

BECOMING BLACKWOMANTEACHER:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ILLUMINATION
OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR CRITICAL DEMOCRATIC
PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEWARK, NJ

by

LEAH Z. OWENS

A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-Newark
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Urban Systems

written under the direction of

Dr. Carolyne J. White

and approved by

Newark, New Jersey

October 2020

Copyright

©2020
Leah Z. Owens
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Abstract

Becoming BlackWomanTeacher:

An Autoethnographic Illumination of Teacher Leadership Development for Critical
Democratic Public Education in Newark, NJ

By Leah Z. Owens

Dissertation Director:

Dr. Carolynne J. White

Abstract: The author is an urban high school teacher turned doctoral student whose exposure to critical theory and pedagogy compelled her to new action and wonderings. She wonders about the relationship among democracy and education and racism. She wonders how teacher leaders are prepared to become politically active in the contemporary neoliberal context. This experimental inquiry is located within a post qualitative paradigm. The author thinks with theory as she narrates and analyzes her lived experiences of being re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education (auto). This autoethnographic inquiry illuminates and critically analyzes (graphy) the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership (ethno). The author uses critical race theory, critical democratic theory, and Black feminist thought to analyze this journey that takes place in Newark, New Jersey from 2004 to 2018. During this time, neoliberal education reform initiatives emerge in force and begin to dominate the educational landscape in Newark, subsequently leading to an uprising of the community who fight back against neoliberalism's deceitful apolitical

nature while envisioning critical democratic public schools. This dissertation is written using the three article format. Three separate, publication-ready manuscripts represent the findings of this inquiry. These findings illuminate some of what may be missing in teacher preparation, namely how adopting a womanist pedagogical approach can cultivate social justice educators and how field experiences crafted from a critical perspective can provide opportunities for preservice teachers to practice place-based political activism and develop their teacher leadership.

Acknowledgements

Carolynne, you are one of the greatest interventions in my life. I value your vision and the impact it has had on me. Thank you for your guidance and patience and belief in me.

To my committee: Dr. Chase, thank you for inspiring (and urging) me to think beyond academia for my future endeavors. Dr. Eatman, thank you for thinking it important to engage in this work with me. Dr. Payne, thank you for bringing your critical eye to my work. Lois, thank you for allowing me access to your sophisticated practicality.

Thank you to the BlackWomenTeachers of Newark who provided shoulders for me to stand on: Toni Baskerville-Richardson, Mary Bennett, and Deborah Smith-Gregory. And the BlackWomenTeachers with whom I stand shoulder-to-shoulder: Shannon Coleman, Yvette Jordan, and Alicia Malave Diaz.

And I also acknowledge the othermothers of Newark who have cared for me and so many others in our struggle for a just system of public education: Laura Baker, Kaleena Berryman, Denise Cole, Cassandra Dock, Shanita Hargrove, Ingrid Hill, Wilhemina Holder, Donna Jackson, Yolanda Johnson, Omayra Molina, Sheila Montague, Anfal Muhammad-Jenkins, Sharon Smith, Lauren Wells, and Viva White.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the women closest to me: my mother, Alethea; my grandmother, Ma (rest in peace); my sister-cousin, Ravyn; my best friend, Millie; and my adopted little sister, Danielle. All strong Black women, all of whom told me numerous times how proud of me they are, all of whom I love and admire deeply. Thank you for your love and support.

This dissertation is also dedicated to Newark, where I “grew up” and “showed out.” I’m not from Newark, but I’m of Newark. And for that, I’m thankful.

Table of Contents

Copyright	iii
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
List of Tables	viii
List of Illustrations	viii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Overview of Inquiry	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	2
1.2.1 Racism, Neoliberalism, and Public Education	2
1.2.2 Urban School Reform and Neoliberalism	3
1.2.3 Critical Democratic Public Education, Teacher Education, and Teacher Leadership	6
1.3 Purpose of the Inquiry	8
1.4 Significance of the Inquiry	10
1.5 Literature Review	12
1.5.1 Teacher Leadership for Social Justice	12
1.5.2 BlackWomanTeacher: A Tradition of Revolutionary Leadership and Activism	21
1.5.3 Gaps and Limitations	28
1.6 Research Question	29
1.7 Methodology	29
1.8 Research Site: Newark, New Jersey	33
1.9 Unifying Theme of the Dissertation: Preparing Politically Active Teacher Leaders	38
1.9.1 Conceptual Framework	38
1.9.2 Critical Pedagogy	41
1.9.3 Education Organizing	43
1.9.4 Social Justice/Movement Unionism	44

1.9.5 Social Foundations of Education	48
1.10 Description of the Three Articles	49
Chapter 2. Manuscript 1: From Apolitical to Elected Official: Cultivating Teacher Leadership to Combat Racism and Generate Critical Democratic Practice in Urban Schools	53
Chapter 3. Manuscript 2: Teachers Rising: Democratic Possibilities of Social Justice Unionism	81
Chapter 4. Manuscript 3: Becoming BlackWomanTeacher: Tensions and Possibilities in Cultivating Social Justice Dispositions in Teacher Leaders	105
Chapter 5. Conclusion	153
5.1 Constitution/Onto-epistemology: Synthesis of Findings	153
5.1.1 Being BlackWomanTeacher	154
5.1.2 Developing Social Justice Dispositions	155
5.1.3 Acknowledging Place and Time	156
5.2 Implications and Future Research	157
5.2.1 Methodological Considerations	157
5.2.2 Three Article Dissertation	160
5.2.3 Implications for Teacher Education and Political Activism	161
5.2.4 Future Teacher Education Research	163
Coda	165
References	181

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Table 1.1 Chronological Order of Key Events for Each Manuscript by Vignette...pp. 52-53

Chapter 2

Table 2.1 Newark Public Schools District Enrollment, Select Years...p. 59

List of Illustrations

Introduction

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework...p. 41

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of Inquiry

I am an urban high school teacher turned doctoral student whose exposure to critical theory and pedagogy compels her to new action and wonderings. I wonder about the relationship among democracy and education and racism. I wonder how teacher leaders are prepared to become politically active in the contemporary neoliberal context.

This experimental inquiry is located within a post qualitative paradigm (Lather, 2015; Packer, 2018; St. Pierre, 2015, 2017, 2019); it looks to examine how a course of actions produced particular outcomes while contributing to the ongoing discussions of what constitutes post qualitative inquiry. I think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2017) as I narrate and analyze my lived experiences of being re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education (auto). Through an autoethnographic inquiry, I illuminate and critically analyze (graphy) the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership (ethno). I use critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), critical democratic theory (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) to analyze this journey that takes place in Newark, New Jersey from 2004 to 2018. During this time, neoliberal education reform initiatives emerge in force and begin to dominate the educational landscape in Newark (Murphy et al., 2017), subsequently leading to an uprising of the community who fight back against neoliberalism's deceitful apolitical nature (Brown, 2015) while envisioning critical democratic public schools.

This dissertation is written using the three article format. Three separate, publication-ready manuscripts represent the findings of this inquiry. The findings

illuminate some of what may be missing in teacher preparation, namely how adopting a womanist pedagogical approach can cultivate social justice educators and how field experiences crafted from a critical perspective can provide opportunities for preservice teachers to practice place-based political activism and develop their teacher leadership.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

1.2.1 Racism, Neoliberalism, and Public Education

Public education in the United States is plagued by the socioeconomic systems of racism and neoliberalism. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court found that it was unconstitutional to have “separate but equal” schools for children based on race (*Brown v. Board of Education*). The very idea of de jure segregation went against the American ideals of freedom and democracy because there was no choice allowed. Furthermore, Black children across the nation were being deprived of equal educational opportunities to compete with their White counterparts; they were not being prepared to navigate and negotiate mainstream American society due to school segregation (Banks, 2004).

