privileges that sets me apart from the teachers in this project. While there are many differences, one big difference between the teachers and myself is that I was afforded with the time to engage with the happenings of the inquiry group. I took this into consideration in what I expected from what teachers were able to do for the inquiry group. Additionally, my relationship with MOP members was valuable because of my ability to tap into the nuances that an outsider might have completely overlooked or simply did not understand. Drawing from past experiences working in urban schools and using youth development techniques to engage students, in this project I did not consider myself to be a neutral bystander, just letting the field unfold in front of me; nor do I believe I am free from judgments or bias. Instead, I saw my role as a one where I was willing to make an impact on the setting in which I participated. Ultimately, I believe most research to be politically loaded and saw my ability to connect with

teachers in this community as an asset with the potential to leave the community better than it was before.

**Description of the site**

MOP is a grassroots organization made up of teachers and community members primarily from South Los Angeles. Members of MOP voluntarily show up to general body meetings each month to engage in discussions on educational equity and then work towards solutions. The general body meetings are held in a classroom in South Los Angeles with an average attendance of approximately thirty members. The structure of the general body has two parts. In the first hour of the general body meeting there is a political education segment that is facilitated by the leadership, which has centered on topics such as the struggle for Ethnic Studies in Arizona. In the second hour of the meeting the members divide up into different committees. The inquiry group is a project that comes out of the Education Working Group. The need for the inquiry group is the result of MOP members expressing a need to create their own form of teacher development to supplement the professional development they receive from their districts and/or administrators that is largely focused on getting students to achieve on standardized tests. In attempt to address the gaps in the teacher professional development offered to MOP members, the Education Working Group created the space for teachers to develop their pedagogy. The teacher-led inquiry group at the center of this project was created and facilitated by members of MOP. I participated in

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the Education Working Group and provided input on the development of the inquiry

group with other members of the committee. Participants discussed the importance for

a paradigm shift in how teachers, districts, and schools view learning while also

interrogating the outcome based, standardized view of public education and learning,

embedded within a positivist Western tradition. Ultimately, the Education Working

Group decided to on the inquiry question to be, "How do we develop a decolonizing

pedagogy?" Over the course of the inquiry groups I worked to support the committee

and facilitators with whatever tasks needed to be done. Along with this, I kept in

contact with the facilitators and provided insights about the group. I also leveraged any

resources available to me and accessed readings not publicly available.

*History of the Teacher-led Inquiry Group*

The teacher inquiry group grew out of the inquiry group I helped to start as a

member of the Latino Council (LC). The past teacher inquiry group grew out of the

teachers' concern that while we may be engaging in political education in LC we did not

engage in the discussion around what social justice teaching looks like in the classroom.

A driving question the group had was, "what are the teaching methods that would align

themselves with the political education work we are engaging in as community

organizers?"

In June 2010, LC hosted a "curriculum symposium" which was an event that

brought in what we called *master teachers* - teachers who had been in the profession for

at least ten years and had strong content knowledge with a focus on social justice. With

over thirty in-serve teachers in attendance, the groups were divided into subject area.

The two master teachers, one 12th grade English teacher and university professor from

San Francisco and one 12th grade history teacher from San Fernando Valley presented

on a unit to the group. At the end of the presentations, attendees were encouraged to

attend the monthly inquiry group meetings that were scheduled to meet once a month

in Los Angeles. The teachers were going to meet based on subject area and consisted of

an English, history, and elementary groups that were going to be facilitated by LC

members.

The first meeting of the English and history group were well attended,

approximately seven teachers per group, but attendance waned as the school year got

underway. The elementary group never held an initial meeting. By September 2010 the

history group stopped meeting and the English group was down to four participants

including the facilitators of the English and history[8] groups. In order to revive the

inquiry group, in December 2010 we decided to host another "curriculum symposium"

but this time we had the facilitators of the history and English groups present on

curriculum that was created in the inquiry groups. Again, this was a well-attended

event with approximately thirty attendees interested in the idea of inquiry to improve

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[8] The history group facilitator joined the English group after the history group members stopped
attending.

one's pedagogy. However, it was decided that the English group and history group

were going to merge. From here through May 2012, the teacher inquiry group met once

per month and had a regular attendance of approximately seven teachers of color from

public and charter middle and high schools.

*Structure of the Teacher-led Inquiry Group*

The teacher inquiry group was held twice per month. Each meeting lasted two to

three hours and over the course of six months (January through June) there were a total

of twelve meetings. In the first hour, the group discussed readings surrounding critical

social theory and education that was selected by the facilitators for that month. The

facilitators were members of MOP that had been in the teaching profession for at least

five years and willing to take on the responsibility of leading the group. The facilitators

prepared discussion questions for the group to instigate dialogue. The readings were

linked to issues that teachers faced in their classroom and that critically examine

educational theory and classroom practice. Readings were used as a way to support

participants in better understanding the issues they faced in their classrooms. The

second hour consisted of participants sharing lesson plans, syllabi, etc., with the group.

From here, the group engaged in feedback that was guided by a protocol the facilitators

created and then was agreed upon by participants. One to two presenters were chosen

in advance to come prepared to the inquiry meeting and share their lesson, syllabi, etc.

with the group. The facilitators would keep time and asked the educator sharing to

provide a description of the lesson - this should take no longer than fifteen minutes. Next, the participants had up to five minutes to ask clarifying questions to the presenter. Then, after the clarifying questions, the participants gave feedback to the presenter. During this time the person who shared was asked not to speak but instead encouraged to take notes - this was no longer than twenty minutes. Lastly, for the remaining ten minutes the educator presenting material shared out what she or he heard as feedback from the group and what she will take away from the feedback given.

**Recruitment & Participants**

Since members of MOP created the inquiry group, I drew on what (R. S. Weiss, 1994) describes as convenience sampling; the teachers that showed up to the inquiry group made up the research participants. To recruit teachers to the inquiry group the Education Working Group created a flier and sent it out over their list serve, posted it to their Face Book page, and featured it on their website home page. Over the course of the inquiry group twenty-eight different people attended the inquiry group meetings. However, not all of the attendees stayed committed to the inquiry group. To select my participants for this research project I based the criteria on attendance. The seven participants of this study attended all twelve inquiry group meetings.

The seven participants were from a broad range of schools, disciplines, and teaching experiences. The chart below highlights the make-up of participants:

**Table 3.1 Participant Demographics**

| Name | Years of Teaching | Grade Level | Subject | Race/Ethnicity | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ms. Nieto* | 13 | 12th Grade | English | Chicana | Female |
| Mr. Spirit* | 7 | 9th Grade | Ethnic Studies | Chicano | Male |
| Ms. Ides | 6 | 7th Grade | Science | Chicana | Female |
| Ms. Garcia | 6 | 4th Grade | Elementry | Chicana | Female |
| Ms. Hela | 6 | 11th Grade | Chemistry | White | Female |
| Ms. Ramos | 1 | 11th Grade | Spanish | Chicana | Female |
| Ms. McIntosh | 1 (pre-service) | -- | History | White | Female |

*indicates inquiry group facilitator

**Table 3.2 Participant Overview**

| Research Participants Overview |
|---|
| Public (2); Charter (5) |
| Elementary (1); Middle (1); Secondary (5) |
| Teacher Experience: Pre-service to 13 years |
| Race/ethnicity: Chicana/o (5); White (2) |
| Women (6); Men (1) |

Looking at the make-up of the participants, they were predominantly educators of color working in elementary, middle, or high school settings. The participants worked in public and charter schools in South Los Angeles in schools that served predominantly

low-income Latino and Black students. The teachers are from a range of disciplines and in the humanities to science. Only two teachers taught at the same school. All other teachers worked in different schools in South Los Angeles. The participants voluntarily attended the inquiry group during the 2012-2013 school year and did not receive any incentive for their participation in this study. Lastly, it is important to point out that my spouse was among the participants of this study.

**Method for Data Collection**

The method of data collection for this project was informed by the work of Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) which consisted of: participant observation in the inquiry group and Education Working Group meetings, one-on-one interviews with the participants at the beginning, middle, and end of this project, email correspondences between myself and participants, and a review of curriculum produced by each of the participants. Along with this, during the first interview I asked participants their motives and goals for participating in the inquiry group. I began my data collection with the start of the inquiry group session as a participant observer and made explicit my participation as a researcher from the start so as not to mislead those participating in the inquiry group. I documented the five planning meetings (January 2013 - June 2013). Along with this, I closely focused on the teachers' experiences and perceptions about the group to gain a deep understanding of their experiences in the inquiry group

and their perceptions of how participating in the inquiry group impacted their classroom practice.

Next, I will describe in greater detail the multiple techniques I used to gather information for this project. Within each description I have included guiding questions that helped me to focus the ways I gathered information in the setting. While these questions assisted me in focusing my attention while in the setting I remained open to emerging happenings in the field as they occurred. Following the description of the methodological techniques, I have included a calendar detailing the timeframe for which I collected the multiple sources of evidence[9].

*Participant Observation in the Teacher-led Inquiry Group:* My role in the inquiry group was that of researcher and participant. I acted as a participant observer at all of the inquiry group meeting, which totaled 12. This gave me an opportunity to closely observe the interactions of the teachers and I was allowed to capture the dialogue and non-verbal cues of participants in the room. Through this method I was able to take active and significant role in the inquiry group.

Guiding questions I used while in inquiry group:

- Are teachers using ideas and concepts from the readings in their conversations? If so, how?

- Are teachers problematizing the readings and videos? If so, how?

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[9] See appendix 3.2

- Are teachers problematizing their own experiences in and out of the classroom? If so, how?

- Are teachers problematizing their curricula? If so, how?

- How are participants engaging in the inquiry group and to what degree?

- What kinds of curricula is developed by the teacher and why?

*Participant Observation in the Teacher-led Inquiry Group Planning Meeting:* My role in the inquiry group planning meeting was that of researcher and participant. I acted as a participant observer at all of the inquiry group meetings, which totaled 6. In these meetings I provided input on the kinds of readings, videos, and structure of the inquiry group just as any other member of the planning team. My role as a participant allowed me the opportunity to capture the dialogue and non-verbal ques in the meeting. Guiding questions I used while in the inquiry group planning meetings:

- What are the kinds of conversations had in the planning meeting?

- How do these conversations allow the teachers to create the inquiry group?

- Do the teachers draw from other resources to create the inquiry group? If so, what are they?

- What are the ways the meeting is structured?

*One-on-One interviews with focus teachers*: These interviews were used to follow up with issues and topics teachers brought up in the inquiry group meetings. One-on-one interviews allowed me the opportunity to ask questions to the participants so that can

further discuss their thoughts and feelings about their participation in the group. The

first interview was used to collect background information about the participants. The

second interview was used to get participants initial thoughts on their experiences

participating in the inquiry group. The third interview was used to get participants

overall reflection on their participation in the inquiry group. Also, this one-on-one

dynamic allowed me the space and time to make sense of my interpretation of the

setting with the participants. This allowed teacher's voices to be incorporated into the

analysis. The teacher's responses were also be transcribed and coded for themes. Also I

shared my transcripts, codes/interpretations with the participants to ensure that my

interpretations were consistent with what they were trying to convey. There were a

total of 21 interviews conducted.

Guiding Questions for One-on-One Interviews:

Interview #1:

- How long have you been teaching?

- What subject do you teach?

- Why did you decide to go into teaching?

- What brought them to teaching?

- Where/what do you teach?

- How would you define a decolonizing pedagogy? Why is this important?

- What brings you to the inquiry group?

- How did you get involved in the inquiry group?

- Talk about the PD that you receive at your school.

Interview #2:

- Tell me two things that were useful and why?

- What do you get out of this space?

- What two things did you find useful in the group today/overall?

- If you were to describe this space to someone else how would you describe it?

- How is the power dynamic different in this space?

- What was/is your role in the inquiry group?

- Why do you continue to participate in the inquiry group?

Interview #3:

- What were you're overall experiences in the inquiry group?

- How would you define a decolonizing pedagogy? Why is this important?

- Has participating in the inquiry group impacted your teaching? If so, how?

*Collection of artifacts*: For the purpose of this study, I examined units created by the

teachers. This examination allowed me to see how teachers incorporate ideas and

suggestions that come up in the inquiry group into their curriculum. The artifacts were

important pieces of data because they afforded this study an opportunity to analyze

whether teachers are taking their experiences in the inquiry group and applying it to

their classroom.

Guiding Questions For Assessing Teacher Artifacts:

- Are teachers drawing from their experiences in the inquiry group? If so, how?

- What kinds of curriculum are teachers creating?

- What are the themes found throughout the units?

- Do teachers use a vocabulary that incorporates language from the inquiry group? If so

how?

**Data Analysis**

According to Stake (1995), qualitative researchers cannot separate the process of

data collection from data analysis and interpretation. Stake (1995) writes, "There is no

particular point when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to

first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71). To make the process of data

analysis systematic, I started with what Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) call

*analytic memos*. The analytic memos were created after a series of field notes had been

written and assisted me in drawing out themes that became apparent in my field notes.

I then moved to create categories in order to organize the information based on

common themes and uniqueness. From here I drew on two steps for coding data

identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985): *unitizing* and *categorizing*. For unitizing data, I

separated information into smaller units that typified key characteristics or

subcategories of the data as related to my research questions. Next, I categorized and

combined units based on common characteristics to describe a larger theme associated

with the phenomenon. After the initial unitizing and categorizing I subcategorized to make sure there was enough subcategories between data so that my key findings were distinct. From these categories I developed *codes*. Codes are defined as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study"(Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 54).

An important part of my data analysis was working with my participants so that they can provide input to the interpretation of information collected related to the research topic (Carspecken, 1996). Over the months of July - November I engaged in the process of *member checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) where participants provided insights about the data I collected. This was important because it allowed participants to provide insights about the study that I may have overlooked or simply did not have the capacity to understand because of my own positionality in the setting. The voice of participants for this study was important because of the ways it has the potential to minimize issues of power between the researcher, participants, and the interpretation of information collected in the setting. This approach allowed the participants to challenge my ideas and allowed for the story of the participants to be "told".

## CHAPTER 4
## Findings: Sharpen Political Clarity

**Introduction**

This chapter examines the ways participants sought to deepen their social

consciousness and how it then translated to impacting classroom practice. In this

chapter, I present the findings from my role as a participant observer in the bi-monthly

inquiry group meetings, 21 interviews with seven participants, and a review of

hundreds of pages of artifacts that included teacher lesson plans and student work.

Tapping into the cultural practices of participants as they support and learn with one

another, I looked at how participants sought to deepen their social consciousness and

applied new theoretical frameworks to their work in the classroom. Drawing from

interview data and my participation in the inquiry group, I examined the ways

participants described their thoughts, feeling, and experiences as participants in the

group.

The findings laid out in this chapter answer the following research questions:

- *What impact does being involved in this teacher-led inquiry group have on participants'*
  *social consciousness?*

- *What impact does being involved in this teacher-led inquiry group have on participants'*
  *pedagogical development?*

The themes, which emerged from the data, answered the research questions that were

the focus of this chapter. What emerged from the data are the ways the participants in

the inquiry group honored what one another brought to the group as they engaged in

the process of learning and developing their social consciousness. From there, I look at

how teachers drew from their experiences in the inquiry group to inform their

classroom practice.

**Teacher-led Inquiry to Sharpen Political Clarity**

> "It's a collaborative space where we read educational theory and it's a space that
> helps us to intellectualize our work to grow our teaching practice."

> - Ms. Nieto

The above quote from Ms. Nieto was captured in our one-on-one interview when

I asked her how she would describe the inquiry group to her colleagues. Ms. Nieto's

response echoed the sentiments of all other participants; engaging in the intellectual

work of reading and discussing academic text was an important aspect of this group.

Most teachers described this part of the inquiry group as "necessary" in order for them

to take on the inquiry project of understanding how to define and develop a

decolonizing pedagogy. According to the participants, reading and discussing scholarly

text was important for them as learners to deepen their understanding of their

positionality and the social context of their schools. This allowed them the space to

engage intellectually as they worked to apply what they learned in the inquiry group to their classroom practice.