While this court case set the legal precedent for equal educational opportunities for all through racial integration of schools, from a critical race theorist perspective, *Brown* has contributed to the reconfiguration rather than the dismantling of structures of racial inequity (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Massey and Denton (1993) explain how the forces of racial capitalism produced hypersegregation. Barriers to upward economic mobility in addition to mandated integration of the public schools resulted in residential (*de facto*) segregation (James, 2014; Tractenberg, Orfield, & Flaxman, 2013). Now, White and Black children do not attend the same schools simply because they do not live in the same towns or neighborhoods.

Neoliberalism, as the contemporary hegemonic ideological force (Brown, 2015), orders society in a way that places the interests of the individual over the collective and frames social phenomena in economic terms. The origins of neoliberalism are traced back to liberalism, which champions the ideals of individual freedom and free markets, and opposes collectivism; however, what distinguishes neoliberalism is its call for the state to assure these ideals (Robertson, 2008). In other words, government should not interfere with or regulate markets, but it must protect them so that they can act freely. Barber (2003) describes neoliberalism as “deforming the quest for democracy and...deflecting the communitarian critique of liberalism” (p. xi). The tenets of neoliberalism can be summed up as follows: the free market, privatization, consumer choice, entrepreneurial initiative, deregulation, competition, public budget cuts, elimination of social subsidies, exploitation of labor, and the commodification of people, ideas, and natural resources (Lipman, 2011; McLaren, 2007; Robertson, 2008; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Russom, 2010; Weiner, 2011).

U.S. education policy does not escape the influence of neoliberalism. Under this paradigm, James (2014) argues, education is presented as a personal trouble rather than a public issue, thereby distorting the relationship between the individual and society. Educational success in a neoliberal order is mainly restricted to procuring high standardized test scores (Bale & Knopp, 2012), eschewing the democratic purpose of education to prepare students to be active citizens.

1.2.2 Urban School Reform and Neoliberalism

The constellation of residential segregation, institutional racism, and neoliberal education policy illuminates Cuban and Usdan’s (2003) finding that many urban school reforms have shallow roots; that is, they never address the systemic issues the school

districts face. Close examinations of the history of policy decisions in inner-city schools (Neckerman, 2007) and the political economic landscape in which those policy decisions are being made (Anyon, 1997; Anyon, 2014; Lipman, 2011) reveal the detrimental impact of institutional racism on the academic achievement of students attending urban public schools, most of whom are students of color and have low-income family backgrounds. Since school reform takes a variety of forms—including pedagogy, finance, and governance—and uses many strategies—including legal, policy, and organizing—the nature of education reform is reflected in the ideology that drives the reforms.

Communities which historically have borne the brunt of institutional racism and economic inequality are further disenfranchised by the dissolution of local elected governance (Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, 2015). The two predominant kinds of school governance reform in urban locales, namely charter schools and state takeovers, shift the power to external, and sometimes even private, entities. Charter schools have become prevalent in urban areas that serve high numbers of Black and Latino students, and students from low-income families. Established as a strategy for fostering educational innovation in the late 1980s, charters quickly morphed into private entities funded with public dollars and subsequently became competitors to district public schools (Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017; Network for Public Education, 2017). As another school governance reform, state takeover of urban school districts is a method of dispossession that stems from the belief that communities of color have nothing of value to provide to the governance of their own schools (Dixon, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015; Picower & Mayorga, 2015), a belief that needs to be disrupted.

Court cases argued in the 1970s and 80s in state supreme courts suggested school finance reform as a promising avenue to achieve educational equity for urban students. *Serrano v. Priest* (1971), a case argued in California's courts, successfully used the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and the parallel equal protection clause in the California Constitution to render property tax-based school funding unconstitutional, mitigating the detrimental impact of residential segregation. Similarly, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), argued in Texas, made this argument and initially won. However, when it was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, the justices overturned the lower court's ruling. It was decided that the U.S. Constitution did not protect education as a fundamental right; the lawyers were not successful in making the case that belonging to a class of poverty should be protected under the law.

Abbott v. Burke I (1985) is considered one of the most important educational equity and adequacy legal decisions in the country. Yaffe (2007) recounts how the Education Law Center came to argue on behalf of nine families from four cities in New Jersey. The justices ruled that near-parity funding would be allocated to thirty-one property-poor school districts across the state with the objectives of providing New Jersey's low-income urban children with equal educational opportunity and reducing the achievement gap based on race, social class, and ethnicity. Though a school finance reform effort at face value, over the span of three decades the multiple mandates of *Abbott* sought to address educational reform through avenues beyond funding by identifying and providing for the extraordinary needs of children living in these districts. Though strides such as *Abbott* have been made with school funding, neoliberalism's commitment to austerity has undone much of this progress (Aguilar, 2012).

What will it take to disrupt myths of inferiority and build an anti-racist education system? How can the gains toward educational equality and equity be amplified and sustained? What can be the intervention?

1.2.3 Critical Democratic Public Education, Teacher Education, and Teacher Leadership

Ball and Dagger (2006) contend democracy should be thought of as an ideal as opposed to one specific form of government. One actuality to support their argument is democracy has rarely, if ever, been true “rule by the people.” From its inception in ancient Greece, democracy has been exclusionary; only adult, free males were allowed to participate in the Athens polis. When democracy took hold in the land that would become the United States, this characteristic of exclusion was replicated. Over the course of two centuries, a number of political movements—particularly those for women’s and civil rights—secured by law each citizen’s right to fully participate in governing this country.

Nevertheless, neoliberalism poses a threat to the kind of democracy which protects those who are most vulnerable in a capitalist state and which empowers the masses. Contemporary political scholars often draw on philosopher John Dewey (1916/2005) when theorizing how to bring about a stronger, more inclusive, more participatory democracy (Barber, 2003; Collins, 2009; Gutmann, 1999; Mirra & Morrell, 2011; Oakes & Rogers, 2006). Brown (2015) asserts that democracy must be “consciously valued, cultured, and tended by a people seeking to practice it and...it must vigilantly resist myriad economic, social, and political forces threatening to deform or encroach upon it” (p. 11).

In revisiting the relationship between schooling and democracy, Mirra and Morrell (2011) highlight two types of democracies: neoliberal and critical. Critical democracy consists of the “elements of the democratic tradition that provide us with the ideological

tools to name and challenge systemic inequality” (Mirra & Morrell, 2011, p. 411); this is opposed to neoliberal democracy, which decimates the public good and destroys critical democratic possibilities by promoting individualism, consumerism, and passivity (Mirra & Morrell, 2011). In Gutmann’s (1999) treatise on democratic education, she asserts the democratic ideal of education is *conscious social reproduction*. This concept refers to “the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior of future citizens” (p. 14). Taking critical democracy and democratic education together, the result can be referred to as critical democratic public education. Critical democratic public education supports the assumption that the success of public schools should be measured by asking to what extent schools (re)produce citizens who can be active participants in a democratic sphere while addressing issues of educational equity in all aspects of schooling (Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

Social justice has become a catch-all term for “activism against oppression and discrimination, particularly within social and political contexts...geared toward systemic change of oppressive systems with political, economic, and social structures in institutions and societies” (marbley et al., 2015, p. 45). Some teacher education programs explicitly set a goal of cultivating social justice dispositions in preservice teachers (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Khalil & Brown, 2015; Picower, 2011a; Picower, 2011b), while other kinds of preparation programs, such as Teach for America, tend to focus on the technical aspects of teaching—what teachers need to do and can do within the domain of their classrooms (Wetzler, 2010). Without an explicit political orientation toward social justice, teachers are much more likely to be reproducers of inequitable and racist social structures. Holding a

disposition that all children can learn is worthy and equity-minded (Villegas, 2007), but is it enough to dismantle neoliberalism?