The concept of *Sharpen Political Clarity* builds on Bartolomé's, (1994; 2004) notion of developing teacher's political clarity. For Bartolomé (2004), teacher development must include teachers engaging in the practice to examine their own positionality and how their position informs their worldview especially as it relates to the context in which they teach. The findings of this chapter called Sharpen Political Clarity differs from Bartolomé (2004) in that the participants in this study drove the process of developing their own political clarity through a teacher-led inquiry group.

In the following sections, I will point to three subthemes that, together, make up this concept of Sharpen Political Clarity. The first subtheme I will examine I refer to as, *Read Critical Social Theory*, which investigates how participants discussed the importance of engaging in the readings done in the inquiry group as an approach to learning about larger systemic issues related to power in society. Then, I will examine the discussions participants engage in during the inquiry group meeting, which I refer to as *Discuss to Deepen Understanding*. The final subtheme that makes up Sharpen Political Clarity is *Collaboration* and this section of the chapter will examine the importance of teachers coming together with like-minded colleagues to develop their understanding and interpretations of readings and the ways they apply new knowledge to their curriculum.

**Figure 4.1 Sharpen Political Clarity Process Cycle**
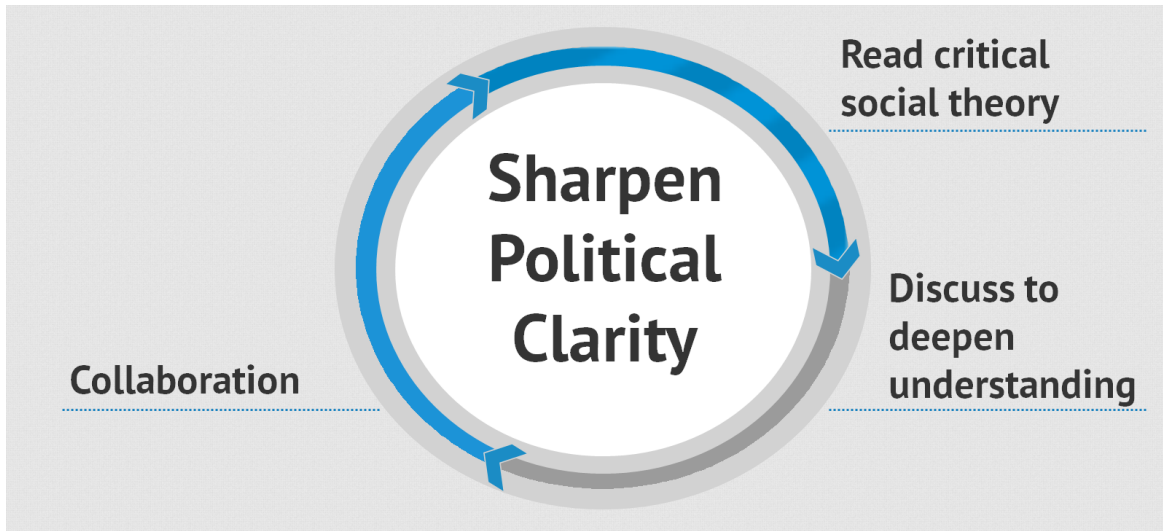


**Read Critical Social Theory**

This notion to *Sharpen Political Clarity* started with participants reading articles grounded in critical social theory (see reading list below). Participants reported this was an important part of the group because it asked them to engage intellectually and got them involved in their own learning. As Ms. Ides stated, "The reading part is a really important part for me, personally." Being expected to read for each meeting gave teachers the academic space to further their knowledge surrounding theoretical and practical educational research and pieces of fiction addressing issues of power. The group drew from readings that focused on topics such as critical pedagogy, postcolonial, and decolonial theory. Participants created a reading list which mirrored a doctoral course syllabus that was grounded in cultural studies. The inquiry group reading list for the 2012-2013 school year was as follows:

Alexie, S, (2013)Indian education. The Lone Ranger and Tonto fistfight in heaven.

Camangian, P. R. (2013). Seeing through lies: Teaching ideological literacy as a corrective lens.

Constantino, R. (1970). The Mis-education of the Filipino.

Duncan-Andrade, J. (2005). Developing social justice educators.

Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2008). The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools.

Grande, S. (2004). Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought.

Moraga, C. (1983). Loving in the war years.

Morrell, E. (2008). Critical literacy and urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation.

Ngũgĩ, W. T. O. (1986). Decolonizing the mind: The politics of language in African literature.

Santa Ana, O. (2004). Tongue-tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education

Tejeda, C., Espinoza, M., & Gutierrez, K. (2003).Towards a decolonizing pedagogy: Social justice reconsidered.

Paperson, L. (2010). The postcolonial ghetto: Seeing her shape and his hand.

Over the course of the year, participants assigned themselves readings to deepen their

consciousness of the social, political, historical, and economic conditions that shape

their realities and their ability to change those conditions. Key to the development of

teachers' consciousness was developing a combination of a macro/micro analysis of

teacher's positionality and the lived realities of students. A macro analysis afforded

teachers with the lens to make sense of the complex social conditions under which they

and their students live. A microanalysis provided participants a lens to understand the ways these complex social conditions impacts their classrooms.

Allowing teachers the space to make sense of the conditions they work-in proved to be important for all the participants. Speaking to the need to read critical educational research, Ms. Nieto said, "...we read authors that think critically about practices that become so embedded and so normalized we don't often see the issue with them." Reading text that challenge the everyday practices that often times go un-noticed provided teachers with a perspective that dispute normative beliefs about schools. In other instances, the participants stated that the readings provided them with the opportunity to learn an opposing view of school practices and policies they may not have previously considered problematic and approaches to subvert dehumanizing schooling practices. Ms. Ramos said:

> "The readings are an important part of being in the inquiry group, I try to take what I read in the articles and make my teaching better...It's [being in the group] sorta like being in grad school and I like having the space to think about a critical view of teaching and being in the classroom because I don't get that at my school."

The inquiry group provided participants a space for learning about the complex social conditions that often times are not explained through traditional professional development.

Engaging in readings that made sense of participants' socio-political context provided them a lens and language to further articulate what they believed. In this next

example, Ms. Hela described how the readings spoke to her personal values and beliefs. Doing the readings provided her with the words to further articulate the world around her. She said:

> "I didn't know how far I could take what I love [teaching science] because I didn't have any theory at all. I just knew what I believed. I was talking to a friend that I've had since high school and I sent him all the articles we read... and so he was just reminding me that those seem to be the things I believe in and now I have a vocabulary and context to make sense of it."

Ms. Hela is armed with a theoretical framework that aligns closely with what she believes to be important in her life. The larger framework the teachers in this group are uncovering speaks to some core principles that resonate with Ms. Hela's own beliefs. Learning about research that described the material conditions of urban schools appeared to provide her with a deeper understanding of her personal beliefs and values. It seemed as if the texts provided her with the language to further make sense of her reality.

Moreover, exposure to ideas and concepts that disrupt normalized practices and beliefs appeared to be beneficial for teachers. Participants took what they learned in the inquiry group and applied it to their classroom practices and curriculum. Further supporting this argument, Ms. McIntosh stated:

> "Readings are pushing decolonial thought... I think the readings are getting at that, they're pushing back at more traditional kinds of schools and, so, it's making me think about what I'm doing with my students."

Ms. McIntosh echoed the sentiment of many other teachers. The learning that takes place in the inquiry group appeared to get them to rethink what they are doing in their classrooms. The teachers discussed how they better understood the importance of being reflective and deliberate about their interactions with students and the curriculum they teach. The impacts of Sharpen Political Clarity will be further explored later in this chapter.

*Check for Understanding*

To understand the impact of engaging in the text related to the inquiry group, I conducted pre and post assessments to document participants understanding of the concept, "decolonizing pedagogy". Next, I will examine the change in definitions of Ms. Ramos and Ms. Hela. I have chosen these two participants because out of all the participants they expressed having very little understanding with the concept, which was the case with Ms. Hela. On the other side, Ms. Ramos expressed having some understanding of the term decolonizing pedagogy. As I will explain below, by the end of this study, participants appeared to have a clearer definition of a decolonizing pedagogy. The participants attributed their learning to the texts and dialogue they were exposed to in the inquiry group, however, this does not mean outside factors did not also contributed to their development.

During our first interview, Ms. Hela described the term decolonizing pedagogy as follows:

"I never heard that word before framed that way but it brings me back to the conversations I had about what systems are in place and who's benefitting from those systems. And I think it's about acknowledging the privilege I had growing up, in terms of I fit the system and so I guess I don't know how to say it succinctly, it's like becoming more and more aware of the systems that are in place that systematically paint things black and white, good and bad, and lazy and not, and what is success and all those things are in my head right now. It's a little overwhelming, right now, honestly."

In the above quote, Ms. Hela acknowledged being unfamiliar with the term

decolonizing pedagogy. However, she pointed out the importance of understanding her

own positionality and the ways she benefits from systems of power as elements of a

decolonizing pedagogy. Central to what she believed a decolonizing pedagogy to be is

understanding systems of power.

In comparison, during our last interview in June when I asked Ms. Hela to define

a decolonizing pedagogy she said:

"Well, the first time [Mr. Spirit] gave me the [Tejada and Espinoza] article I stopped halfway through. You can see where the pen color changes because I read two pages and I had no idea what they're talking about. Like the first time I read it because it's really kinda big words and all this stuff and I was like, 'I don't know what it's talking about,' and so I just quit. And then I made myself sit down and read it this time and it was still hard...I had to look up some terms like 'hegemony.' I mean I hear it all the time but I'm like, 'oh yeah whatever,' so there's always moments like that when I'm doing the readings which I really appreciate because otherwise I stay as an outsider which is why I joined the inquiry group because I knew I would never talk about this if I didn't have the vocabulary. So this time, I read the whole thing. So, it's still a little nebulous in that not that I don't know what it means but that it looks different in a lot of different settings and that's what I learned from being in the TIG is that there isn't some prescribed definition that I'm trying to learn to regurgitate for people. In my class, what it means is that we think about science in terms of 'whose science?' And how the whole premise of science in the U.S. is from a European

perspective and that's not validating to all perspectives. And so acknowledging that science is a product of colonization is like a starting place. And then the conversation of what does a decolonized science classroom look like is really complicated. And the first thing that it means for me is acknowledging that whether it's day to day in my lessons, which I started doing throughout the year, because I felt more comfortable throwing these little things in there to have that conversation in my class.

Here, Ms. Hela discussed the difference in her struggle with reading the texts. At first she described not understanding the article enough to get through the first few couple of pages. However, later she described her commitment to persevere with the text and even developed her vocabulary in the process.  Here, her definition of a decolonizing pedagogy takes into consideration that it is not a formulaic concept. Instead, she pointed out that trying to understand decolonization must take into account the local context in order to create localized solutions working towards decolonization. Next, Ms. Hela described how her definition of decolonizing pedagogy challenges the field of science as a Eurocentric concept. Lastly, she highlighted the ways that her newly developed understanding of a decolonizing pedagogy compelled her to interrogate classroom practices to ensure she is having conversations about dominant discourses in her science classes.

The learning that took place was evident for teachers across the board; for those that were new to the concept of "decolonizing pedagogy" and those with more experience. For example, when Ms. Ramos, a teacher that expressed having more

experience with concepts surrounding colonization, described decolonizing pedagogy

she said the following:

> "I define it as a pedagogy that centers colonialism, so looking at everything
> through the lens of colonialism and how that's effected us not only historically
> but how we live and think today. And so I think that's important because
> colonialism really ties together race and class from an historical perspective
> given that colonialism especially impacted people of color around the world. So,
> yeah, centering colonialism and imperialism and I'm sure there's more that's why
> I'm looking forward to the teacher inquiry group."

Ms. Ramos is clear that understanding the history of colonialism is the starting point of

a decolonizing pedagogy. She also pointed out that a decolonizing pedagogy allows for

a deeper understanding of the racial and classist subjugation of people of color around

the world. Lastly, Ms. Ramos admits that there is more she would like to learn

regarding a decolonizing pedagogy, which she hopes to get as a participant in the

inquiry group.

During our last interview, Ms. Ramos defined the term decolonizing pedagogy

as:

> "I see it as I want them [students] to go into other classes understanding the
> world from multiple perspectives; an indigenous perspective, so that they know
> that indigenous peoples' culture has been attacked and destroyed in many ways
> and people are still trying to preserve it and keep cultural traditions alive. The
> idea that there was greatness in Northern and South America and in Africa
> before Europeans got there... I think decolonial looks past a Marxist perspective
> and now I know it's important to also include other living things, beyond the
> human condition like natural resources. And I also think it means creating a
> pedagogy where I build real relationships with students...The other part, which I
> didn't think I did well this year with my students was the 'so what' part. This

kind of pedagogy has to have an action piece that shows students how to apply the concepts to the world."

Above, Ms. Ramos described a decolonizing pedagogy to be inclusive of indigenous perspectives in order to understand the ways cultures have struggled, resisted, and survived colonization. Additionally, she discussed that traditional cultural theories can be human-centric and that it is important to acknowledge the natural resources of the land. From here, a decolonizing pedagogy, according to Ms. Ramos, requires a classroom practice that is relevant and simultaneously, one that encourages meaningful relationships to be developed.

While it is impossible to assert that the teacher learning described above was a direct result of their participation in the inquiry group, I have found that by the end of this study all participants were more able to clearly articulate a definition of decolonizing pedagogy. Through developing a deeper understanding of the socio-political context, the teachers were more able to make sense of the power dynamics at play that influence the ways their schools operate. More importantly, engaging in this intellectual endeavor supported participants in creating a new vision for the kinds of teachers they can be.

**Discuss to Deepen Understanding**

In this next section, I describe the ways participants developed their critical consciousness. To examine this aspect of the group I will draw on the collective

dialogue that took place during inquiry group sessions. Additionally, I will provide

quotes from follow up questions asked in one-on-one interviews to further make sense

of the ways the group and participants deepened their understanding of the texts and

larger systemic issues.

To deepen their critical consciousness, participants engaged in small and large

group discussions that allowed them the opportunity to engage with the text and one

another at each of the inquiry group meetings. As I will highlight below, the ways in

which the discussions took place honored participants' starting point as it related to

understanding systems of power connected to schools and society. The next section will

elucidate the ways the participants agreed, disagreed, problematized and asked

questions regarding the ideas put forth by the different authors.

*Deepen Understanding: Decolonizing Pedagogy*

To understand how the inquiry group provided the space for teachers to talk

through their ideas to deepen their critical consciousness, I will examine the ways

teachers engaged in a discussion during an inquiry group meeting. During the January

meeting, Ms. Nieto facilitated the discussion of the text written by Tejeda et al., (2003)

titled "Towards a Decolonizing Pedagogy: Social Justice Reconsidered." Participants

were asked to write main ideas, themes, and questions about the text onto the white

boards. After about fifteen minutes of having participants write on the boards, Ms.

Nieto brought the group back together. As the participants wrapped up their thoughts

to the prompt Ms. Nieto stated:

> "Alright everybody we're going to come back together. I think there's some
> themes within the questions that are similar. So I thought we would start off with
> questions related to how the article articulates a lot of what decolonizing
> pedagogy isn't, leaving us with a question of well, what is it. And so whoever
> wrote this, it was well articulated. The question, 'What would we call all this
> stuff if it were defined by what it is instead of what it isn't?' And then kinda
> bridging with this question, 'If it's anti most aspects of the system we live in what
> is it pro, what's the vision that we're trying to create within the existing system?
> What is the alternative that we are all envisioning and working toward?' And, 'Is
> that even possible within the structure or schools we currently have?'"

To start, Ms. Nieto pointed to the larger unspoken dialogue that was on the white

board. By having participants engage in writing their thoughts on the board she sought

to get as many voices and thoughts participating in the discussion of the text. Ms. Nieto

would begin the discussion by making connections between many of the ideas and

questions that were written on the board. The questions Ms. Nieto highlighted from the

board challenged the article that the group discussed. The questions pointed to defining

the term "decolonizing pedagogy." Ms. Garcia built on the dispute of the definition by

stating:

> "I think it's really general and I use Grande to supplement it with Red Pedagogy
> because she fills in a lot of the gaps. And so that's where I feel like, I don't have
> the answer but I feel like that text can help kinda support this text."