How can teachers foster their students' development into participatory citizens if these teachers are not prepared to teach toward this end and if they are not politically active themselves? What role should teachers play in the eradication of racism and the transformation of the current socioeconomic system dominated by neoliberalism into one that is directed by a critical democracy? From the perspective of social justice and critical democratic public education, the answer is a leadership role since teachers are citizens as well as workers located within the public education sphere. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) by Paulo Freire is a text frequently cited in the literature on teacher preparation from a social justice approach. In outlining a program for transforming the lives of the oppressed, Freire defines revolutionary leaders as those who

realize that their own conviction of the necessity for struggle (an indispensable dimension of revolutionary wisdom) was not given to them by anyone else—if it is authentic. This conviction cannot be packaged and sold; it is reached, rather, by means of a totality of reflection and action. Only the leaders' own involvement in reality, within an historical situation, led them to criticize this situation and to wish to change it. (p. 67)

How are teachers being prepared to be revolutionary leaders in this historical situation of racism and neoliberalism?

1.3 Purpose of the Inquiry

This research is important because it contributes to a growing literature that seeks to document what is actually happening on the ground in urban public education during

this era of neoliberal education reform, both inside and outside of schools (Aguilar, 2012; Jacobin & CORE Caucus, 2014; Trocolli & Knopp, 2012; Uetrict, 2014). It provides a unique perspective to the mainstream accounts of school reform in Newark, joining others who are similarly reporting from the ground in other cities (e.g., see Dixson, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015). This research documents the political activism of citizens as they take actions to not only defend public education but to articulate a critical democratic vision for it.

The problem statement presents the context in which new teachers are entering the profession. For many of them, it is also the context of their PK-12 education, which furthers explains why we must transform the kind of education preservice teachers receive to one that explicitly adopts an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-classist pedagogy (Chapman, 2011). Much of their learning needs to be undone. This is why the literature on teacher leadership needs to contain stories and theories of how teachers come to be politically oriented and politically active, particularly in a neoliberal and urban context. Teacher education is not immune from the pathology of neoliberalism, but by learning more about how teachers develop into leaders and develop social justice dispositions, we create possibilities for transforming the kind of teachers produced.

The purpose of this inquiry is to illuminate teacher leadership development for critical democratic public education. This inquiry is important because it complicates social justice. Social justice has become ubiquitous, but what does it really mean and is it enough? How can employing an intersectional praxis allow us to see teacher leadership differently, particularly when it comes to political activism? How do we prepare politically active teacher leaders?

1.4 Significance of the Inquiry

A social justice disposition, or orientation, is developed in teachers in multiple ways. For many teachers, this disposition is developed formally, like through preservice teacher education programs or professional development as a practicing teacher (Grant and Agosto, 2008). Sometimes it is developed through political action with the union or electoral politics (Hagopian & Green, 2012) or through lived experiences that provide a conduit for cultural transmission (Slater et al., 2016). In teacher preparation programs, this development is affected by choices concerning the field experiences of preservice teachers, how we think about teacher dispositions, how we coach student teachers, if we invite their leadership, if we structure collaboration into the program, and how we know what is being learned or developed with teacher candidates. This inquiry joins (and attempts to answer) the call for the design of academic programming that is “conceptually grounded in the pillars of pedagogy enacted by effective Black women teachers to support preservice teacher learning” (Acosta, 2019, p. 35). Additionally, it advocates for field experiences that provide opportunities for preservice teachers to practice place-based political activism and teacher leadership development.

It has been acknowledged that educators who study self contribute to the discourse on teaching and teacher education (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). By critically examining how I have been re-constituted over the span of my teaching career and what sparked these re-constitutions, I illuminate possible practices to employ in urban teacher education programs. Analyzing my lived experiences as a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education through a lens of Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) provides another realm of significance to this inquiry because I explore how

employing a Black radical feminist tradition of leadership (Carruthers, 2018; Ransby, 2018) as an intervention to market-based education reform can be an effective approach to securing critical democratic public education. When we think of the leadership of Black women teachers as an “orchestration of a sophisticated pedagogy rooted in a struggle for justice and equity” (Acosta, 2019, p. 27), we can see how this type of leadership has implications for all people, whether they identify as Black women or not (Reyes, Radina, & Aronson, 2018).

The unique application of the inquiry exists in the conceptual framework that imagines how to prepare politically active teacher leaders (see Figure 1.1). The concepts within the framework each stand alone, and have their own locations, but together create a constellation of activism, emphasizing the political nature of teaching. The conceptual framework also calls on us to look for teacher leadership in sites beyond the classroom—in the union and in the community. Some research is beginning to be published on teachers union reform (Asselin, 2019), but otherwise there is a dearth of research on teacher activism in both of these sites. With activity being so recent, journalistic sources become significant empirical materials (Murphy et al., 2017).

Additionally, this research is an example of post qualitative inquiry in that it adopts the analytical practice of thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2017). Using this analytical approach assists in illuminating challenges inherent in the work of building community and the challenges encountered by teachers who claim power to be leaders in their schools and communities.

1.5 Literature Review

The topic of this inquiry is teacher leadership development but situated within a critical theoretical framework (Anyon, 2009) so that I can examine how teacher leadership can be developed for critical democratic public education. I review literature about teacher leadership from a social justice as well as an intersectional approach. An intersectional analysis (Collins, 2019) creates space to observe how revolutionary leadership and activism in the tradition of Black radical feminisms (Carruthers, 2018) inform the broader conversation about teacher leadership development.

1.5.1 Teacher Leadership for Social Justice

Like Wenner and Campbell (2017), I define teacher leaders as those who “*maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom*” (p. 140, emphasis in original). Literature reviews on teacher leadership demonstrate that leveraging this aspect of teacher culture as a strategy for school improvement became prominent in the 1980s, although clear evidence of a positive impact on student achievement is nearly nonexistent (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Smylie, Conley, and Marks (2011) found that the framing of teacher leadership shifted from individual empowerment and role-based initiatives to collective and organizational approaches in the early 2000s. In a review of forty-one empirical studies on teacher leadership published from 1980 to 2004, York-Barr and Duke (2004) found there was a “largely atheoretical nature of the extant teacher leadership research” (p. 291). This prominent gap in the literature was one future scholars attempted to address. Wenner and Campbell (2017) replicated most of the research questions from York-Barr and Duke’s literature review, but extended them by acknowledging the need to

examine issues of equity due to the change in demographics that has made schools more diverse. Of the fifty-four articles that met their inclusion criteria, Wenner and Campbell found only five that attended to issues of equity and diversity. The literature largely restricts the conceptualization of teacher leadership to school and district settings, as opposed to other sites such as teachers unions or community-based organizations (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2011; Wenner and Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Teacher leadership scholarship that adopts critical theoretical frameworks is often connected to the concept of social justice. In examining the relationship between teacher capacity and social justice, Grant and Agosto (2008) discovered recurring ideas in the literature concerning knowledge, skills, and disposition, i.e., what a social justice educator should know, be able to do, and care about. These seven characteristic practices are: “critical pedagogy, community and collaboration, reflection, social (critical) consciousness, social change and change agents, culture and identity, and analyses of power” (p. 183). As a tool to gauge a social justice disposition, Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2017) propose the use of

a constructive-developmental lens can help us better understand how educators’ internal capacities influence their teaching and leadership for social justice, as well as their orientations toward race, diversity, identity, privilege, and collaboration within and across lines of difference. By orientations we mean the powerful and often unconscious dispositions that guide our thinking, feeling, and acting in relation to our own and others’ identity, our work, and societal demands more broadly. (p. 460)