To challenge the idea that the term "decolonizing pedagogy" should be clearly defined,

Ms. Ramos entered the conversation and said:

"Even though I'm always like, 'okay, tell me what it is,' I think it's cool that it doesn't say what it is because I think every classroom and every community needs to be able to articulate what that is for them, right. And, so, a decolonizing pedagogy isn't going to look the same everywhere and I think that freedom is cool because we need to be able to say what it is we want and what does dignity look like for ourselves. So I think it's okay. Even if in our own classrooms it doesn't look the same. Because all of our kids are different and we're different."

Ms. Ramos took the position that the author left the interpretation of the term "decolonizing pedagogy" open for the reader to define in relation to their local context. What other participants viewed as a vague definition, Ms. Ramos saw as giving teachers the room to make the term applicable to their classrooms. Keeping the definition open, according to Ms. Ramos, had the potential to honor the different communities where participants teach. Supporting the position Ms. Ramos had taken, Ms. Ides stated:

"I didn't think about this before, but what I appreciate about what [Ms. Ramos] is saying is that we are different, you know, and one collective can be very different from another collective and I think it's kinda important to leave it open for each collective to create their culture. But I think that's probably why it's a list of what it's not so that we have the freedom to create what it means for our community but also just be aligned with what we're not. And it's not necessarily a bad thing to say, 'oh, we're against these things.' It's kinda like a framework."

To further support Ms. Ramos' stance, Ms. Ides pointed out that the text encouraged self-determination for communities. Important to this dialogue exchanged in the meeting was that Ms. Ides pointed out that the comments made by Ms. Ramos encouraged her to think differently about the texts. Because of the dialogue, Ms. Ides

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began to articulate a deeper understanding of the nuances that make communities simultaneously different and similar.

To sum up why Ms. Ramos thought the author's approach to laying out decolonial pedagogy was appropriate she said, "It allows us to be able to imagine a different alternative that's powerful and that's how we begin moving towards answers and solutions. There's a danger in publishing something as definite because then that's all it becomes." For Ms. Ramos, leaving the definition of "decolonizing pedagogy" open to communities to define has the potential to draw from their creativity and can shine a light on the ways they envision transforming systems of oppression. Along these lines, Mr. Spirit then pointed out that, "...the piece has a lot of anti this, anti that but then I think we can turn that around and affirm it for ourselves so that the piece doesn't end up being this anti everything." Mr. Spirit added to the conversation and gave his perspective on how he read the text. Taking a stance that was affirming, he says he was able to look for what the definition of a decolonizing pedagogy could offer him. Being explicit about how Mr. Spirit understood the text seemed to provide a new lens for others in the group to interpret the text because he shared how he was able to take something away from the text.

Further expanding on the conversation and discussing the usefulness of the article for teachers, Ms. Garcia said:

"I feel like it can be useful for teachers because the term social justice has been co-opted and this basically calls out all those institutions that are using it. So whether it's a teacher prep program at [a West Coast University] or a charter school that claims to be social justice because they want to get more students of color into college, basically, getting more people of color to participate in these oppressive structures. And he [Tejeda et al.] spells it out; that's not social justice if it's not acting to transform these institutions. So, that's why, personally, I like this even if it doesn't tell us what it is."

Ms. Garcia pointed to the ways the article highlighted the importance of transforming institutions that perpetuate social inequities. While the author may have not been specific for some of the participants, Ms. Garcia pointed to how Tejeda et al. (2003) call out watered down versions of so-called social justice themed institutions. Furthering the idea that the article was helpful for teachers as they develop an analysis of a decolonizing pedagogy, Mr. Spirit added:

"And I think one of the parts that was really important for me was the capitalism analysis. I think that, historically, I always teach about colonialism, whether it's Indigenous people or African people or in South-East Asia or wherever, you always talk about this colonial system as an historical event but you only really need to take a few more steps to explain how it's now neo-colonial and how the system is impacted today. And I think some teachers would be in-tune or okay with teaching a culturally relevant, social justice based curriculum where they teach about Dr. King and Malcolm X but I think that a lot of people are not willing to have that anti-capitalist stance in the classroom because they're scared of being seen as a communist teacher. And I think that's something that we can be really intentional about."

Here Mr. Spirit seemed to deepened the level of analysis of what it means to draw from decolonial frameworks and challenged participants to think about how they may

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engage in creating culturally relevant or social justice curriculum that avoids a critique

of capitalism. It appeared that Mr. Spirit added another dimension to the conversation

that was not taken into consideration, thereby, allowing participants to deepen their

understanding of the text and a broader understanding of decolonial frameworks.

To understand the meaning of this conversation for participants, I followed up

with Ms. Ides about her thoughts regarding the discussion. She said:

> "I'm glad Mr. Spirit pointed out the need to understand capitalism. Sometimes I
> think, 'I'm a science teacher so that doesn't really relate to me.' But then I think it
> all relates if we're really about getting students to understand how all this stuff
> relates to their lives...It was good to be brought up because it made me think
> about how I need to do that in my classroom."

The group discussions seemed to support her in deepening her analysis of larger

systemic issues and understanding the need to make those same connections in her

classroom.

Emphasizing the claim that the discussions supported teachers in developing

their critical consciousness, Ms. Nieto explained the impact the inquiry group had on

her:

> "Being a part of the TIG has helped me to develop the language to make sense of
> why schools are how they are. And the readings and discussions give us another
> way to see our curriculum and even a positive way to see our students and their
> community that doesn't blame them for the larger social issues they face which
> isn't something we get all the time."

Ms. Nieto's response pointed to the ways the inquiry group has supported her in

developing a deeper understanding of the realities of her students. This seemed to be

important for Ms. Nieto because it goes against much of the dominant discourses that place the blame of issues like poverty on the individual (see Lewis, 1966). Instead, it seems that developing a deeper understanding of systemic issues supported Ms. Nieto in understanding her students from an asset perspective. Because this is not the normative view of low-income communities of color, the inquiry group seemed to be an important place for Ms. Nieto because she was able to further deepen her understanding of the systemic issues that cause social inequities and supported her in seeing the assets her students bring with them to the class.

This dialogue from the meeting moved from participants being unsure about the usefulness of the text to the ways the text provided a theoretical framework to address capitalism. Engaging in dialogue provided the opportunities for participants to hear and think about perspectives they may have not considered. Participants discussed that they were able to think more deeply about the text and then work to connect those ideas to their teaching practice. Moreover, it appeared that engaging in a dialogue where the text was problematized instigated participants to articulate a stance based on the text. Engaging in this public dialogue seemed to provide participants the intellectual insights to new and different ways of understanding the texts.

Throughout the course of this study it was discussions and reflections like the ones described above where participants appeared to further develop their social consciousness. Through approaches such as respectful and supportive dialogue, debate,

and inquiry this learning community seemed to support participants with deepening their understanding of critical social theories, which thereby broadened their worldview.

*Deepen Understanding: Make it Relevant*

> "We read together and we go through the readings asking questions, picking out themes that we can actually use in our own classrooms and in our own teaching."
> - Ms. Ramos

In this next section, I will continue to describe and examine how teachers used the discussion during the inquiry group meetings to deepen their understanding of the text by making it relevant to their realities. As the quote above from Ms. Ramos suggests, at some point during the group discussions, in structured or organic ways, the participants explicitly made connections to how the ideas and concepts in the texts related to their classrooms. What follows are excerpts from discussions of two inquiry group meetings. The first excerpt describes and examines when participants engaged in a dialogue around Renato Constantino's (1970) article titled, *The Mis-Education of the Filipino*. The second excerpt describes and examines the discussion regarding Dr. Patrick Camangian's (2013) article, "Seeing Through Lies: Teaching Ideological Literacy as a Corrective Lens." In both examples, I point to the ways participants made connections between the readings and their local context in order to further develop their understanding of the texts and the ways the concepts and theories apply to the lives of the participants.

*Discuss to Deepen: Making "Mis-Education" Relevant*

The participants at the meeting in February were sitting in a circle for the large

group discussion. For this meeting, the group discussed the reading *The Mis-Education*

*of the Filipino* (1970) written by the Filipino historian Renato Constantino. In

Constantino's piece he critiques the ways schools are set up as sites of assimilation in

the Philippines and he lays out the importance of developing a "nationalistic

consciousness" in order to hold on to indigenous Filipino identities and cultural

practices. As the discussion developed there were questions about the idea of

nationalistic consciousness and its relationship to present day classrooms. Ms. Ides said,

"I just didn't really understand why he was focused on the idea of nation verses like, I

dunno, something else. Is it just an old term?" Here it appears as though Ms. Ides is

unclear as to why Constantino (1970) has decided to focus on developing a

"nationalistic consciousness". To support Ms. Ides in understanding Constantino's point

Ms. Ramos responded, "I think nationalism is tied to the idea where we need to build

pride in ourselves, we need to love ourselves and we need to invest in that." Ms Ramos

tried to make explicit the way she believed the author is getting at a larger issue that

goes beyond the idea of nationalism as only relating to borders and points to a self-

determined approach to education. Next, Ms. Garcia stated that:

> "I just felt he used the term for a lack of a better term. Because I felt that he was
> just talking about the people of this space that happen to have these certain
> borders and these certain names at this specific time but I think that's why that

term is misunderstood so often and viewed as a negative thing because it can get separatists. Whereas it's really just we live in a post/colonial society or still a colonial society where that is what else would we use. To me, I read it as the people, uniting the Filipino people around sovereignty."

Ms. Nieto followed up and echoes the sentiments expressed by Ms. Garcia,

"That's how I read it too. All the Third World Liberation movements were nationalistic in that they were articulating their self-determination so when I read the term, I have an aversion to the term in the context of the U.S. but in the context of Third World Liberation it means self-determination or that's how I saw him using it."

Ms. Garcia then added:

"I think also, our negative connotation of the term is a result of the type of education he's talking about. Where we've been socialized to see it as negative. Oh those Black nationalists, oh those whatever nationalists that it's a negative term but no it's people saying no to imperialism. Its people saying we want to decide what we're doing."

Further expanding on these ideas and connecting the idea of nationalistic consciousness

to the classroom Ms. Nieto commented:

"This idea of nationalistic consciousness in our context, the way I see it is helping the students develop a consciousness as people who live within a state of internal colonialism in the United States and so helping them to develop a hood pride consciousness which includes both an awareness of your own oppression because he talks about how like the Filipino upper class or the more educated folks or just the general population will vote against its own interest like with the English only laws or there was something about language related to that and so I think definitely helping students develop that kind of consciousness so that they identify with a people with a common struggle and then what does it mean to answer that question, 'what does it mean for education to serve your own interests?' And I think that in the progressive education movement we really need to bring back that idea of internal colonialism into our rhetoric because then we're able to make connections across communities."

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Ms. Nieto stated that she thought it was important to develop students' understanding of the world around them. Along with this, she saw it as important to develop progressive educators' understanding of internal colonialism as a way of making connections across communities and uniting the divided struggles for equity. This seemed to be an important moment in the large group dialogue because of the ways she was able to make the connection from the reading across multiple contexts. Ms. Nieto was clear about how the ideas presented by Constantino are important today for the classroom and larger community organizing efforts.

*Discuss to Deepen: Making "Seeing Lies" Relevant*

In this next example, I will examine the dialogue from an inquiry group meeting held in March. At this meeting in March, the reading for discussion was, "Seeing Through Lies," written by Professor Patrick Camangian. The article makes the case for developing students' ideological literacies by drawing on a critical and culturally relevant pedagogy. The study the teachers are reading is a self-study of the author's work as a 12th grade English teacher in South Los Angeles. As the discussion of the text was about to finish up, Mr. Solis[10] asked the group how he could apply some of the approaches used by the author in his Spanish class. Mr. Solis stated:

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[10] Since the inquiry was an open space, Mr. Solis attended a total of three meetings. Because he did not attend all of the meetings he was not identified as a research participant. However, I have obtained permission from Mr. Solis to use the dialogue captured for research purposes.

"As an educator who teaches Spanish, I always struggle bringing in the literacy component and how do I use my content to have my demographic of students becoming critical about, I can't even say a topic in Spanish because that's how I feel disconnected right now from this conversation because I'm thinking about how does this even relate to my Spanish curriculum. How can I infuse maybe one of the strategies to what I'm teaching? So I reserve myself to not say too much because I'm still drawing those connections in my head if they even exist. So I guess in a way I'm saying if there are any ideas out there how language teachers can use this, in particular Spanish, that would be helpful."

Mr. Solis is upfront that he is unclear about the relevancy of the approach used in the reading being applicable to his situation as a Spanish teacher. Here Mr. Solis asked the group to demonstrate how a pedagogy that is critical and culturally relevant can be used in his Spanish classroom.

In response to Mr. Solis' question about how he can apply what the author describes in the article, Ms. Nieto said:

"I feel like language is always rich for thinking about power and power dynamics. I mean, obviously if you're teaching subject/verb it's different but just in terms of bigger themes to your class, thinking about how language is always tied to power and that the way that you speak, it gives you access. I feel like those kinds of questions are important when you're thinking about language in general, so I don't know if that helps."

Ms. Nieto drew from her experience as an English teacher and points to the ways she frames language as a discourse of power. In this instance, Ms. Nieto suggested moving beyond the grammatical aspects of teaching language to establishing a larger framework of addressing notions of power in society. Moreover, she pointed out that

language is connected to access in society and that such questions are important to interrogate within language courses.

Looking for further insight and support, Mr. Solis discussed the units that are in his textbooks and asked how notions of power can be addressed. He said:

> "When I think of Spanish I just think of it as, again, grammar. I think of it thematically, the units that are laid out or presented in our textbooks. So with those units how does the power of language play into specific themes like past times and family? When I'm thinking about Spanish I or even Spanish III level, they're at the restaurant. How can I infuse these ideas?"

Here, Mr. Solis states the kinds of themes that are found in the textbooks and asks how one might accomplish teaching the language skill while addressing issues of power.

To give Mr. Solis tangible takeaways, Mr. Spirit and Ms. Nieto offered approaches that he could incorporate into his teaching. Drawing from his teaching practice as an Ethnic Studies teacher, Mr. Spirit offered advice on ways Mr. Solis might be able to draw a connection to the lives of students. Mr. Spirit offered:

> "Well, maybe, what's poppin' in my head is maybe looking at music in Spanish, right. Whether its corridos or something else that's in Spanish and then asking the students, to breakdown the lyrics and maybe having them connect it to a song in English that they listen to. Like finding some themes in the songs that are similar and having a discussion about that. This can help 'em to identify with the language a little bit more or maybe, what I've talk about before with Afro-Latinos, getting them to think about people of African descent, Black people who arrived and speak Spanish. What kind of literacies do they have when we think about it internationally, like in poetry and music?"

First, Mr. Spirit suggested using music as a way to connect with students and make

connections across languages. By incorporating music, it seemed as if the idea is to

make the context relevant to students. Then, Mr. Spirit suggested making the

connection between Black and Latino cultures. Given that Mr. Solis' students are Black

and Latino, Mr. Spirit's suggestion was to make the connection between these two

communities. By drawing on an Afro-Latino framework where the goal is to show that

these two communities are more similar than different.

Expanding on the idea of making the curriculum critical and culturally relevant

Ms. Nieto shared with the group how she gets students to think about notions of power

in her classroom:

> "If it's a unit like restaurants, I mean in Spanish, depending on the way you
> speak Spanish and walk into a space your class is identified. I mean, your
> language is a marker, right. And so getting them to think about, in English, when
> I say it this way and walk into a restaurant people see me this way. So, just to
> think about the way that language is tied to identity so it can tie into all of those
> units you talked about. It's this broader way of thinking about it that asks for
> them to bring in their experiences in English because we do it constantly to them
> in our school, right, 'you speak English this way,' there's a bad English, there's a
> good English, you know what I mean. So getting them to unpack that I think is
> powerful even as they're learning basic Spanish."

To show Mr. Solis how ideas from the text can be incorporated into the classroom, Ms,

Nieto shared an example of what it may look like to frame the larger unit under a

broader understanding of how language is a marker. She pointed to the ways schools

promote Standard English vernacular as legitimate and how groups that do not speak

this form are labeled as speaking "bad" or a less valuable form of English and then suggested making that kind of connection to students in Mr. Solis' Spanish class. In response to the feedback from Mr. Spirit and Ms. Nieto, Mr. Solis responded:

> "I think I need to unpack it first and figure it out for myself [laughs]. But thank you, you're raising the questions that I hadn't even entertained before in the past so I appreciate that feedback right now."