In a study conducted by Slater et al. (2016), several perspectives on social justice—economic, cultural, associational, and developmental—were used to analyze the practices of five teachers in Costa Rica and Mexico. The researchers determined that how teachers conceived of social justice ordered the actions they took to achieve it. For example, the teacher in Mexico, who was guided by economic (equal treatment of different people) and cultural justice (respect of the other in the context of economic and social deficits), “arranged for girls to participate on an equal level in learning and recreational activities” and “spoke with mothers to persuade them to give their daughters the same treatment as their sons” (p. 160).

Villegas (2008) writes that there are three factors which have significantly shaped how teacher education has responded to diversity in public schools: “(1) changes in the demographic makeup of the K-12 student population; (2) changes resulting from the Brown decision; and (3) changes in conceptions of learning” (p. 553). Given these changes, scholars have called for the troubling of not only the teaching and learning occurring in K-12 classrooms but also in teacher preparation programs (Breault, 1995; Kumashiro, 2008), for increased diversity has implications for (in)equity, a key concern of critical democratic public education. In traditional programs, teacher candidates are given an extended period of time to develop their teaching practices before becoming the teacher of record. Teacher preparation programs that seek to develop social justice educators use part of this time to create opportunities for the candidates to critically examine assumptions they hold about teaching and learning, students and their families. However, not all social justice teacher preparation programs are created equal, nor do they all “address the conceptual underpinnings and context of social justice” (Grant & Agosto, 2008, p. 181).

Teacher education scholars have developed theories and frameworks to assist in thinking about what a social justice approach to teacher preparation looks like. Cochran-Smith (1991) argues that educators should be developed to “teach against the grain;” they should employ “collaborative resonance” to “critique the cultures of teaching and schooling, research their own practices, articulate their own expertise, and call into question the policies and language of schooling that are taken for granted” (p. 283). Khalil & Brown (2015) developed a social-justice leadership framework constituted by three C’s: cultural competency, including cultural awareness, experience, and understanding; communication skills bridging urban teaching and learning; and commitment to serve students and the community. Neumann, Jones, and Webb (2007) focus on a leadership typology that consists of three pillars (transactional, transformational, and critical) that will allow teachers to more clearly recognize and navigate the political landscapes of their schools, particularly in this time of heightened accountability when teachers are expected to carry out policy but afforded little opportunity to make decisions. All in all, there is consensus that teacher education programs are central to “the process of developing consciousness-raising within teacher education candidates in order to reflect and begin to ask critical questions of their practice as teachers” (Katsarou, Picower, & Stovall, 2010, p. 138).

The research on teacher leadership for social justice also provides examples of what it looks like in practice. Picower (2011b) details several strategies used by six new and pre-service teachers to stay true to their philosophy of social justice education. One strategy was to create a safe haven as a group, a place where they could talk openly with one another. A second was to incorporate social justice pedagogy into the mandated

curriculum. A third was to develop their students as agents of change. And a fourth was to speak out publicly against injustices. In a related study, Picower (2011a) found that participation in a critical inquiry project fostered a collaborative space for social justice educators and “improved members’ ability to actualize social justice education in their classrooms” (p. 12).

Teacher inquiry, as one of several examples of participatory social inquiry in action, is a common social justice practice found in the literature (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Neumann et al., 2007; Oakes and Rogers, 2006; Picower, 2011a; Picower, 2011b; Storm; 2016). Teachers use inquiry groups for many purposes, including to explore how their teaching philosophies revolve around student-centered pedagogies (Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Some adopt the designation of “teacher-researcher-leaders,” and view this role as “involv[ing] working with others in order not just to shape one’s own classroom but also to shape our profession collaboratively” (Storm, 2016, p. 58). Oakes and Rogers (2006) describe how groups of Los Angeles teachers met on a monthly basis at UCLA to discuss themes of social justice, leading to the creation of an online journal called *Teaching to Change LA (TCLA)*, which published the work of the teacher inquiry groups along with student and parent advocacy work. Though *TCLA* demonstrated the possibilities of participatory social inquiry making formidable change in the way the public perceives education and education reform, the researchers acknowledge that knowledge construction is not enough. As the authors point out, “Spreading disruptive knowledge is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the kind of social change needed to accomplish equitable schools” (Oakes & Rogers, 2006, p. 92).

As demonstrated by the teacher inquiry groups held at UCLA, universities can play a major role in the development of inservice teachers' leadership skills. Two examples found in the literature include administering graduate programs (Bradley-Levine, 2012; Jacobs, 2012; Palmer, Rangel, Gonzales, & Morales, 2014) and sponsoring communities of practice (Mirra & Morrell, 2011). Jacobs (2012) found that an instructional leadership master's program that engaged teachers in equity-focused action research empowered the teachers and increased their confidence to view themselves as change agents. After observing class sessions, reviewing coursework, and conducting in-depth interviews with a cohort of teachers in a teacher leadership master's program, one conclusion Bradley-Levine (2012) reached was "the development of critical consciousness is difficult," but "through dialogue with others...school leaders are pushed to grow in their critical awareness" (p. 767). Palmer et al. (2014) conducted a case study on critical consciousness with nine bilingual teachers in a graduate program in Texas. Their weekly written reflections during their first year in the program were analyzed and the researchers discovered that their development of critical consciousness influenced their thinking about their role as leaders in marginalized communities and this led each teacher to take at least one action toward rectifying an inequity in her school environment, an action that she would not necessarily have taken before participation in the program.

To further understand the ways in which teachers are developed into leaders for social justice, it is important to also review research which examines the practices of teacher educators in developing a social justice orientation within their students (Carpenter and Diem, 2013; Katsarou, Picower, & Stovall, 2010). Teacher educators provide strategies on how to transform from a deficit approach toward students to one of empowerment by

empathizing with students rather than labeling them (Katsarou, Picower, & Stovall, 2010). Neumann et al. (2007) describe some of the assignments in which they have their students engage: observing and analyzing school board and school-based meetings, reading case studies of school politics, developing change projects connected to curriculum, writing and then reflecting on K-12 autobiographies, and conducting action research projects.

Dialogue about race also develops teacher leaders with a social justice disposition. In an educational leadership preparation program, Carpenter and Diem (2013) interviewed six professors to determine their practices in teaching and talking about race. Among these practices, the professors discussed “locating yourself” as a teacher educator, particularly so conversational spaces about race can be co-created with students; planning purposefully for these conversations, which includes selection of course materials that will assist in framing the discussions; and filling “curricular gaps” for talking about race since the P-20 educational system does not center race-related issues. By deliberately employing these practices, teacher educators both develop and model them for their students, the teacher leaders.