Mr. Solis revealed that he has not considered some of the larger ideas presented by the inquiry group members and acknowledged he has his own work to do in making the kinds of changes to his curriculum as suggested by Mr. Spirit and Ms. Nieto.

It was instances like these that participants engaged in developing their consciousness because they were able to talk through their understanding of the texts, got pushed to think deeper, and then reflected and discussed how the concepts from the readings apply to their work in education. The group's engagement in texts that interrogate systems of power seemed to allow the teachers to make deeper connections to the ways schools, classrooms, and social inequities manifest themselves.

**Collaboration**

> "I'm learning about my own interpretation about this stuff by working with other people instead of just working on my island, like I always do. And what we created was even better than if we were working apart."
>
> <div align="right">- Ms. Hela</div>

The final part of Sharpen Political Clarity that I will discuss is *Collaboration*. A key aspect of the inquiry group meetings were that teachers engaged in a process of

collaboration in supporting one another in developing their knowledge about critical

social theory and their curriculum. As mentioned above, teachers supported one

another in deepening their consciousness. Along with this, teachers supported one

another in developing curriculum that was reflective of the ways they were working to

develop their consciousness. The inquiry group meetings were structured so that

participants had time to share curriculum with the group. Teachers signed-up in

advance to present their curriculum over the course of the inquiry group meetings

(January - June). An important part of sharing curriculum through short presentations

was the feedback given to the presenter on how to further develop their curriculum.

The curriculum presentation segment of the meeting allowed teachers from

various disciplines to support one another in developing and improving curriculum.

Participants expressed the valuable insights offered by the various members of the

group and the importance of relevant support that allowed them to go to their

classrooms on Monday and try new approaches to teaching in their classrooms. They

talked about how helpful it was to have seven other people think about their

curriculum in a way that was supportive. Even if they were not the ones getting

feedback, the participants reported that they were able to take something away from the

feedback offered to the presenter that they could use in their classrooms.

*The Power of Teacher Collaboration*

Stencils of revolutionaries like Assata Shakur, Cesar Chavez, and Malcolm X decorate the classroom walls where the TIG is being held in March 2013, and seven teachers are gathered in a circle. On this day, Mr. Spirit, a Chicano in his seventh year as a teacher, currently teaching 9th grade Ethnic Studies, presented his unit on Afro-Latinos. After his unit presentation, the group provided him with feedback on ways to further develop the unit.

Part of the protocol established by this inquiry group is that the presenter is to share out what he will take away from the feedback given to him. As Mr. Spirit began to speak, he is overcome by emotion and says:

> "I'm feeling a little emotional right now because earlier this week I sat in a room of teachers defending the importance of my Ethnic Studies classes; successfully, thank God! But now I'm in this room today with a whole group of people who are supporting and uplifting my work saying, "Hey, this is good! Let's make it better!" And, so it's really emotional as an educator to go through those two very different interactions. I feel really inspired from you all, and so all these ideas and feedback you've given me are great and I want to push myself and my students to go deeper. And so what you all have just done for me is created a vision on how to grow and I value that you all have helped me to create this vision. We can't do this in isolation where it's only one person coming up with new and better ways of teaching because I know that sometimes we can get scared or sometimes we get anxious because we're not sure how people are going to take what we've created…So I think if we push each other that's how we become better at teaching and better at working with our students and in turn, hopefully make our students better."

Mr. Spirit spoke about the importance of being in a supportive environment, especially when his colleagues call his work into question. His emotion demonstrated the ways he seems to feel at times – isolated and undervalued as a teacher. Pointing to the power of

the group, Mr. Spirit spoke about how he valued the process of working together to get better at teaching and draws strength from the group to push through the feelings of being under attack. It was these vulnerable moments that made the group feel it was necessary to further understand what happens when teachers come together to learn, think, and collaborate with one another.

This teacher-led inquiry group provided teachers with the space to engage with teachers around topics that articulated critical perspectives of education and society. Being able to engage in this collaborative intellectual work proved to be important for the teachers because they often stated that it provided them with a space to grow, learn, reflect and deepen their understanding about the conditions under which they work and teach. As shown above, participants engaged in the process of *Sharpening Political Clarity* because they were able to talk through their understanding of the readings, were pushed to think deeper, and then reflected and discussed how concepts and themes from the readings applied to their work in the classroom. In the next section, I will examine the ways teachers sharpened their political clarity to inform the curriculum they developed.
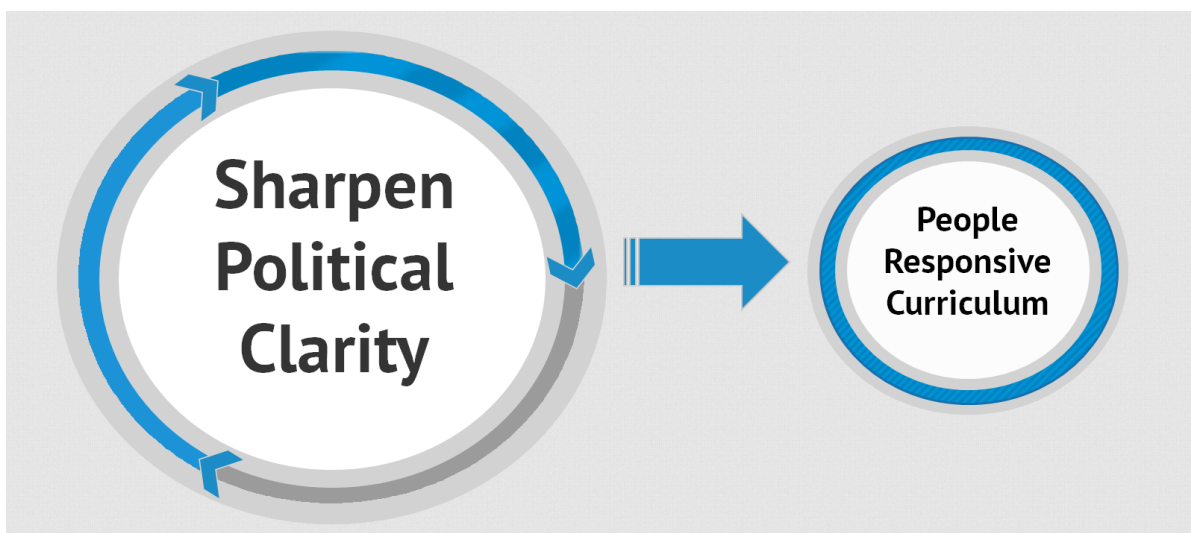
**Developing People Responsive Curricula**

> "What is our role as teachers to think about how are we creating our curriculum or collaborating with others so that it can reflect something more people's centered and values rooted in love and caring for one another?"
>                                                                          - Ms. Ramos

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This section examines the ways inquiry group participants incorporated what was being discussed and learned in the inquiry and put it into practice. Drawing from the words of Ms. Ramos above, I examined how the teachers developed a curriculum that recognizes students as human and that was relevant to *The People* in the classroom. I am defining *The People* in the classroom as the students and their communities because they are the ones most immediately impacted by the teacher and her curricula. Through an exhaustive review of teachers' lesson plans and student work, findings indicate that teachers' curriculum sought to highlight the lived realities of students and uncover systemic issues that create oppressive conditions. In the three exemplar models of curricula that follow, the teachers are looking to engage students in their communities through classroom curriculum.

**Figure 4.2 Sharpen Political Clarity to Develop People Responsive Curricula**

The above image, Figure 4.2, shows that in order to get to the place of developing *People Responsive Curricula* teachers must first engage in the process to Sharpen Political Clarity. Developing one's critical consciousness provides educators with a theoretical framework to develop a curriculum that is critical and culturally relevant.

In the next section, I will specifically discuss the units of three teachers because of the ways they attempted to create curricula that was critical and culturally relevant, and encouraged and supported students to engage in their communities. The curricula under examination in this section are exemplar models chosen from the participants because they seemed to most closely reflect pertinent ideas from the inquiry group texts and dialogue into their curriculum. The curricula I will examine from the participants are as follows: Oral History Project; Afro-Latino History; and Air Quality.

*Curriculum Example #1: Ms. Nieto, English 12, Community Cultural Wealth Counternarrative Storytelling Project*

The first example of curriculum that was discussed/demonstrated by teachers in the inquiry group was a unit developed by Ms. Nieto. The unit that Ms. Nieto brought in for feedback was her oral history project for her 12th grade English class. According to Ms. Nieto, "Oral history is a collection of personal testimonies or stories of events that occurred in people's lives." Ms. Nieto conveyed to the group that she wanted to develop a unit that would challenge deficit thinking about students' community that she was seeing students internalize. She wanted to use oral histories as a way to teach students

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about the concept of counterstorytelling, or storytelling that captures the experiences of those most marginalized in society. In our one-on-one interview, Ms. Nieto described what she believes to be the importance of an oral history project:

> "Oral histories are one of the most important ways that people can learn about the lives of our ancestors, family and community. Since our community and family histories are not valued, often times in textbooks or movies, oral histories can document the story of who we are and preserve it for the next generation. Oral history is an important way to remember the lives and experiences of those people not often heard."

By engaging in this project Ms. Nieto stated that she was looking to get students to honor the life and struggles of a person in their community whose story would normally be marginalized or untold. The focus of this project is telling the story of a person in students' family or community who has overcome and survived significant challenges and barriers or forms of trauma in their lives and capture the narrative of resilience and survival as a source of knowledge for the community. For this project, students were asked to recreate, from interviews with a person, their resiliency narrative, which Ms. Nieto framed for students was a counternarrative because the participants in students' research were from historically dispossessed communities. Central to this unit was honoring those least likely to be acknowledged in their community so that all of the students can learn from the lives of the interviewees and acknowledge the rich history of struggle and resilience that is all around them, but largely goes unnoticed or acknowledged in classroom discourse or media.

Ms. Nieto stated that for this unit, students were asked to develop a series of questions that will get their interviewee to discuss three significant events or struggles they have had to overcome or survive. Ms. Nieto was clear that students needed to get the interviewee to explain how they overcame these obstacles and stayed resilient. Additionally, students were instructed to ask questions that highlight the interviewee's different forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). After the interviews were conducted students then transcribed the interview and provided an analysis and interpretation of the interviewees experiences.

Once the entire interview was transcribed students were to highlight areas where there could be more research done or context given to the story. In order to delve deeper into the interviewee's story, students then researched the historical, political, and/or social context of the time period described by the interviewee. This research was done to create a narrative where students combined interviews and their research to show the details of the interviewees' story.

To prepare the oral history for presentation the students then created a digital story based on the interview and research conducted by the students. The digital story included images, music, and audio narration. The digital stories were then presented to the community at a Community Exhibition Night organized by Ms. Nieto and her students. The goal of this exhibition was to invite family and community members to

exhibition night and showcase the digital story projects. Ms. Nieto discussed that the

students conveyed a deep gratitude toward the interviewee.

*Student Civic Engagement: Community Cultural Wealth Counternarrative Storytelling Project*

In Ms. Nieto's oral history project students were encouraged to learn from the

histories of people from their community. Ms. Nieto's classes were asked to look at the

ways their communities are the holders of knowledge. In order to complete the oral

history project, students were required to conduct interviews with community

members in order to capture their story. Getting students to engage in this work further

provided students with an asset based perspectives of their communities. In order to

share the richness of their community histories, students presented their findings at a

community gathering that was organized by Ms. Nieto and the students as a way to

reframe the community on its own terms. This project seemed to work to bring the

various ethnic communities that make up Ms. Nieto's student population together to

hear about stories that often go untold in an attempt to disrupt a dominant discourse

that views communities of color from a deficit perspective.

*Curriculum Example #2: Mr. Spirit, Ethnic Studies 9, Afro-Latino History*

This second example of curriculum was created by Mr. Spirit which was used in

his 9th grade Ethnic Studies class. Inquiry group participants supported Mr. Spirit in

further developing his Afro-Latino History unit. In my interview with Mr. Spirit

regarding his unit he expressed that he thought it was important to develop a unit

highlighting the history of Black and Brown unity given that he teaches in a school in South Los Angeles that is made up of approximately fifty-percent Black and approximately fifty-percent Latino youth.  It is a unit that teaches Black and Latino students about the similar histories that their ancestors shared and to find points of unity that Black and Latino communities share today in South Los Angeles.

Mr. Spirit drew from resources such as a film series titled "Black in Latin America" or Afro-Latino TV to highlight how there are over 200 million people of African descent in Central and South America to develop students' understanding of the African presence in Latin America. Mr. Spirit emphasized the need to dialogue with each other across the continent to understand the struggles faced by Black and Latino communities. There are over nine activities where Mr. Spirit engaged students by drawing from the following: guest speakers, documentary films, websites, and historical documents.  Part of the project consists of students conducting a discourse analysis of websites dedicated to the Afro-Latino topic.  In order to get students engaged in the lesson, he uses theater techniques where students role play the ways the notion of "divide and conquer" plays out in their communities or how it has played out historically.

The culminating project consists of students creating the missing chapter from their history book on Afro-Latinos. The reader that Mr. Spirit uses with the class for this unit has fifteen readings that he has come across in his college-level courses. In the

reader, the students learn about Vicente Guerro, Pio Pico, Garifunas, Toussaint L'Ouverture and others that are connected to the history of African and Indigenous peoples. Moreover, the students are exposed to the history of how Black and Latinos came together to resist slavery and colonialism. Another final piece of writing the students work on is an opinion piece where students are asked to write their perspective on the need for Black and Latino students to come together in their communities given that there are similar problems they can relate to such as police terrorism, lack of affordable housing, racism, poverty, and unemployment. Mr. Spirit made it a point to say that, "if our ancestors came together then we can to," which is what he would like his students to understand. Mr. Spirit said that

> "Without the support and help from the inquiry group I wouldn't have been able to pull all of these resources together like I have. I think we're in this together and that's why we gotta share. If anything our kids need teachers that are telling them 'we're together, we're more similar than different,' you know"

Lastly, Mr. Spirit and his students organized an exhibition where his students share their missing chapter on "Afro-Latinos" with other students and teachers during a lunchtime event.

*Student Civic Engagement: Afro-Latino History*

The unit Mr. Spirit created around Afro-Latino history challenged Eurocentric norms and began to highlight the ways Black and Indigenous communities have resisted colonial domination. Through providing students with a counter-narrative

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about the histories of Black and Indigenous communities he was able to inspire and

motivate his students to share this knowledge with other students on their campus.

First, students, along with Mr. Spirit, organized a lunchtime event where they exhibited

their missing history chapters.  They invited teachers and students from across the

campus and shared the work that came as a result of the Afro-Latino unit.

**Figure 4.3 Mr. Spirit's Students Sharing "Missing Chapter" Project**



Additionally, students from Mr. Spirit's class organized cultural groups to come

to their school to give talks and perform. The students connected with groups that did

presentations on Hatian dance and Danca Azteca. In our discussion about the ways

students took what they learned and then tried to apply it outside of the classroom, Mr.

Spirit talked about how the students organized these cultural presentations so that

Black and Latino can see a different side of honoring Black and Latino cultures.

**Figure 4.4 Cultural Events at Mr. Spirit's School**



Moreover, Mr. Spirit discussed that students also wanted to highlight these different cultural groups as a way to bring the Black and Latino communities on campus together. While the attempt to highlight Black and Latino culture on a campus where racial tension is heavy was in Mr. Spirit's words, "not deep enough" he thought it was a step in the right direction to start taking action. He mentioned that he was going to engage students in a reflection and push students to think about the ways to go deeper and address root causes of the violence on their campus and in their communities.