A social justice orientation is also developed through lived experiences, before enrollment in teacher education programs. Research shows teachers’ lived experiences may influence their commitment to social justice (Collay, 2010; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2005). In a cross-case study, Collay (2010) recounts the critical reflections about educational experiences of three teachers in an urban teacher leadership master’s program. She concludes,

The roots of teachers’ professional identity as leaders are deep, intertwined tendrils growing in soil of life experiences shaped by race, culture, language, gender and

class...Rather than transforming one's self 'into' a leader, teachers benefited from recognition of the ways they already lead. Individual teachers' life histories are the rootstock of their values about the process of education and contain powerful and progressive examples of leading. (Collay, 2010, p. 229)

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2005) also acknowledge the significance of critical self-reflection in the development of social justice leadership and advocate for its inclusion in the pedagogy of early childhood education teacher preparation programs. Anna, the subject of their phenomenological interview study, recalls how early childhood experiences of injustice shape the way she interacts with the families she serves and propel her to work to change the perceptions of childcare and early childhood education as mere babysitting.

Most of the literature on teacher leadership development is situated within the context of teacher education programs, but my search did not produce any literature about the role of teacher preparation programs in the development of teachers' political activism. If we say teaching and leading for social justice, we can't leave out the activism part—the part of leadership beyond the classroom. In the recommendations of one case study, the researcher called for urban teacher preparation programs to model activism inside and outside the classroom (Schildts, 2015).

While scholarship on teacher leadership and activism in their unions is experiencing a surge (Asselin, 2019; Jacobin & CORE Caucus, 2014; Maton, 2016), there is a gap in scholarly writing on the phenomenon of being a teacher in today's neoliberal context who is involved in local political work outside of the union, for example, teachers' motivations for and experiences in running for office, how teachers are prepared to become community organizers, and teachers' memberships in community-based and political organizations. Of

the few studies I have located on this topic, several describe the experiences of Teach for America (TFA) corps members and alumni (Sawchuk, 2014; Trujillo, Scott, & Rivera, 2017). Possibly, the focus on TFA is a result of Leadership for Educational Equity, a 501(c)4 nonprofit, spinoff organization of TFA founded in 2007, whose mission is “to propel Teach For America alumni who ‘share a commitment to ending the injustice of educational inequity’ into leadership roles” (Sawchuk, 2014, p. 10) in policy, advocacy, and political office. A decade worth of national workshops, regional trainings, and in-kind donations to candidates has created direct opportunities to study the impact of TFAers on the political landscape.

Jacobsen, White, and Reckhow (2016) conducted a study to investigate “the role TFA plays in shaping corps member leadership by tracking the ways in which attitudes towards and engagement with local civic and political organizations shifts throughout the two year corps experience” (p. 24). By the end of their two year commitment, political engagement practices that demonstrated an increase included reading political websites or blogs, listening to radio shows about political issues, and reading a newspaper in print several times a week, while practices that decreased were being a member of a group or association and volunteering regularly. The findings point to low levels of direct, active engagement in local politics for TFAers.

Furthermore on local political activism, very little has been written about the significance of place and time in the development of teacher leadership development. Trethewey and Whitehead (2003) examine the political activity (both in and out of the teachers union) of three women teachers in South Australia during the post-suffrage era and acknowledge “the importance of an urban setting as an enabling factor in their

activism” (p. 107). U.S. cities are cultural, social, and political centers. Each has a distinct history, yet a common thread runs through them. U.S. urban history reveals how various waves of immigration and migration into U.S. cities over the span of this country’s existence resulted in the creation of urban ghettos for people of color (King, 2000; Lemann, 1992; Massey & Denton, 1993; Muller, 1994; Wilson, 1996). Also, discriminatory public policies in areas such as education (Anyon, 1997; Anyon, 2014), housing (Gans, 1991; Massey & Denton, 1993; Mohl, 2000), economics (Wilson, 1996), criminal justice (Alexander, 2010), and health (Baicker, Chandra, & Skinner, 2005; Fiscella & Williams, 2004; Galea & Vlahov, 2005; Murray et al., 2006; Williams, 1997) exacerbate racial inequality and maintain an urban underclass. More research is needed on the spatial (and temporal) aspects of teacher leadership development.

Although how teachers, as a social and cultural group, are involved in local politics is understudied, a body of literature that illuminates teacher leadership as political activism does exist and is uncovered when we factor in the influence of race, culture, and gender on teaching (Acosta, 2019). This intersectional approach (Collins, 2019) reveals the Black radical feminist tradition of leadership (Carruthers, 2018; Ransby, 2018), which shows promise for securing critical democratic public education due to its commitment to nurture active, productive, and collective practices in everyday citizens.

1.5.2 BlackWomanTeacher: A Tradition of Revolutionary Leadership and Activism

To demonstrate their capacity to teach effectively, teachers of color have long been expected to go above and beyond for their students (Grant and Agosto, 2008, pp. 182-183), and have been doing so from their locations of marginalization (Acosta, 2019; Collay, 2010). According to Robinson and Baber (2013), “Within the stories of African American

teacher leaders is a blueprint for social justice leadership towards development of policies and practices that ensure educational excellence and equity for all students, but in particular for those who have been disenfranchised and miseducated” (p. 223). More specifically, some scholars posit a womanist approach to pedagogy—which is an approach that centers Black women’s legacy to overcome struggles and move their communities forward—is the most viable way to producing the social justice educators we need (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Hill-Brisbane, 2005; Hill-Brisbane & Dingus, 2007). Through the eras of U.S. slavery, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and the contemporary neoliberal context, Black women teachers have kept an emphasis on the political nature of teaching.

Sociohistorical context shapes the development of individuals. The historical periods of slavery and Reconstruction in the United States had a profound impact on the daily lives of Blacks and their leadership development. Racial uplift and personal freedom were emphasized as the primary purpose of education (Fairclough, 2000; Fairfax, 2014; Johnson, 2007; Williams, 2005). Through their practices, activism, and commitment to educational progress for the disenfranchised, Black women teachers of these time periods made a difference for their communities. Williams (2005) details the history of African Americans building their own institutions of education before and right after slavery was abolished. Teaching was a political act, an act of courage, and Black women were at the forefront. Women such as Susie King Taylor who taught regiments of Black soldiers during the Civil War in addition to civilians and children, and Jane Deveau who had been teaching for thirty years by the time the Georgia Freedmen’s Bureau surveyed teachers in 1865 were among the many who put their lives on the line for their people (Williams, 2005).

Anna Julia Haywood Cooper (1859-1964) is described as an activist, social and moral change agent, and “one of the most influential African-American educators of the late 19th and early 20th centuries” (Johnson, 2007, para. 1). Her philosophical views on education and Black feminism led her to challenge discrimination in the educational experiences offered to men and women in an era when most women—let alone Black women—were not educated (Johnson, 2007). Fairfax (2014) writes about Miss Virginia Estelle Randolph (1874-1958), master-teacher and community mobilizer at the turn of the twentieth century: “Randolph’s [community] mobilizing placed her directly in the path of parent engagement—thus strengthening the relationship between school and family” (p. 12-13). Randolph also viewed interracial coalitions as an effective strategy for uplifting the Black community (Fairfax, 2014). In addition to civic organizations, both Cooper and Randolph were active members of their respective state teachers associations, demonstrating the women’s understanding of and belief in collective power (Fairfax, 2014; Johnson, 2007). Another noted Black female teacher leader in the time of Reconstruction, Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) was an accomplished woman who started a training school in 1904 for African American girls which later grew into a university, Bethune-Cookman University. Her work in education was driven by the concepts of “head-heart-hand.”

By incorporating the head, used to describe knowledge, Bethune believed that with knowledge, others would be drawn. Once the knowledge was attained, she wished her students to incorporate their heart, “her highest priority,” (Smith, 1995, p. 105). The heart was a means of creating an environment to foster knowledge of Christian principles and Biblical teachings, and helping others. The concept of the hand

represented the training of Blacks for jobs in the work force (Reid-Merritt, 1996).
(Watson, 2007, p. 179)

During the Civil Rights era, education continued to play an important role in the struggle for racial and social justice for African Americans. The teaching strategies of Septima Clark “redefin[ed] the use of reading and writing to foster social change among people and within communities. During this process, her life became a public example of how to use education to promote social justice and social change in communities” (Hines & Reed, 2007, para. 49). Clark organized Citizenship Schools in her roles as director of workshops at Highlander Institute and Director of Education for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The curriculum for these schools used the lived experiences of the students as teaching tools to affect change in their communities, subsequently developing the students’ leadership skills. Additionally, the schools provided students with the literacy skills to pass the voter registration test. Even in the face of sexism from the leadership of SCLC, Clark persisted and the Citizenship Schools produced an unprecedented number of African American eligible voters (Hines & Reed, 2007).

Black women teachers effectuated change within the public school system as well during this time in history. For instance, through autoethnographic writing, Barbara Sizemore (2008) expounds upon the Black struggle for educational excellence over the span of her career from 1947 to 1998 as a teacher, principal, and superintendent in the public schools to professor and dean of education. Sizemore uses each passing school reform to contextualize her experiences as an educator and chronicles the successes she obtained educating Black students in urban centers through her overarching strategy of

“seek[ing] strong confrontation to white supremacy at every opportunity and keep[ing] the glare on it” (p. xxiv).

In contemporary times, Black women’s standpoint continues to influence the field of teacher leadership. Narrative inquiry dominates as methodology in the literature (Baber, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Hill-Brisbane, 2005; Monroe, 1997; Robinson and Baber, 2013; Sizemore, 2008; Warren, 2017). Baber (2003) has written “[a]n ethnobiographical reflection on [her] personal and professional journey as a social educator from classroom teacher to teacher educator” (p. 47) which concludes with her realization that social studies as a teaching content cannot fulfill its social justice imperative if it is grounded in liberal multicultural education; instead, she contends, it needs to be framed from a critical race theory perspective. Monroe (1997) shares leadership lessons from her success in overcoming social challenges to teaching Black and Brown children living in poverty in Harlem. By including her own upbringing, also in Harlem, and educational career, Monroe recognizes how she is a part of the legacy of Black educational excellence, which takes deliberate effort in many aspects of life: “As you’ll see, my work at the Frederick Douglass Academy was really the culmination of a lifetime of preparation—professional, intellectual, psychological, and spiritual” (p. 2). When Black women teachers share their stories with researchers, a prevalent theme found in their leadership style is the importance of a strong connection among home, school, and community (Robinson and Baber, 2013; Warren, 2017).

With growing access to and legitimacy in academia, Black women teachers take on leadership roles by fostering the development of the next generation of social justice teachers. To ensure Black girls are equitably represented in the next generation of social

justice educators, Gist, White, and Bianco (2018) explored the experiences of a group of high school Black girls involved in a pre-college teacher preparation pipeline. This “Black Women Educator Pipeline” is “viewed as a structural intervention of pedagogies and policies that are responsive and protective of Black girls’ learning experiences” (p. 62). After listening to and then creating composite characters from the girls’ stories, the researchers make thirteen recommendations for how to improve educational outcomes and opportunities for Black girls and women, one of which is to “Value, learn from, and work with Black teachers with commitments to Critical Race Feminism and Black Feminist Pedagogies—pedagogies of othermothering, caring, cultural responsiveness, high expectations, activism, and a critical consciousness that view education as the practice of freedom” (pp. 80-81).

Hill-Brisbane (2005) interviewed, shadowed, and reviewed documents of three Black women teacher educators in order to examine how their commitment to racial uplift had an impact on their work with preservice teachers. She found that practices such as “creating a realm of protection that facilitate[s] learning” (para. 54) resulted in these teacher educators positioning themselves as other-mothers, making them more likely to be seen as caretakers than a person in authority. Be that as it may, “[h]ow these professors support students encourages other college professors to think of new ways to teach, assess, and interact with prospective teachers” (Hill-Brisbane, 2005, para. 56). Furthermore, in another paper that uses the same set of data but analyzes for the ways the participants overcame their outsider-within identity, the researchers concluded,

womanist teaching is seen...through change agents who continue to fight against multiple oppressions by creating innovative academic curricula, fulfilling

community-based leadership roles, and by teaching courses that allow students to analyze their perspectives in relation to the oppression in society. (Hill-Brisbane & Dingus, 2007, para. 42)

Not all teachers who are Black women embody the above-described teaching practices. For all who do, I dub teachers who are Black and who are women and who adopt Black feminist pedagogies (Gist et al., 2018) as BlackWomenTeachers (BWTs), running the words together like Robin Boylorn (2016a) runs together blackgirl because of the intersectional nature of this onto-epistemological positionality (Collins, 2000, 2019). BWTs, through their leadership, have long contributed to the greater social justice project as the literature shows a strong legacy of Black female leadership in general, and in education specifically, over the course of U.S. history (Carruthers, 2018; Grimes, 2005; Robinson & Baber, 2013; Ransby, 2018). Examples of the practices of contemporary BWTs are organizing other teachers for anti-racist education (Scheurich & Williams, 2017) and reconceptualizing the construct of citizenship for their students to include notions of community membership and agency (Vickery, 2015). Some teacher educators who do not identify as Black women also employ a womanist pedagogy (Reyes, Radina, & Aronson, 2018), demonstrating how Black radical feminism, the theory informing the onto-epistemological positioning of BWTs, transcends the identity of the person to inform their teaching practices. In sum, to be a BWT is to be embedded in the world in a way that allows one to recognize the injustices and power differentials and to actively work to dismantle oppressive structures.

1.5.3 Gaps and Limitations

This dissertation illuminates the development of teacher leadership for critical democratic public education. Due to this purpose, I reviewed literature on the topic of teacher leadership development through a critical lens and found that the most common approach is one described as “social justice.” While social justice is committed to ameliorating a history of racism and other oppressions as well as addressing issues of inequity, further investigation uncovered how an intersectional analysis of the topic at hand imagines much more about the ways in which teacher leaders’ political activism can be fostered—namely, through a Black radical feminist tradition of revolutionary leadership. This dissertation is situated within and contributes to the existing scholarship on Black women teacher leaders by exploring teacher leaders’ political activism from the perspective of lived experiences of a politically active teacher and teacher educator.

A few gaps and limitations were identified in the literature review, all having to do with time and/or place. The definition of teacher leadership is tied most commonly to the school setting even though teachers exhibit leadership in other spaces. This dissertation opens up the concept of teacher leadership to include sites in the union and the community. By looking for teacher leadership in these additional spaces, I have also added more to the scholarship about where development is occurring because the current literature has a narrow focus on teacher education programs. Last, the role of place, in a geopolitical sense, is considered in the analysis, more specifically how the urban locale of Newark, NJ as it exists during a time of neoliberalism has an impact on my development into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education.