*Curriculum Example #3: Ms. Hela, Chemistry 11, Air Quality*

The last example of curriculum I will examine is the collaborative work of Ms. Hela, a 6th year chemistry teacher and Ms. Ramos, a 1st year Spanish teacher. Both teachers were participants of the inquiry group and this research project. Additionally, these two teachers were the only teachers that worked together at the same school. For this unit, they did parallel units that culminated with a joint final project. For the purposes of this discussion I will focus on the chemistry class unit. Ms. Hela began the air quality unit with a background on colonialism and then moves into topics around

environmental justice that addressed air quality issues in Los Angeles. The essential

question for this unit was: "How could air quality in Los Angeles be considered a

lasting effect of colonization?" Ms. Hela was drawing from a range of text such as:

- 'Burning Books and Destroying Peoples' by Bob Peterson,
- Documentary: "The Right to Breathe" by the Los Angeles Air
- Quality Management District (LAQMD)
- Analysis of Map: People of Color and Toxic Release Facilities in Los Angeles County
- Environmental Justice – Is there really a problem?  – CBE

The guiding questions for the unit were:

- What is air pollution? What are the causes of air pollution? What are the effects on human health of the air quality in Los Angeles? What communities are affected by the air pollution in LA? Are the effects equitable along racial and class lines?

The essential questions attempt to broadly understand what communities with poor air

quality in Los Angeles are asking for. From here, students then looked at what

communities with poor air quality in Los Angeles are asking for and compared and

contrasted with what Indigenous groups are demanding. For the final, students were

allowed to choose an artifact to create for their final project that included the following:

graphic novel, poem, children's book, magazine, protest song, video, and/or a play.

With the final project Ms. Hela was looking for how students showed their knowledge

of the connection between air quality and colonization or colonialism in general.

Reflecting back on the ways in which Ms. Hela has taken what she has learned in the inquiry group and applied it to her curriculum she described her experience of getting feedback from participants in inquiry group. Ms. Hela said that she wanted feedback on how or if she should incorporate ideas from a critical theory framework into her chemistry classroom. The feedback she received encouraged her to bring in ideas like hegemony and counter-hegemony into her chemistry class. In our one-on-one interviews she talked about feeling that she had been given a license by the inquiry group participants to devote instruction time to lay out a framework to understand oppression and liberation as a way to make the content in her chemistry class more relevant to the lives of her students.

*Student Civic Engagement: Air Quality Unit*

This last example of student engagement draws from Ms. Hela's unit on Air Quality and the final project that asked students to show their understanding of connection between current Air Quality in Los Angeles and colonialism. For the final project students were given a choice of different projects to chose from that included: A graphic novel, protest song, theatre piece, zine, video, painting, or poem. What I will do next is examine the work of a student, Emilio Z. in Ms. Hela's 11th grade Chemistry class. Part of what students in the Chemistry class do is attend an Earth Day event in South Los Angeles. Ms. Hela told me that she thought the Earth Day event is typically "watered down" and "superficial" but that she wanted her students to participate in

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order to provide a critical narrative on environmental justice. For his final project, Emilio Z. produced a pamphlet that he wanted to give out at the Earth Day event.

The pamphlet that Emilio Z. created was written in Spanish because of the collaboration with the Spanish class but Ms. Hela added that the student wanted to get the information about the quality of air out to the Spanish-speaking community.

**Figure 4.5 Pamphlet created by Ms. Hela's student**



**RESPIRE AIRE PURO EN SU COMUNIDAD**

Libérese de la injusticia de la calidad del aire. Demande, investigue, y peleé para que la calidad de su aire mejore.

Todos tienen el derecho de respirar aire puro independientemente de su raca y sus recursos. Hable sobre este tema en su próximo foro comunitario. Exija mas educación sobre el medio ambiente y comunice esta información. Si mas y mas gente exigen reglas mas estrictas para fabricas, la calidad de nuestro aire puede mejorar.

**Figure 4.6 Pamphlet created by Ms. Hela's student (translated)**



**Breathe Pure Air in Your Community**

Liberate yourself from the injustices of the quality of air. Demand, investigate, and fight for better air quality.

We all have the right to breathe pure air independent of our race and resources. Talk about this in your next community forum. Demand more education about the environment and communicate this information. If more and more people created stricter rules for factories our air quality can improve.

On the top of the pamphlet it says "Breathe Pure Air in Your Community," and

underneath the title it says, "Liberate yourself from the injustices of the quality of air.

Demand, investigate, and fight for better air quality."

On the inside of the pamphlet the student lays out how poor air quality plagues

communities of color and provides a GIS map of Communities of Color and their

location to toxic release sites. Inside the pamphlet Emilio Z. goes on to state that the

information about poor air quality is not readily available and that most times one

would have to take an advance science course to get this information. Moreover, in the

pamphlet, he points to the ways factories operate unchecked and that they continue to

violate health and safety regulations.  On the last page of the pamphlet he writes,

> "We all have the right to breathe pure air independent of our race and resources. Talk about this in your next community forum. Demand more education about the environment and communicate this information. If more and more people created stricter rules for factories our air quality can improve."

Here, Emilio Z. is making a call to the members of his community to get involved in

fighting for better air quality and putting tighter restrictions on factories. Emilio Z.

believes that race and class should not be determining factors to the quality of life one

has access to. With this, he makes the push for educating others about the inequitable

environmental conditions communities of color in South Los Angeles face daily.

The above excerpts are small pieces of larger moments when whole classrooms,

under the facilitation of their teacher, looked to move their learning beyond the

classroom walls. These instances show the ways teachers sought to inspire their students to connect what they were learning in the classroom with the world around them. In a time when low-income communities are often pathologized and blamed for the conditions they live under, providing students with a lens that allows then the ability to articulate the cultural wealth of their communities gets students and teachers closer to honoring one another.

**Conclusion**

Being influenced, encouraged, and supported by the teachers in inquiry group pushed participants to engage in the process to *Sharpen Political Clarity* and develop curriculum that was *People Responsive*. Collaboration with others through the inquiry group allowed participants the opportunity to further develop their knowledge of the complex social issues they live and work in. From here, participants were encouraged to bring these concepts into their curriculum planning process. Additionally, the collaboration between teachers was across disciplines and provided participants a broad perspective from which to draw. This translated into teachers creating curriculum that encouraged students to learn about the richness of their communities, which supported teachers in making the content relevant to students' lives.

All the participants in this inquiry group expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the professional learning opportunities they are offered at their schools. In contrast, each participant agreed that they found this teacher inquiry group to be

inspiring and re-energizing. For the participants, this teacher-led inquiry group

extended the boundaries of traditional professional development as the process of

developing their critical consciousness. It was honoring each other's humanity and

giving teachers a voice that supported participants in developing their social

consciousness, which then inspired them to create curriculum that honored their

students and communities. Most importantly, participants were able to understand that

learning is a process and something they can continue to create.

# CHAPTER 5
## Humanizing Inquiry Process

**Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from my role as a participant observer in the

bi-monthly inquiry groups meetings, 21 interviews with 7 participants, and an

examination of hundreds of pages of artifacts. From my role as a participant observer in

the inquiry group, I sought to investigate the cultural phenomenon of humanization at

play in the group. Building on the concept, *Sharpen Political Clarity* as outlined in

Chapter 4, I examined the ways participants described their thoughts, feeling, and

experiences of being involved in the inquiry group and how the practice of

humanization impacted their learning. Furthermore, my role as a participant observer

allowed me the opportunity to follow up with participants about their comments made

in the teacher inquiry group.

*Research Questions*

This chapter seeks to answer the following research question:

- *What is the usefulness of this teacher-led inquiry group for participants?*

  - *Is a teacher-led inquiry group humanizing? If so, how and why?*

The themes that emerged from the data answered the research questions that were the

focus of this study. This study centered on the experiences of teachers as well as the

ways they reported how their teaching changed as a result of being in the teacher-led

inquiry group. Drawing from the work of Paulo Freire to ground my definition of humanization, in the following section, I will introduce the cultural phenomenon of humanization as it took place in the inquiry group.

**Humanizing Inquiry Process**

The overarching theme that emerged from my findings was the notion of humanization. To understand humanization it is important to first understand what Paulo Freire defines as dehumanization. Looking back at Freire's (2000) earlier work he writes that, "Dehumanization…is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (p. 28). This distortion usually attempts to disrupt or put roadblocks in the way of people working to define their own destiny. It can be argued that the process of most professional development currently offered to the participants associated with this research distorts their work to make education a humanizing experience. In other words, all the participants alluded to the idea that their professional development can be considered an act of dehumanization.

Important to this teacher-led inquiry group are the ways participants described how their humanity was recognized as they developed their political clarity. For Freire (2000), the struggle of each individual is to become more fully human through one's emancipation from oppression. From this perspective, humanizing approaches for teacher learning can provide the participants in this study a way of seeing, analyzing, and intervening into operations of power to inform their teaching practice. Freire (1985)

describes humanization as follows, "For men, as beings of praxis, to transform the world is to humanize it, even if making the world human may not yet signify the humanization of men." (p. 70). This idea of humanization then is to act and participate in the world, but this acting on the world may result in acts of humanization or dehumanization. Additionally, engaging in the process of humanization is developing a deep understanding of the socio-historical-political conditions that shape society or as Gramsci (1971) refers to it, "hegemony." Freire (2000) writes, non-dominant groups can work against their minoritized status in order to reclaim their humanity, "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (p. 47). In other words, to recognize one's humanity it is necessary to engage in the process of understanding the material conditions of one's oppression. The process of becoming conscious of the ways power manifests itself in society is the beginning stage of humanization. From here, it is necessary to interrogate one's actions or the ways one participates or disrupts and transforms hegemonic discourses. For educators working towards social justice, it is first import to develop an analysis of social injustices in order to recognize the humanity of their students.

In this chapter, I argue that the findings from this research suggest that the process of creating their own space for learning was the way participants were signifying their humanity to the world. Findings in this chapter point to the notions that

creating this alternative space for teacher learning has engaged participants in a process to *Sharpen Political Clarity* as participants problematized their teaching practice, and thereby, supported participants to begin developing more humanizing approaches to their teaching. In the sections that follow, I will make the case that the inquiry group is really about people and their importance to each other and from here they are supported in this process of becoming intellectuals**;** becoming better for their students because they are more able to make sense of the socio-political forces that impact society.

This chapter will examine three distinct component of the humanizing inquiry process as it manifested in the inquiry group. First, the inquiry group facilitators sought to create a structure that would allow for teachers to have a voice in the inquiry group. Next, the teachers reported that they were able to develop relationships and get to know one another throughout the course of the meetings and engaged in respectful dialogue around the readings and each other's curriculum. Lastly, the teachers expressed the ways the inquiry group was a safe space for learning that allowed them to be vulnerable and admit when they did not know something. At the same time, the participants reported they were also positioned as experts and felt that their experiences mattered.

Drawing from Freire's (2000) concept of *humanization* where one develops the critical consciousness and agency to transform the world, participants in this study

discussed the ability to transform the ways they developed as professionals, create

community, and work to disrupt dominant discourses. Instead of a top-down approach,

they have engaged in a process of learning that positions them as a teacher-students

(Freire, 2000) where they can engage in humanizing approaches that honors their voice

and that supports them in becoming better teachers.

In the sections to follow, I will highlight participants' voices to illustrate the ways

the inquiry group structure, through discussion norms and spaces for dialogue around

the readings provided the structure for teachers to participate in the group setting.  For

ease of discussion, I will examine three main subthemes that together make up the

notion of a Humanizing Inquiry Process: *Humanization as Deliberate*; *Acts to Reveal*; and

*Being Vulnerable*.

**Humanization as Deliberate**

> "We cannot design learning, only design for; however a conscious effort is being
> put into the design of activities, spaces and organization that engage teachers
> and facilitators in dialogues, discussions, project work and negotiations,
> fostering in this way changes in their identities, practices and trajectories."
>                                   - Goodyear, Jones, Asensio, Hodgson, & Steeples

The above quote points to the importance of creating the conditions for

participants to learn, grow, and succeed. This idea is important to make sense of the

teacher inquiry group at the center of this study. In the following section, I will point to

the ways the structure of the inquiry group allowed for participants' humanity to be

acknowledged.

Participants repeatedly reported that central to their experiences of the teachers in the inquiry group, was the connection they had with one another and this in turn became to be a key component of their commitment to the group. The participants also described relationships with one another to be important and that this allowed for deeper learning in the inquiry group as this led to creating an environment where they were willing to be vulnerable and open up their teaching practice to others. After careful review of the data, it became evident that this process to create the conditions for humanization to come to fruition was a deliberate act carefully crafted by the facilitators. Important to this process was providing a structure for the group members to get to know one another. An attempt to create humanizing experiences for inquiry group participants was embedded throughout the meeting. The structure of the meeting was set up as follows:

- Welcome to the group from the facilitators (2 minutes)

- Check-in (13 minutes)

- Discussion of the assigned reading (50 minutes)

- Curriculum presentation and feedback (55 minutes)

During the initial planning session for the group's first gathering, facilitators articulated why creating space for participants to share who they are was important.

When planning for the first TIG, Ms. Nieto expressed the need to start off the meeting

with a check-in,

> "... I know we don't have that much time but we should go around and have people share something, like where they teach, their subject, grade and for the first one what they want to get out of coming to the space. We can find out more about them too."

By doing a check-in, the initial idea was that it would provide an opportunity for the

facilitators to make sure they were meeting the needs of the participants but at the same

time it allowed each of the members to share their ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Facilitators thought it was important to start with a check-in that would allow everyone

a chance to get to know who is in the room. Speaking to the importance of the check-

ins, Ms. Hela said, "The TIG is a model that can be used in other spaces but what has to

be built is the trust between each other. I think the check-ins started to build that for us."

Many of the participants expressed they learned about one another through the check-

ins. When I asked Ms. Ramos what she thought was import about the inquiry group she

said,

> "You know what's funny, I think the check-ins were really important for me. I think I was able to find out more about people and I started to see them more than just teachers, not that there's anything wrong with being a teacher [laughs] but I was able to see a human side of them."

The check-ins proved to be a space where participants were seen as more than just their

work as they began to be recognized as a person with their own stories of struggle and

accomplishments.

Along with the check-ins, the facilitators wanted to structure the inquiry group to allow participants the time and space to discuss the readings with each other. The idea was to set up the discussion segment of the meeting in a way that allowed each of the participants a chance to speak and to be heard. In order for this to happen the facilitators developed discussion norms which are as follows:

1. Observe participation: Step Up/Step Back

2. Anchor your comments in the text

3. Assume positive intent.. but alright to push back

4. Speak your truth NOT someone else's

5. One Mic

At the beginning of each meeting the discussion norms were read aloud to make sure all the attendees understood the ways the group operated.

Then the facilitating teachers discussed different ways the format of the discussion could take place. In deciding the ways the inquiry group could be structured, Mr. Spirit says, "I think that the structure needs to be informed by decolonizing pedagogy, where we all have a say in what happens." Mr. Spirit opened up the conversation about the different ways discussions could take place that allowed all the participants' voices to be heard.

The first discussion format put forth was:

- Break into smaller groups of two to four people to discuss the reading based on the questions participants had about the text. Then, reconvene as a large group to share out what was discussed to engage in a discussion with all participants.

Mr. Spirit thought the above approach would allow for participants to engage in a discussion in small groups and give everyone a chance to share their thoughts. From there, the small groups could share out to the larger group about the discussion had and then move into a larger group dialogue.

The second approach the facilitators decided to implement to get participants engaged in a dialogue around the reading was as follows:

- Have inquiry group participants write out on the white board main points, themes, and questions related to the readings and then base the discussion around what emerged from the notes written on the white board.

Regarding the second approach, Ms. Nieto said, "This way everyone will be in the discussion, it'll just be on the boards and it can give space to people who aren't always as vocal in the small or large group discussions." A key component of the discussions were to ensure that the participants had a chance to express their thoughts about the readings and have space for dialogue. Over the course of the year both formats

described above were used to engage inquiry group participants in a discussion about assigned readings.

Transitioning to the second half of the meeting, the curriculum presentation and feedback segment was set up to allow participants the opportunity to present a unit or lesson plan so they could get feedback from the group on how to improve their unit or lesson plan using the inquiry question as a lens for the kind of feedback that is given. Making the case for an approach for feedback that was in-line with the larger pedagogical framework the group was working towards developing, Mr. Spirit said:

> "The structure or our particular way of giving feedback is essential to our teacher inquiry group; that's a way of showing how decolonial frameworks informs our inquiry group. It's a process and we can show how we practice decolonizing pedagogy and I think that we have to show that with the feedback process, we start where people are at and give resources and suggestions so they can make their actual teaching better and closer to a decolonizing pedagogy.

Important for Mr. Spirit is creating a space that allows participants to come as they are in an effort to create a supportive environment for teachers to be vulnerable and discuss challenges they were facing in their classrooms. From here, Mr. Spirit envisioned the possibility of supporting teachers to develop their practice in a way that drew from a decolonial pedagogy.

The feedback protocol that was developed by the facilitators and then approved by participants is as follows:

- Presenter gives description of the lesson / unit – 15 minutes

- Participants ask clarifying questions to the presenter – 5 minutes

- Participants give feedback – 15 minutes

- Presenter reflects on process and central takeaways – 5 minutes

The above feedback protocol was followed at each meeting when participants presented their curriculum to the group. Participants expressed they appreciated the structure of the feedback protocol because they felt it allowed for meaningful feedback to be given to the presenters. Reflecting about the importance of the feedback process Ms. McIntosh says:

> "The feedback process, the way we did it, I just loved how we approached it. It was structured but then it was like, 'let me present my work to you, ask me questions,' there was a flow to it and people were receptive to feedback and made me feel like I could say anything and pull from any resources I had. It was really helpful to me to keep thinking in that way and to hear other teachers and teachers with much more experience than I share that they continue that feedback cycle."

For Ms. McIntosh, the feedback process revealed for her the process of teaching itself as a lifelong endeavor. Seeing more experienced teachers working to better their practice seemed to make the veteran teachers she was learning from more human in that these teachers are not just good teachers but rather that they continually work to make their teaching better. Along these lines, Ms. Ides shared the importance of working alongside teachers that work to improve their practice. She said the following about the feedback process:

"What I was learning was a way of thinking about developing my curriculum and a community of teachers that do this as a regular part of their practice and it showed me a kind of mentorship in that way that I can continue to do this throughout my entire life teaching and it was helpful to see teachers who have been in the classroom many years do something many times and still looking to make it better and that was validating to reinforce that nothing is ever perfect or done or off the table. Everything can be reworked."

What Ms. Ides' comment shows is that the feedback process seemed to provide her with insight into how teachers she seemed to hold in high regard continually developing their practice. The ability to see veteran teachers engaged in the process to improve their practice allowed her the insight that developing as an educator is a continual process.

Through a range of thoughtfully structured components that remained responsive to participants' needs, the facilitators hoped the participants would be compelled to reveal a sense of themselves, share their struggles and triumphs, and engage in a process of inquiry for the year with the end goal of improving classroom practice and developing their critical consciousness.

**Acts to Reveal**

In this next section I will rely heavily on quotes from the teachers as they check-in with other inquiry group members. Then, I will point to their reflections on the inquiry group as it related to developing relationships and a sense of community. Lastly, I will draw from interviews to illuminate how teachers talked about the inquiry

group as a supportive place where teachers could share their practice with others and learn from others' experiences and expertise.

The idea of doing a check-in was integrated into each of the meetings and varied with what was asked. Over the course of the meetings, teachers were asked to respond to check-in prompts such as their highs and lows of the week, what they are looking forward to, what were their social justice teaching goals, what were some of their takeaways from past inquiry group meetings, and what their summer plans were. What is important are the ways the teachers responded to the check-in prompts. To set the tone and model responses to the check-in prompts facilitators were willing to be one of the first to share their thoughts to the prompts. Each time Mr. Spirit or Ms. Nieto revealed the human parts of her or himself seemed to set the stage for others to open up.

In the first teacher inquiry group meeting Mr. Spirit showed power point slides to the room of ten teachers to lay out the group discussion norms and the theoretical framework the group draws from to address the inquiry question. He then moved into asking all the participants to respond to the check-in question, "Say your name, where and what you teach and what brought you to the inquiry group and what are you looking to get out of this space?" Since he has the floor Mr. Spirit was the first to respond and said:

"My name is Renato Spirit, I'm in my 7th year as a teacher and I teach ethnic studies, African-American studies and I'm currently teaching government/econ. What brought me to the inquiry group today is that teaching today is incredibly difficult because of the framework teachers work under and especially working for [a corporate charter management organization - CCMO]. Especially because I'm put through this evaluation system at the [CCMO] which in the end is just another part of the colonial enterprise. This merit-based system is just sort of an NCLB set of policy but for teachers. It's because of policies like merit pay I feel stifled, especially when all my professional develop at the school surrounds merit-based systems of evaluation. I find the TIG as my outlet to honestly dialogue about social justice, critical pedagogy, race and ethnicity in the classroom and decolonial frameworks. I'm really happy to see everyone here.

Ms. Nieto is the next to share her response to the check-in prompt:

"I'm Alejandrina Nieto and I'm in my 12th yr in the classroom. The reality is that it has been a struggle to get my practice to where it is today and in order to maintain and nourish myself the way that I need to in order to stay in the game I need spaces like this because [CCMO] isn't gonna give it to me; they just want me to teach to the test! So, I'm really grateful for the space and for all of the people willing to share this space.

In the first meeting the facilitators were clear that, for them, teaching is hard work. In their response to the check-in question they made themselves human and revealed that they are not perfect. With this, it became explicit that they make a conscious effort to work on their teaching practice and one of the ways they do so is by showing up to the inquiry group. Along with this, they both pointed to the inquiry group as a place where they could have discussions about issues that are relevant to what they face in the classroom. Lastly, an important part of what they shared was their critique to the larger process of schooling that impacts the realities of their classrooms.

After the facilitators set the stage for responses, Ms. Ides was next to respond to the prompt, "Say your name, where and what you teach and what brought you to the inquiry group and what are you looking to get out of this space? She said:

> "My name is Evelyn Ides and I'm in my 6th year as a 7th grade science teacher I wanted to come to the teacher inquiry group to get re-energized and get new ideas. With all the test prep stuff we have to do I feel like I'm getting stagnant and starting to buy into the ways to improve my teaching to get students to do better on tests and I feel like I was getting lost in needing to improve along those lines because admin beat down on teachers so much. And having a space like this [the teacher inquiry group] reminds me that I don't have to buy into test prep strategies because the numbers don't mean shit and I'd like to have this space to be a constant reminder to me of that. Also, I want more ideas because there isn't a lot of curriculum for 7th grade on how to do critical pedagogy - especially in science. So I'm constantly trying to apply the things I hear about in the secondary classrooms to fit my needs. I always learn a lot from you all on a continual basis and I'm not at that level yet, but I want to work at it."

Ms. Ides shared the ways administrators at her school were hyper-focused on developing teachers' skills to get students to perform better on standardized tests. The over emphasis of high-stakes testing began to give Ms. Ides the feeling that test scores are central to who she is as a teacher. She wanted the inquiry group to be a place where she could develop a critical teaching practice along with other teachers she seems to respect.

Lastly, Ms. Hela's response further pointed to the different ways teachers talked about what they are looking to get out of the inquiry group. Ms. Hela stated:

> "Hi, I'm Ms. Hela and while I've been a teacher I've found it frustrating because I haven't really found a space to get critical feedback. My school is somewhat

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supportive. I mean, I'm encouraged to keep doing what I'm doing but I still feel isolated so I'm looking to connect with peoples where I can get critical feedback."

Much like what other teachers have discussed, Ms. Hela suggests that she wanted to surround herself with others that are supportive and will push her to grow her practice from a critical perspective. Ms. Hela was upfront about her frustration regarding being supported in her process of becoming a better teacher. Especially important to her is being able to receive feedback from a critical perspective. Expressing her frustration, Ms. Hela shared with the group her feelings of isolation at her school because she is unable to get the kind of support she would like on her campus.

Furthering elucidating the ways the inquiry group provided the space for participants to reveal their humanity, the check-ins gave participants the opportunity to hear from each other about their more personal and intimate experiences. A moment that exemplified personal orientations of the teachers was when Mr. Spirit announced that he had gotten married over the spring break. Even though all the participants knew of his plans for marriage they still cheered him when he told the group. In response to the prompt, "How was your spring break?" Mr. Spirit stated," My spring break was great. I got married! It was beautiful, (sounds of applause and cheers filled the room). So, yeah, I'm happy to be here today." The celebrating of an important transition in the life of Mr. Spirit allowed the members to share in his joy. When Ms. Garcia responded

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to the check-in prompt that day she added that she attended Mr. Spirits' wedding and said, "I cried a lot. Like a lot [laughs]. The ceremony was beautiful."

In response to what she did over her spring break, Ms. Ides shared that she had time to rest and spent time with family,

> "I feel good. I've read more this week than I have all school year. I think going to see my family for a little bit helps me too, to feel energized and ready for the rest of the school year."

Along these lines, Ms. Ramos shared that, "Friends that I haven't seen in a while came into town and it was great spending time with them, hanging out and going to the beach and stuff." It was moments like these over the course of the inquiry group meetings that allowed the participants the opportunity to get to know each other outside of teaching and work contexts. It seems that these instances allowed participants a glimpse into the human side of each other. These more intimate experiences they shared about their struggles in the classroom and/or experiences of being with family and friends showed the ways they are teachers by profession but also people with families filled with stories of struggle and hope.

During follow up interviews I asked participants open-ended questions regarding their thoughts about the inquiry group. A common theme emerged was that participants thought the meetings were a place where they felt cared for and that they felt connected to each other. Speaking to this idea Ms. Ramos stated:

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"There is a genuine concern for each other, for teachers and they can go and discuss something as simple as 'how was your day,' to abstract 'let's talk about this policy.' There's a place for the conversation and it feels authentic as opposed to a generic PD or some cliché workshops. There's a sense of love I feel in the space which is something I don't think we get to talk about enough. People know your name and are concerned about you. Last week people were like, 'oh, come teach with us next week.' And I'm like "what are you doing with this unit?" So there's a professional level and a personal level of care and I think that gets connected."

Ms. Garcia described the group in much of the same way:

"What's kept me coming back is like everyone I feel is very sincere and takes that space very seriously and I feel like it's a place that I can grow and be nurtured as far as growing in not only my own classroom and the way that I do my own thing but also through the readings that we do and the relationships that we maintain with each other. I love that space, it's really dear to my heart because I feel it's a place where I resonate with people."

A common sentiment held by participants is that there is a sincere level of care and respect for one another. The inquiry group was a place where participants were concerned with supporting one another to develop professionally but also important were the relationships that developed over time.

When asked about her thoughts regarding the inquiry group, Ms. Hela talked about the importance of the relationships she had created with the other participants. She said:

"I can have deeper conversations with people that I've already built with, in the way that we have makes me feel like it's a safe place where I can bring up problems. Just knowing that that place exist when I come up against stuff at school, that in of itself is powerful."

For Ms. Nieto, the inquiry group was a place she could find a group of teachers she is

inspired by:

> "This inquiry space has kept me grounded and provided me with some collegial
> relationships that are important to me in that they're teachers whose values I
> align with in terms of serving students so that they can move from self-
> destructive resistance to transformative resistance. You know, having colleagues
> that are trying to do work like that in their classrooms has been invaluable and
> has allowed me to stay working where I work and serving the students who I
> serve cause otherwise it can be really isolating. I feel pretty marginalized in
> terms of my philosophy of teaching and learning where I work right now.
> There's an eagerness or willingness to learn and be vulnerable with each other
> and I just really enjoyed it for all of those reason."

The inquiry group provided Ms. Nieto with the collegial support that she was not able

to find at her school which is important since she feels isolated at her school site.

Having other like-minded colleagues allowed Ms. Nieto to identify with other teachers

that share some of the same struggles in their work environment. Along with this, Ms.

Nieto found a group of teachers that align with her on a philosophical level. Being able

to make these connections seemed to show Ms. Nieto there are other teachers working

towards similar goals while facing similar struggles.

Ms. McIntosh also expressed similar feelings as a pre-service teacher in her first

year. Ms. McIntosh explained the ways the group was an important space of critical

teachers:

> "I feel like I've gotten to this place of feeling really down about the daily of lesson
> planning and failing and just all these things that are really hard to take - a lot of
> feedback and a lot of trial and error - and mostly error right now because it's the
> beginning. And I think I found refuge in critical spaces of educators who I feel

align with my values and the reasons why I got into this work. Community is really important to me and it feels like I have a community there [in the inquiry group]. My cohort is really great but I think that there are varying levels of passion and compassion in the group and in the TIG it feels like people are choosing to be there out of a really deep passion to work towards decolonizing education/social justice education and those are the folks that I was looking for. I feel like I can be myself here."

Here it seems as if Ms. McIntosh is articulating a stance that values the community that was created by this group of teachers. The idea of finding a community where she can be herself is important in the context of her graduate program and professional experiences where she does not seem to be making fulfilling and meaningful connections. Mr. Spirit summed up this idea of connections between the participants and said, "We are all committed to each other." Accountability to others working towards similar goals of justice and equity were important across the interviews.

**Being Vulnerable**

Being a part of the group pushed teachers to articulate their practice and then look to the group for support. Participants relied on others' experiences and expertise to grow and learn. Trusting in the group was a risk for teachers but they were motivated by the genuine sense of support and their drive to be better teachers. When Ms. Hela was asked about her thoughts about the inquiry group she said,

"It's a scary for me to be vulnerable at the inquiry group but I also think it's an important opportunity to be vulnerable about my personal struggle as a learner and I feel like it's a place where people are learning together and it doesn't feel top down. I don't feel like people are trying to get me to arrive at a certain perspective. Cause it feels like there is this pedagogy that is this sort of big blob

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that's always moving but it's got a definite theme. Decolonial is a big concept so it feels safe to say 'I get this part but I don't know what you're talking about over here,' and I don't feel judged if I don't know the right answer."

Understanding that learning is a process for all those involved, teachers pointed to the ways the inquiry group provided them with a place of support in that process of learning. Along these lines, Ms. Ramos shared that it was good to see Ms. Ides getting support in further developing her curriculum along the lines of the inquiry question. Ms. Ramos said:

"Seeing Ms. Ides present was great. It's good to see that people think it's a safe environment to present no matter what level they feel they're at in terms of 'social justice' and it's good to know they'll be supported by us."

Support is key to all the participants. From this place of support, participants reported that they were more receptive to ideas from the readings and the feedback from the group.

In our interview after she presented her curriculum, Ms. Ides shared the ways the inquiry group felt like a place where teachers suspended judgment. She stated:

"I don't feel ashamed that I don't know enough. Everybody has something to contribute because of that protocol. That space is a lot more egalitarian. No one is the expert. Everybody is vulnerable at some point and everybody gets to get and give feedback and I appreciate that."

Ms. Ides pointed to the ways there is shared responsibility in the group and that all the teachers engaged in the process of teaching and learning simultaneously which she felt added to the group being a safe space for her.

Talking about her experiences with presenting curriculum, Ms. Nieto said that

she and others learned a great deal from the feedback given to her. Ms. Nieto said,

> "I presented my curriculum and got lots of feedback and I felt it was rich in that
> sense because I felt like what people were able to see is that through inquiry you
> can get a lot of feedback but you can also learn through the feedback that other
> people are getting. For instance there was an elementary school teacher there and
> even though she was hearing me get feedback on my curriculum she realized
> that she could not only use the curriculum I was getting feedback on but also all
> the resources and feedback that I was getting she could use developing her
> curriculum. There's constant cross-pollination or reciprocation of ideas which is
> really wonderful. I also felt like we were really clear that focusing on developing
> a decolonizing pedagogy is the purpose of the group and that we're looking to
> develop in this way, so that felt good as well."

Learning in the inquiry group presented itself in various forms. In the instance

described above Ms. Nieto seems to believe that going through the process of

developing one's practice models for other teachers the power of an inquiry process or

stance towards one's teaching. Ms. Nieto pointed out that revealing her process to

develop curriculum allowed others to see how they can develop curriculum for

themselves. For Ms. Nieto, participants act as role models as they present their

curriculum. It seems that for Ms. Nieto, relying on others for support is a humbling

experience because it requires a level of trust and respect.