1.6 Research Question

The research question explored in this inquiry is: How is an apolitical teacher re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education? Commitment to critical democratic public education presupposes a social justice orientation due to the mutual desire to achieve equity and to prepare actively engaged citizens. Because of this relationship, this autoethnographic case study of the lived experiences of the research subject as an activist teacher and teacher educator in Newark from 2004 to 2018 traces how social justice dispositions can be developed.

1.7 Methodology

I situate my scholarship in a post qualitative research paradigm in response to a call to re-focus qualitative inquiry on how to be as opposed to how to know, on how we are constituted and how we can be re-constituted toward emancipatory interests (Packer, 2018). This inquiry is experimental in nature in that I look to understand how a course of actions produced particular outcomes; in this way, the intention is to explore possibilities as opposed to studying predetermined social science concepts (St. Pierre, 2017, 2019). Additionally, post qualitative work is not a clearly defined process as the philosophical concepts employed in this work “do not exist but are always becoming and mutating as they respond to a problem imposed on thought” (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 692). Through this dissertation, I am seeking a path to post qualitative inquiry by garnering the courage to ask “sufficiently difficult or interesting questions” (Packer, 2018, p. 3).

There is a rapidly emerging literature about onto-epistemology in post qualitative inquiry. Wu et al. (2018) articulate this as a “wrestling...to show that the world is an assemblage of people, discourse, matter, and nature intra-actively engaged in a continuous

process of emerging, differentiation, unfolding, connecting, and becoming” (p. 6). Largely due to the dominance of positivism in scientific research (Packer, 2018), there is an ongoing discussion about how to move from one paradigm to the next (St. Pierre, 2017, 2019). As part of this conversation, Packer (2018) argues that we should view constitution as an ontological process where the experiencing subject conceives the world through “altered way[s] of being embedded” (p. 263) and orders reality through social practice.

Autoethnography has evolved into different types which differ based on their empirical approach to qualitative research, form, and theory (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). As part of a post qualitative research paradigm (Lather, 2015; Packer, 2018; St. Pierre, 2015), I employ critical autoethnography. Holman Jones (2016) describes the

three central commitments or concerns of critical autoethnography. They are commitments to the ideas that: Theory and story work together in a dance of collaborative engagement; Critical autoethnography involves both a material and ethical praxis; Doing critical autoethnography engages us in processes of becoming and because of this, shows us ways of embodying change. (p. 229)

These commitments support an inquiry focused on the onto-epistemological, which in turn parallels emancipatory models of praxis in teacher research (Torres & Mercado, 2004). I use critical autoethnography as a critical reflexive narrative inquiry to examine my lived experiences of being a politically active teacher in Newark, New Jersey from 2004 to 2018. The “dance of collaborative engagement” of this critical autoethnography is between critical social theory (Anyon, 2009) and the narratives I have produced. Critical social theories advocate for an ethical dimension to scientific inquiry which seeks to acknowledge and rectify the oppressive foundations of society, so “the act of writing a critical

autoethnography is a step toward uncovering how oppressive systems inform what we think of as ‘common sense’” (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 70).

I think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2017) as I narrate and analyze my lived experiences of being re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education (auto). This autoethnographic inquiry illuminates and critically analyzes (graphy) the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership (ethno). The critical social theories employed are critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), critical democratic theory (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). Storytelling and counternarratives are integral parts of critical race theory (Delgado, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Rosiek, 2016) and Black feminist theory (Dillard, 2014). Counternarratives of defining moments that mark individuals’ commitment to social justice (marbley et al., 2015) become a racial/cultural memory with the power to transform (Dillard, 2009). Critical autoethnography fulfills the goal of “examining the ideas and actions of...excluded groups in a way that views them as subjects” and “reveals a world in which behavior is a statement of philosophy and in which a vibrant, both/and, scholar/activist tradition remains intact” (Collins, 2000, p. 17).

I come to this research after “it was done.” I do not arrive in Newark in 2004 with a plan to write this dissertation. Taking a feminist research methods course in spring 2012 solidifies my commitment to the topic and the methodology. However, returning to teaching this same semester only to resign a year and a half later, I give up on ever writing my dissertation. I tell myself it’s too painful and disappointing of a story to tell, I have nothing to show for all of those years of activism. The success I experience working as a

community and labor organizer in the following three years revives my hope, but I don't want to be readmitted into my doctoral program so I can tell a triumphant story. I want to examine how I have changed by reopening a course of events that contributed to this change.

(Re)membering a course of events spanning fifteen years requires a process. A room of overstuffed Staples cardboard boxes; blue, translucent bins; and grey plastic crates. Papers, magazines, and books piled high on shelves. Where do I begin? The bins, some of which are already labeled—TFA, Barringer, Newark Community Orgs. One by one, I touch each artifact and then create groups based on content by making piles on my living room floor. I set aside duplicates for the recycling bin. When I empty a box, I use a sticky note to give it a broad label—Teaching Curricula Barringer, for example—and then insert hanging folders with more specific labels to represent grade levels or teaching units—10th Grade Honors, Antigone, Hispanic Heritage, The Black Experience, Hip Hop Unit.

Other artifacts which are not so easy to group, I decide to organize chronologically in order to make sense of them. These include items such as fliers and event agendas. I grab one of the empty crates and label the tabs on fifteen hanging folders, one for each year from 2004 to 2018. I realize I need to create a coding system, so I can later find these artifacts. The code consists of three components: two digits for the year, two digits for the month, then a dash followed by a number to identify how many artifacts I have for this date. For example, “0602-5” tells me that this item was published in February 2006 and that this is the fifth item I have coded for this date. I enter this code into a Google sheet along with a short description of the artifact and identification of the type of artifact, for instance, agenda, flier, or newsletter. To complement this index, I create a timeline

spanning this same timeframe (2004-2018) so that I can categorize events (graphy) as specific to me (auto) or part of the larger context (ethno) of urban education reform and teacher leadership.

1.8 Research Site: Newark, New Jersey

The tale of the rise and fall of Newark as a great urban center has been well documented (Tuttle, 2009). Newark has seen more than its fair share of urban decline and subsequent failed revitalization, political corruption, and racial tensions that eventually exploded into a rebellion of its exploited citizens (Mumford, 2007; Porambo, 1971/2007; Woodard, 1999). All of these factors served to undermine the viability of the local system of public education (Anyon, 1997). The Newark Public School District faced disputes directly related to education as well, including transitions from mayoral to state control with an elected school board in between (Rich, 1996) and vicious teachers' union strikes (Golin, 2002). In order to gain a deep understanding of education reform in urban areas, one must know about the social, economic, and political conditions of these locales (Anyon, 1997; Rich, 1996).

Newark has a population of nearly 282,000 residents within its twenty-four square miles of land area. The Black population has grown steadily since the 1940s (Mumford, 2007; Rich, 1996), becoming the majority racial group in the city by 1970. The U.S. Census Bureau (2017) distinguishes between race and ethnicity. Race is considered how individuals identify as a social group and is identified by regions of origin that align with the continents, while ethnicity establishes whether a person is of Hispanic origin or not. A person of Hispanic origin can be of any race, and a person can identify by more than one race. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), in Newark, people who identify as

Black or African American in race make up the greatest proportion of the population at 50.2%; White comes in second at 24.4%. Since White as a racial category is identified with European, Middle Eastern, and North African regions of the world, a quarter of the city being White is explained by the members of the Portuguese community who reside in the city's East Ward. Of the total population, regardless of race, 36% are identified as of Hispanic or Latino origin. A quarter of the residents are under the age of eighteen. For adults aged eighteen to twenty-four, 43.4% have some college or an associate's degree; 7.5% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. Of all adults, 13.7% hold a Bachelor's degree or higher. Nearly 27% of the adult population aged twenty-five or older has not earned a high school diploma, half of whom have less than a ninth grade education. The median household income is \$33,025, and 29.1% of the population lives in poverty.