**Conclusion**

Given that Freire (2000) describes humanization as the struggle to understand

the conditions that make one oppressed and then work to change those conditions, the

inquiry group proved to be important for teachers because it left them with a feeling of

being seen, being heard, and being recognized. This was especially the case when teachers stated that they felt as if they were not heard or recognized at their school sites. The inquiry group allowed teachers the space to meet, talk, listen, and challenge the isolation and alienation felt at their school sites by developing caring relationships with inquiry group participants. These teachers supported one another as they engaged in the work to further develop their teaching practice through a humanizing inquiry process. Being heard by others disrupted some of their feelings of isolation as they worked to make sense of the ways dominant narratives impacted their classrooms. It was through *Humanizing Inquiry Process* in the inquiry group where participants engaged in the subthemes of *Humanization as Deliberate*, *Acts to Reveal*, and *Being Vulnerable* which participants report impacted their learning with and from one another.

## CHAPTER 6
## Humanization of Teacher Intellectualization:
## Discussion, Analysis, Implications

**Introduction**

In this last chapter, I will present a summary of my research findings and the conclusions I have come to based on my inquiry. Then, I discuss the implications of my research findings for teacher development, teacher classroom practice, and future educational research.

In this study, I used a case study approach drawing from ethnographic methods to investigate a teacher-led inquiry group to glean insight into the usefulness of such a group for developing participants' teaching practice. This study builds on the existing body of literature surrounding teacher learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Goswami, Dixie, & Stillman, 1987; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1989), critical teacher inquiry groups (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Nieto, 2003; Picower, 2007), and critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 1994; Woodson, 1933) by providing a productive and important response to the plea from some urban educators searching desperately for concrete discussions that could support them in developing their classroom know-how to transform the lives of students in their classrooms and communities. The group was designed, in part, by their understandings of teacher inquiry groups as a model for teacher-directed learning, and informed by

their experiences with the professional development provided to them by their schools. The former was a model they were working towards, while the later acted as a model of what they did not want to recreate. In the section that follows, I will explain the importance of the concept of *Sharpen Political Clarity* in this teacher learning community that was working to create autonomous, teacher-led spaces for teacher development; especially one that was grounded in principles of social justice.

**Sharpen Political Clarity**

Findings from this study revealed the importance of teachers engaging with texts that made sense of larger power dynamics in society. The participants discussed the importance of understanding how macro-politics influences their classrooms. For most participants, engaging in texts grounded in critical social theory was important because it allowed them to develop an analysis to understand what they were seeing every day in their classrooms. Understanding larger systemic issues as it related to teaching in the urban context provided teachers with a larger framework that they could couch their teaching practice within. As mentioned in a previous chapter, when Ms. Ramos discussed the importance of deepening her understanding of the social forces that impact education, she said, "... I like having the space to think about a critical view of teaching and being in the classroom because I don't get that at my school." Having the opportunity to reflect on critical perspectives about education in the inquiry group appeared to provide some teachers a counter-narrative to what they were given at their

schools. Furthering the importance of developing a critical consciousness, Ms. Nieto, stated:

> "Being a part of the TIG has helped me to develop the language to make sense of why schools are how they are. And the readings and discussions give us another way to see our curriculum and even a positive way to see our students and their community that doesn't blame them for the larger social issues they face which isn't something we get all the time."

Through engaging in readings and dialogue, the inquiry group allowed participants the opportunity to challenge some of the more mainstream deficit and pro-standards based narratives promoted by their schools. Developing an analysis in the inquiry group seemed to support the teachers with a lens to develop curriculum, make sense of school policies, and even shift student perceptions and expectations.

To deepen their social, political, historical consciousness, participants engaged in dialogue that provided them with the space to express their ideas and interact with a range of perspectives put forth by educators from a range of disciplines and school contexts. Important to this process was the ways teachers were pushed to think in different or deeper ways. From observational data, the inquiry group seemed to be a place where participants engaged in respectful debate and dialogue in order to deepen their understanding of the texts. In each of the inquiry group meetings the participants seemed to make clear connections from the text to their lived experiences in the classroom. This aspect of their discussion made explicit the ways the ideas in the text could be applicable to teachers' various school contexts and disciplines. Important to

this dialogue was how teachers made clear the interpretations of the readings and how they connected this to their work as classrooms teachers. For example, as mentioned in chapter four, Ms. McIntosh stated:

> "Readings are pushing decolonial thought... I think the readings are getting at that, they're pushing back at more traditional kinds of schools and, so, it's making me think about what I'm doing with my students."

What Ms. McIntosh expressed here was representative of other teachers. As a result of the readings and discussions in the inquiry group, participants noted that they were rethinking what they do in their classrooms. The teachers revealed the importance of being reflective and deliberate about the curriculum they teach and their interactions with students. This is significant because readings and discussions gave teachers the space to challenge traditional notions of schooling and a push to create classrooms that fall in-line with the frameworks put forth in many of the texts.

Furthering the idea that developing political clarity contributed to changes in one's classroom practice, Ms. Ramos expressed the following:

> "I think decolonial ...means creating a pedagogy where I build real relationships with students...The other part, which I didn't think I did well this year with my students was the 'so what' part. This kind of pedagogy has to have an action piece that shows students how to apply the concepts to the world."

Above, Ms. Ramos described a decolonizing pedagogy as a pedagogy that requires a classroom practice that is relevant and simultaneously, one that encourages meaningful relationships to be developed. Observational data revealed that participants in this

inquiry group seemed to articulate that the meetings pushed them to think about their teaching within a critical social theory framework. From this place, participants expressed the need to get students to engage in their communities as part of the work they are asked to do for school. Authentic civic engagement that reaches into the community seemed to be important for participants across all the interviews. This is demonstrated that it is possible for teachers to develop a pedagogy and curriculum that supports students in understanding the issues in their communities while encouraging and supporting students to take action. Having a space like the inquiry group that supported and inspired teachers to develop curriculum for students that engaged them on this level has the potential to shift the ways students see the relationships between their communities and schools. Moreover, creating curriculum that is critical and culturally responsive has the potential to motivate students to transform the world and teachers can leverage this desire to improve students' overall engagement in school

Without the commitment, support, and encouragement from one another it seemed as if the group would not exist. Currently, many teachers are given very little meaningful collaboration time, therefore, creating a space for teachers to collaborate proved to be powerful for participants. This point was made repeatedly throughout my observations and interviews.

*Authentic Care*

Embedded within the theme of collaboration between participants are the ways that participants cared for one another. This notion of care was similar to what Angela Valenzuela (1999) defines as authentic care. Valenzuela's (1999) notions of "authentic care" provides useful insight about the types of relationships that either subtract from, or add to, Latino students' positive experiences in school. Valenzuela's work shows us that authentic care must be included in the ways teachers connect and work with one another. This is of the utmost importance because as participants seemed to become more invested in one another, they seemed to show increased investment in the inquiry group. Moreover, providing teachers with the opportunity to engage in a learning space such as this that models authentic care, voice, and community-relevant collaboration, has the potential to inspire participants to recreate these humanizing practices in their classrooms. Through this lens of authentic care, the ways in which participants engaged in collaboration began to get this research closer to identifying the ways humanization manifested itself in the inquiry group and the impact it can have on classrooms.

**Humanizing Inquiry Process**

The major theme that emerged from this study was the importance of a *Humanizing Inquiry Process* for the teachers. This theme was used to code the ways participants humanized themselves as they revealed their thoughts, emotions, and feelings while making sense of the ways oppression manifests itself in society and in

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their schools and classroom practice. Freire (2000) comes closest to concretely defining

the concept of humanization when he writes:

> "But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors: it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity" (p. 44).

Humanization is the struggle against a hegemonic discourse that positions the values

and beliefs of the ruling class as "normal." The struggle for humanization can be

understood through the demands of non-dominant groups as they struggle for justice

and recognition as people living outside of normative practices. Marginalized

populations can work against their non-dominant status in order to reclaim their

humanity but integral to realizing one's humanity is the process of becoming conscious

of the ways power manifests itself in one's reality. From here, one can begin to

interrogate their own actions to uphold or disrupt and transform hegemonic discourses.

Drawing from this Freirean conceptualization of *humanization*, I make sense of how

teachers become more familiar with their humanity and the humanity of their students.

During interviews, the participants in this study expressed that the inquiry

group provided them with a space to develop nuanced understandings of the

hegemonic forces that play into the ways schooling manifests itself today. From

observational data and follow up interviews, I am able to understand that participants

moved away from blaming individual students and instead pointed to larger systemic

issues that work to create oppressive schooling conditions. It is important to note here

that participants used terms such as "dehumanizing" and "oppressive" when describing

the schools where they work. Conversely, participants expressed that they felt

"validated," "supported," and "humanized" by their colleagues in the inquiry group

because of the emphasis on developing a critical analysis of social oppression and then

applying this lens to the work they do in the classroom.

*Deliberate*

To understand the ways deliberate structuring of the inquiry group supported

the humanization of participants, it is important to point to the discussion norms

developed by the facilitators and then agreed upon by the group. I believe the

discussion norms set up the atmosphere in the meetings for participants to be cognizant

of their participation or the ways they interacted in the group. Participants expressed to

me that the discussion protocol made them aware of the ways they engaged during the

meeting.

At a time in the teaching profession when teachers' concerns continue to go

unheard, the inquiry group, according to the teachers, provided a space for them to feel

heard. According to the participants, the design of the inquiry group set up the

structure for teachers to reveal their humanity to one another through dialogue. Over

the course of the inquiry group, participants were given the time to discuss topics such

and "schooling" and "hegemony" and how these ideas presented themselves in the lives of the participants. It was evident from observational data that these critical discussions allowed participants to reveal their more intimate thoughts and emotions related to these topics.

This was especially true with the check-ins that began each of the meetings. Over the course of the inquiry group meetings, the participants divulged personal information about themselves often talking about their struggles and limitations working within schools that are oppressive. At the same time, they often discussed their triumphs working in those very same schools. Some participants cried but most laughed as they worked to support one another in the process to further make sense of the realities at their different schools. According to the participants, the inquiry group allowed them to have access to a group of colleagues that potentially understood the conflicting nature of schools such as extreme discipline policies and being unable to meet the needs of all the children. The participants expressed the support they felt in the group was different than what one's family and friends may be able to offer because participants understood the nuances of what it means to be a teacher working towards social justice in a context that potentially stifles that approach to teaching. Being heard by others was a validating experience and created the context for participants to hear others. From my analysis across interviews, it was evident that engaging in critical and supportive dialogue set up the context for participants to be open to the learning that

happened within the inquiry group. Thinking about the process of coming together to collaborate and developing relationships on the surface can seem insignificant to some. However, given that the participants are working within and against societal norms that breed individualism, the act of coming together, I argue, is an important aspect of the *Humanizing Inquiry Process*.

Furthering the notion that the structure of the inquiry group supported teachers participating, acting, and contributing to the group, next, I point to the discussion formats used by the facilitators. Developing a discussion format that redistributed power in the inquiry group was important for the facilitators. The small group to large group format allowed for participants to have voice in the small group dialogue before moving into a larger discussion. This provided a space for teachers to begin thinking through their ideas about the text and then when it came to the large group discussion, participants echoed their thoughts shared in the small group. This format also allowed multiple voices to be heard during the discussion, thereby, including more than one perspective to be analyzed. However, participants noted that individuals who shared out in the small group discussion were the same people that shared out in the large groups. In order to shift that dynamic, a second format was used where participants wrote their thoughts on the board regarding the main points and themes of the texts and questions they wanted to discuss. This format allowed each of the participants to think through their ideas and engage in a dialogue from the start. This format allowed

for a discussion to take place on the board even before the large group came together. After participants wrote on the boards it was not as clear who wrote which comments. If there were questions about what was written on the board, the facilitators or other participants were allowed to talk or ask questions about what was written. While this may create some anxiety for those that are not comfortable speaking in the large group, it allowed participants to share that may otherwise not have done so. Moving to this format of discussion seemed to allow for participants to engage in the discussion on multiple levels; written and verbal. I believe there are two important takeaways related to the format of the inquiry group that emerged from my observational data and interviews. The first is that this format created spaces for multiple voices to be heard. This approach de-centered the facilitators as leaders of the group and seemed to allow more room for participants to take responsibility for the dialogue taking place during the meetings. Second, changing the format of how the group engaged the discussion was the result of teachers looking for a more inclusive way to have a group dialogue. Shifting the structure of the meeting showed the facilitators' ability to adjust to the needs of participants. Being able to quickly respond to the inquiry group participants allowed for teachers to feel as if their voices were heard. This contributed to the participants' buy-in because they felt that the facilitators worked to address any concerns.

Just as important, participants were able to see that teachers, even teachers that were seen as exemplar critical educators, continue to develop their practice and that it is a struggle for them as well. This seemed to be important to participants because it showed them that teachers thought to be "good" or "critical" continued to engage in a process of developing their practice. I believe demonstrates the idea that good teachers are not simply born but rather good teachers are developed. In this case, participants were working to develop their practice through collaboration and a process of inquiry in a multi-generational space.

Lastly, the feedback part of the inquiry group allowed participants the opportunity to get what they referred to as meaningful insight regarding their curriculum and pedagogy and positioned teachers as experts. Participants were able to draw from their own experiences of working in classrooms and provided resources to others. The feedback process allowed participants to see that they have something worthwhile to contribute to others. Since part of the feedback protocol required the presenter to simply listen when feedback was being given, participants explained that it was a humbling experience to deeply listen to others. In my observation, it seemed important that listening to others was important to those speaking because it allowed them to feel heard while it was also humbling for the presenters to deeply listen. These instances of being heard seemed to allow space for participants to have a voice and created the environment for participants to humanize themselves and see the humanity

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in others. In the end, the inquiry group seemed to support participants in deepening

their critical consciousness through a humanizing approach.

**Humanization of Teacher Intellectualization**

In this section, I will bring the two larger themes together to discuss a concept I

am referring to as the *Humanization of Teacher Intellectualization.* Next, I will draw from

Giroux (1988) and illustrate his concept of teachers as intellectuals. I will then make the

case that in the inquiry group, humanization was a vehicle for teacher development that

supported teachers in further becoming intellectuals.

Giroux (1988) argues that the work of teachers and teaching is a process to build

up humanizing and empowering spaces for students and teachers.  For this to happen

Giroux writes that:

> "teachers must be able to shape the ways in which time, space, activity, and
> knowledge organize everyday life in schools. Teachers must write, research, and
> work with each other in producing curricula and sharing power" (p. xxxiv).

According to Giroux, teachers should be the ones that will transform their working

conditions and develop a discourse and set of assumptions that allow them to engage in

the creation of knowledge**.** Moreover, he goes on to write:

> "As intellectuals, they will combine reflection and action in the interest of
> empowering students with the skills and knowledge needed to address injustices
> and to be critical actors committed to developing a world free of oppression and
> exploitation" (p. xxxiv).

The teachers that Giroux envisions are not merely concerned with promoting individual achievement or advancing students along career ladders, the teachers he envisions are concerned with empowering students so they can read the world critically and change it when necessary. Taking into account Giroux's words, I am making sense of the ways this teacher-led inquiry group helped to professionalize teachers while also increasing their capacity to critically serve students and their communities. This framework acknowledges that teaching is intellectual work that is working towards social change.

Bringing together the concepts of *Sharpen Political Clarity* and *Humanization*, I will next discuss how these two concepts interacted across the data set. The concept of the *Humanization of Teacher Intellectualization* is the precursor to Giroux's notion of teachers as intellectuals. This means that in order to become the kind of teacher intellectual Giroux envisions, it is necessary to build the capacity of teachers to become intellectuals. In order for this to happen, teachers must engage in a process of humanization that allows them the opportunity to develop a critical consciousness about the complex nuances of hegemony and their positionality under, within, and outside of dominant discourses.

Participants' involvement in the inquiry group essentially engaged in a process of teacher learning that allowed them to practice and model humanizing approaches for learning with other teachers as they sought to develop a critical teaching practice. It is the process of humanization that is the vehicle for teacher development because as

participants developed a critical consciousness, they began to see more clearly the ways dominant discourses have manifested in their lives. For the participants, this inquiry group was humanizing because teachers were able to make deeper connections between the larger social forces that impact their schools and classrooms. In my analysis across observational data and interviews, developing these connections allowed participants the opportunity to bring their humanity and the children they serve into their planning process as they worked to disrupt hegemonic values and beliefs by creating classrooms that were academically rigorous while challenging students to develop a deeper analysis of social oppression and liberation. Being involved in the inquiry group was important for participants because, as teachers, they can model for students the type of critical consciousness, social compassion, and collaboration needed to transform unjust social conditions. In other words, this inquiry group supported teachers in modeling what humanizing spaces for learning can look like.

In the previous chapters, I have shown how teachers were supported in working towards becoming the kind of intellectuals that Giroux envisions through working to create a space that honors one another's humanity. Next, I will highlight the implications of teacher-led inquiry for teacher development. While the implications of this study are numerous for teachers, I will focus on the implications for teacher education and educational research.

**Implications for Teacher Education**

*Pre-service Teachers*

The implication of this work related to pre-service teacher preparation programs is that this model of professional learning can act as a preventive measure to catch teachers before they "burn-out" or leave the profession all together. Most participants in this study attended the inquiry group because they felt alienated working within a standards- based-testing culture without a space to support them in dealing with their frustrations. If the teachers were at their wits end by the time they showed up to the inquiry group, I argue for preparing teachers to create supportive spaces for learning with their colleagues as central to preservice training. This is especially important because the teaching profession has proven to leave teachers with feelings of isolation and loneliness (e.g., Johnson, 1990; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Therefore, providing pre-service teachers with the space to do the needed critical self-reflection acknowledges how important it is for them to understand their positionality under and within dominant discourses. This study furthers the notion that teachers must develop a deep understanding of their own positionality and the context of the communities where they work. Supporting teachers in developing a teaching practice that is reflective may support them in getting closer to being the kind of teacher that cultivates the humanity and critical capacity of the children in their classrooms.

We know that good teachers are not just born, they are developed. Therefore, it is important to think about the ways future teachers are inspired to develop a deep and

meaningful interest in education. I say that pre-service teachers must be inspired because as this study has shown, the participants have tapped into their own agency to create the kind of learning space they needed. This study speaks to the important of inspiring pre-service teachers to develop a sincere interest in learning and thinking about learning especially after they leave their university. Once pre-service teachers are inspired, it is then necessary to support them in developing into critical and culturally relevant educators. Additionally, this study shows the importance of teachers working with other teachers that are at various stages in their careers. It is important that teacher preparation programs create multi-generational spaces that are humanizing. Thus, it is imperative that pre-service and more veteran teachers come together to discuss their insights about the different and similar struggles shared across that spectrum as they draw from critical social theory to develop their analysis and classroom practice. It is of the utmost importance to give pre-service teachers the space to treat teaching as intellectual work that questions and challenges dominant narratives.

A pre-service teacher education program looking to develop critical and culturally relevant educators would create the structures for on-going interrogation of the ways in which dominant discourses are reified within the teacher development process. This would include everything from the application process to assessments and evaluations. Additionally, centering an analysis of power and the conditions that reproduce inequities within all content areas from foundation to research methods

courses would be essential to developing educators with a critical consciousness.

Moreover, this research suggests it is important for teachers across a varying spectrum

of experience to collaborate. This means universities must think creatively about how to

better include more in-service teachers in the pre-service teacher development process.

*In-service Teachers*

The goal of this work was to examine the kinds of professional learning spaces

teachers need and want. This study builds on the idea that teaching must be understood

as a process. As Sonia Nieto (2003) points out, we need to understand that teachers are

always in the process of becoming – now the question is becoming "what?" As a result

of this study, I argue for teachers to be supported as they develop towards a pedagogy

that is critical and culturally relevant. To get teachers to that place, this study provides

teachers and researchers with a model of how to build the capacity of teachers to

develop humanizing spaces for learning that are grounded in what teachers say they

need as they work to develop teaching practices that are socially just. Teachers will have

a hard time being socially just if they have not done the work to unpack deficit

perspectives of the students they teach. Therefore, teacher learning spaces must bring

together the reflection and action needed to further understand what Professor David

Kirkland (2013) refers to as displacement ideologies. Teachers must understand the way

displacement ideologies have created systems of schooling where society has consented

to an education where only a few will be successful. Allowing teachers to unpack and

deeply understand the ways they are complicit in reinforcing these displacement

ideologies while at the same time working to disrupt this logic will be important for a

teacher's development. From here, teacher learning spaces can work to envision new

kinds of educational spaces that are humanizing, rigorous, and culturally empowering.

This research is a call to action for universities and teachers. First, this study

challenges universities with a vested interest in developing so-called effective

educators. This study came to fruition because of the grassroots work of teachers

working to meet their own needs. What is possible if universities leverage their clout to

create spaces for educators to come together and do the necessary work as outlined in

this study? The possibilities may go beyond what is expected if university-sanctioned

teacher-led inquiry groups hold firm to ensuring spaces remain focused on developing

a critical and culturally relevant classroom practice. However, as this study has

demonstrated, teachers cannot wait for universities or school districts to create these

kinds of spaces. Instead, this research calls for educators to take up the work to create

what they believe they need in order to best serve their students. However, it is

important that these teachers created spaces work towards understanding, disrupting,

dismantling, and transforming dominant discourses. From here, it will be necessary to

develop humanizing classrooms for young people.

*Classroom Practice*

The implications of this study for teachers' classroom practice suggests that developing one's teaching practice in a humanizing, teacher-led space has the potential to support teachers in deepening their critical consciousness. Developing critical consciousness can support teachers in creating curriculum that is critical and culturally relevant which has the potential to create classroom spaces that are humanizing. This has the potential to support some students in beginning to see the relevancy of their education that may lead to greater student engagement. However, this engagement is not one based on academic achievement. Instead, engagement in this sense may be one where some students are encouraged to bring their communities into the classroom and then supported to be civically engaged in their communities as part of their educational experiences. From here, teachers can tap into students' engagement to support them as they engage in their communities to address issues of inequity.

*Educational Research*

This study positions educational research as a means to fortify the possibilities of teachers as capable agents inserting their voices to transform the educational landscape. Teachers are thought to be only capable of providing surface information about their classroom and little else concerning the teaching profession. Given that teachers' voices are not often at the decision-making table when educational reform is discussed, it is imperative that teachers have room to contribute to the ways education is transformed. Researchers must involve teachers in the design and implementation of a study in order

to get closer to addressing the issues most important to schools, students, and teachers. This is important because it has the potential to directly impact classrooms, students and their communities.

Traditional research structures react to teacher-produced knowledge with a disdain that delegitimizes the voice of the teacher. This reaction by the academy can be seen as a reaction to protect itself. This sort of epistemological hostility can manifest itself in ways that are self-serving to university standards. However, this study highlights the importance of focusing explicitly on teachers' thinking and knowledge generated through teacher-led inquiry groups as a tool for getting teacher voices heard while also leveraging spaces where knowledge is generated as a vehicle for civic engagement.

**Limitations**

*Participants*

The limitations surrounding the participants can be seen from the perspective that they were a select group of teachers already oriented towards social justice. Since the teachers were recruited by teachers that are part of a larger community-based organization, these teachers may not represent the greater body of teachers in Los Angeles or across the country. Because participants are connected to a community organization, it may have only encouraged teachers with a certain political orientation to attend the inquiry group. Additionally, given that the participants for this study

voluntarily showed up to the inquiry group meetings, if teachers were required to show up to a meeting like this, they may have a different experience in the setting. With this, the way the group dynamic played out may be entirely different had there been a wider scope of ideological beliefs represented in the group. Moreover, this research did not investigate how participants' development in the inquiry group actually impacted their classroom practice beyond participants' perceptions. While participants have expressed the ways the inquiry group impacted their thinking and curriculum, it is not certain if these changes will last over time. Additionally, for cases where individuals do not have ideological alignment, creating spaces for learning is just as important. Groups can build a shared understanding as long as individuals are open to the learning that will take place as they develop their critical consciousness around issues of power, oppression, and liberation.

*Data Collection*

The data collected for this research project was limited in scope. As a researcher, I was faced with limitations related to the kind of data I was able to collect. For this study, I only conducted interviews and participant observations. Through interviews, I was only given the perspective of the interviewee, which may not entirely represent the complexities of their experiences. Additionally, as a participant observer it would have been important to follow teachers into their classrooms to see the ways in which their learning in the inquiry group manifested itself in their classrooms. Relying on

curriculum alone does not provide this study with clear examples of how participants'

classroom practice aligned with their self-reports. Moreover, given the scope of possible

informants for this study, I was unable to collect information from inquiry group

attendees that did not meet the requirements as participants. Doing so may have added

valuable insight to understanding other aspects of the setting not taken up with study.

*Positionality*

As mentioned previously, I do not claim to be free of biases. Instead, I see my

role as a father, partner, community organizer, and Latino in graduate school as

informing the research I have decided to undertake and the ways I have interpreted my

findings. The idea is that we are intimately connected to our relationships with and

against systems of power. I believe this to be true in the teaching profession where

teachers' values and beliefs inform their pedagogy: what they teach, how they teach,

and why they teach. Moreover, given that I have been organizing with teachers in South

Los Angeles since I arrived to Los Angeles five years ago, the ways I understand this

research project are seen through this lens and impact the ways I understand the

findings of this research.

**Future Research**

This research leaves many questions unanswered. As next steps for this project it

would be important to follow inquiry group participants to see how they implement

what they learn in the inquiry group in their classrooms. From here, it would also be

important to understand students' experiences with curriculum that was informed by participating in the inquiry group. Student voice has the potential to provide this study with considerable insight. Additionally, as Common Core begins to unroll in Los Angeles County, it would be important to understand how a teacher-led inquiry group can support teachers as they implement a critical and culturally relevant classroom practice while also meeting new state and federal standards.

Early findings from this research are beginning to point to the ways teacher-led communities can address the issue of teacher retention. At a time when nearly fifty percent of teachers in urban schools leave the teaching profession within the first five years, understanding if teacher-led inquiry groups can support teachers to stay in the profession for the long-term is of the utmost importance.

Over the course of this study I have been asked about the similarities of a teacher-led inquiry group to professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2010; Jaquith et al., 2010). While there may be similarities such as a focus on group collaboration, engaging in the process of inquiry, and the focus on student learning, there are some major ways this teacher-led inquiry group diverges from the professional learning communities model. Much of the literature on professional learning communities focuses on students' standardized test scores as indicators of improvements in a teacher's practice (DuFour et al., 2010; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). In contrast, the teacher-led inquiry group at the center of this study sought to develop

participants' critical consciousness. It was from this place that participants were then supported in developing their classroom practice which is dramatically different than the professional learning communities model.

Just as important, it is imperative to understand the impact of grassroots community-based organizations on teachers; especially organizations working to address issues of equity. With the increasing numbers of teacher activist groups springing up across the country, this can give much needed insight into why teachers are willing to spend their free-time organizing with community members, students, and other teachers. Also, important to understand, are the ways these groups are connecting across the country and the ways they influence and learn from one another.
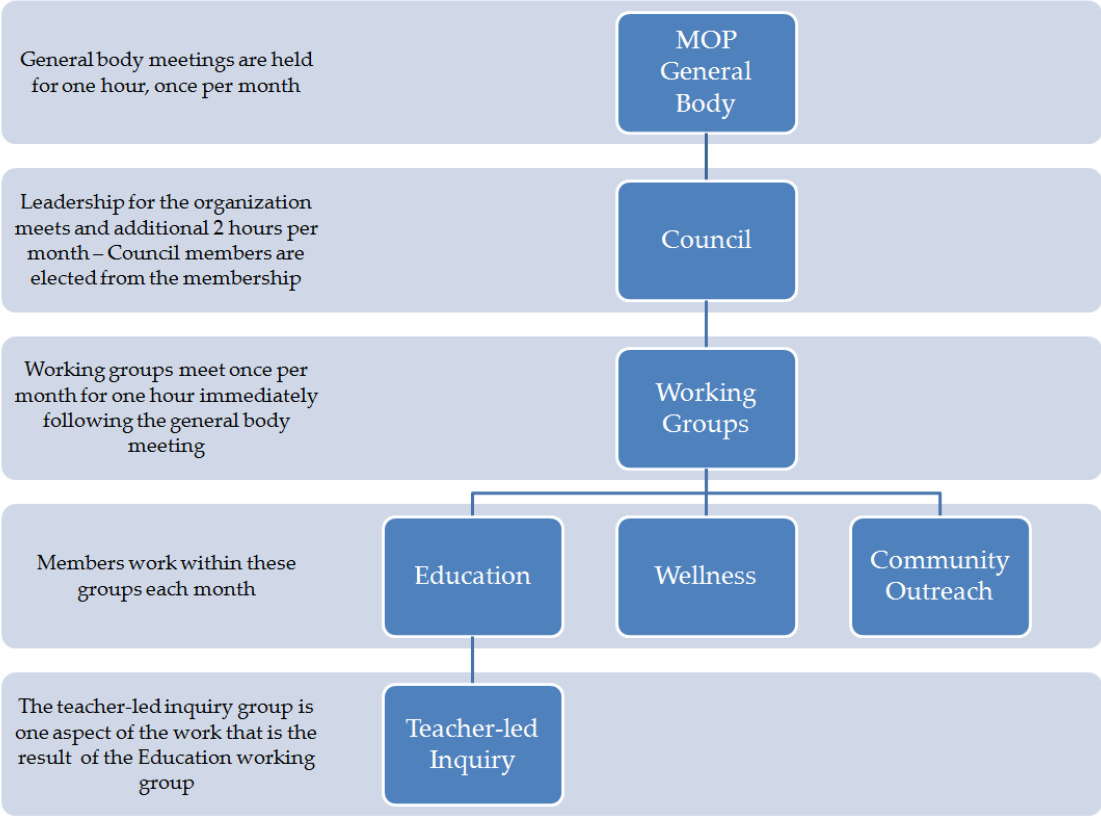
**Conclusion**

As a researcher and community organizer who is embedded in the struggle for educational equity, my research is intimately personal. Over the course of the year when this data was collected I was afforded the opportunity to learn and grow and to mentor and be mentored. In my role as researcher I was witness to the ways teachers have collaborated, shared, and inspired one another. I have seen teachers come together from across academic disciplines and work on developing their curriculum to be more responsive to their students while at the same time addressing issues of injustice and justice. I have seen chemistry teachers support English teachers and elementary teachers support high school teachers, and vice versa, in order to make curriculum more

responsive; sharing information in a way that allowed each other to feel heard and respected. I have had the opportunity to see teachers moved by their organizing experience and work to create the same kinds of spaces for their students. This has resulted in classrooms that are more democratic where students' voices are central to the learning taking place. But I have also see the power of teachers as they extend their classroom beyond the steal gates and as they take what is learned in the classroom and apply it to their lived realities. I have seen teachers create community forums with their students to address issues such as police terrorism. In other instances, teachers have worked tirelessly with students on campaigns addressing Black and Brown tension on their high school campus which manifested into student-led teach-ins and spoken word events. Teachers worked outside of their contracted hours of duty to create spaces to share social justice curriculum with other teachers as a way to build networks of educators across Los Angeles in an attempt to building solidarity with teachers across the city. Lastly, over the year, I observed the ways teacher inspired each other. New teachers inspired more experienced teachers and more experienced teachers inspired newer teachers in a form of reciprocal generosity; the more each gave to the group, the more everyone else gave back. These examples have showed me what is possible when teachers are motivated and supported to move their teaching to a place of critical action inspired by hope and a love for the community.

**Appendix 1.1**

**Movement of the People Organizational Chart**

General body meetings are held for one hour, once per month

**MOP General Body**

Leadership for the organization meets and additional 2 hours per month – Council members are elected from the membership

**Council**

Working groups meet once per month for one hour immediately following the general body meeting

**Working Groups**

Members work within these groups each month

**Education**　　**Wellness**　　**Community Outreach**

The teacher-led inquiry group is one aspect of the work that is the result of the Education working group

**Teacher-led Inquiry**

**Appendix 3.2**

**Movement of the People - Teacher-Led Inquiry Group**
**Data Collection Timeline**

| Data collection timeline | Jan | Feb | March | April | May | June |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant Observations | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| 1-on-1 interviews w/teachers | X |  | X | X |  | X |
| Collected artifacts | X | X | X | X | X | X |

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