According to New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) (2018) data, Newark Public Schools (NPS) enrolled close to 36,000 students in the 2017-2018 school year; the two largest racial and ethnic categories were Black and Hispanic at 42.4% and 48.2%, respectively (a mirror of the city's racial demographics); and 84.7% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. It is important to point out that only 6.2% were eligible for reduced-price lunch, while the remaining 78.5% were eligible for free lunch. Receiving lunch for free is considered the marker for the most extreme level of poverty.

The NPS presentation of the budget projections for the 2017-2018 school year provides an overview of the district's finances (Newark Public Schools, 2017). NPS projected a \$931 million budget for the 2017-2018 school year. Revenue mainly came from state aid (\$743.4M), and a significantly smaller amount was raised through local property taxes (\$130.3M). Just over half of the expenditures of the district went to the salaries and

benefits of the 8,000 employees (\$520.1M), and a quarter of the expenditures were accounted for as transfers to the city's charter schools. Almost twenty charter schools operated within the political boundaries of the city, including a number of them being part of two national charter chains: KIPP and Uncommon Schools. Charter school enrollment was projected to be 17,075 for the 2017-2018 school year; this is approximately 35% of the total public school enrollment in Newark. The amount of funding going to charter schools increased nearly threefold in less than a decade, from \$91M in 2010 to \$242M in 2018. In terms of academic achievement, NPS's four-year graduation rate was reported at 73.5% (Newark Public Schools, 2017).

After conducting a comparative case study of public school districts in three cities with majority Black populations after the *Brown* decision, Rich (1996) described his findings as "highly politicized school systems continuing the status quo but in deep denial" (p. xi). Like other cities, Newark has a legacy of its schools being enmeshed in local networks of corruption and patronage (Anyon, 1997; Rich, 1996). In countering this corruption, everyday Newark residents have long played active roles in the social and political dimensions of their city. The rebellion of 1967 is a significant turning point in Newark's history and much has been written about the activism leading up to and following this time when racial tensions exploded in the city (Anyon, 1997; Gillespie, 2012; Mumford, 2007; Porambo, 1971/2007; Tuttle, 2009; Williams, 2014; Woodard, 1999). Mumford (2007) documents the rise of the "black public sphere" in the late 1940s which resulted from "the Double V campaign increas[ing] in scope and reach with the expansion of a new print culture that spontaneously awakened a powerful sense of entitlement among black Newarkers" (p. 32). Widely accessible news articles about Blacks in other parts of

the country pushing back against discrimination propelled Black Newarkers into action in their own city.

Federal urban renewal policies of the 1960s took many different forms in Newark, but a significant project was a land grab of 200 acres to build a state-run medical school in the middle of the Central Ward, which would have displaced 22,000—mostly Black—people (Williams, 2014; Woodard, 1999). A raucous hearing in June 1967—preceding the rebellion by a month—inspired Junius Williams (2014), in August, to co-found the Newark Area Planning Association, “the people’s organization to take on urban renewal citywide, starting with the Medical School” (p. 168). After eight months of organizing and perfecting a legal strategy, Williams’s leadership successfully negotiated what would come to be known as the “Medical School Agreements,” all significant wins for the community that included the following: reduced acreage for the medical school; an adequate number of replacement dwellings, including housing for low- and middle-income people on the remaining part of the land; power of the residents to approve the developers; construction jobs for Blacks and Puerto Ricans; upgrade in the health services available to the community; and veto power through a community council over developments proposed as part of the Model Cities Program (Williams, 2014).

Also in the wake of the rebellion, community leaders—most notably Black radical Amiri Baraka—recognized an opportunity to create systemic change by taking over the city’s government. They organized the Black and Puerto Rican Convention of 1969 with the explicit purpose to form a slate of candidates who represented the interests of the communities of color in the city. Ken Gibson was selected as the mayoral candidate and

went on to win the 1970 election, becoming Newark's first Black mayor (Gillespie, 2012; Williams, 2014; Woodard, 1999).

Woodard (1999) recounts the struggles and subsequent failures of another organization led by Baraka, Newark Congress of African People (CAP), to build low- and moderate-income housing in the Central and North Wards of the city in the early seventies. The collusion of racist Italian American leaders in the North Ward and Black city council members undermined two developments planned by CAP in conjunction with community members—Kawaida Towers and Kawaida Community Development. In 1984, residents of the University Heights neighborhood expressed outrage when a plan to redevelop the area, drafted by the coalition of the city's four institutions of higher education, was leaked in the newspaper. Concerned about gentrification and displacement, these residents formed an ad hoc committee and presented the Community Plan. Aspects of their plan were incorporated into the final proposal for new housing and businesses in the neighborhood (Council for Higher Education in Newark, 1992; Williams, 2014).

For all that, this legacy of activism did not extend to producing spectacular results for children attending the city's public schools. The shift in Newark's demographics from predominantly White lower middle or working class to Black and Puerto Rican over a span of four decades (1930-1970) found the school district less effective with educating this changed student population (Anyon, 1997). In addition to the cultural shifts, the political economics of the city and racist public policies contributed to the decline of the school district by detrimentally affecting the viability of families. Deindustrialization shut off the supply of good paying jobs located in the city. The construction of new highways took people and jobs out of the city and into what would become the suburbs. These same

highways displaced residents and divided the fabric of neighborhoods, while redlining practices inhibited the availability of financial services such as access to mortgages, insurance, health care, and even supermarkets (Anyon, 1997; Mumford, 2007; Tuttle, 2009). Large public housing projects built across the Central Ward of Newark in the 1950s and 1960s (Narvaez, 1987) and privately managed apartment buildings for middle-class families built at the end of the 1960s (Jacobs, 2007) were initially bastions of family values and symbols of the American Dream, literally rising high into the sky. However, neglect of the facilities, mismanagement of funds, and increased criminal activity showed blatant disrespect to the humanity of the adults and children who lived in these homes (Anyon, 1997; Mumford, 2007; Tuttle, 2009). Taken together, these conditions were far from optimum for raising a family or preparing children to arrive to school ready to learn.

1.9 Unifying Theme of the Dissertation: Preparing Politically Active Teacher Leaders

1.9.1 Conceptual Framework

A number of the concepts present in the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) for this inquiry have been discussed above. Here, I provide a brief overview of the relationship among these concepts, followed by elucidation of critical pedagogy and the three main concepts that comprise teacher political activism—education organizing, social movement unionism, and social foundations of education.

The woman's silhouette represents the primary research subject (me). Critical pedagogy is in a space where it is represented by "the mind" while teacher political activism is represented by "the heart." These depict the embodiment of constitution/onto-epistemology—the ways in which the social practices of experiencing subjects form objects and subjects, and order reality. "The heart" often represents emotions, and in this

case the emotion being expressed is commitment. The teacher political activism block is represented as bricks and mortar to pay homage to Newark's nickname, "Brick City," and to symbolize the strength created when the constructs in the block are placed together. The block demonstrates a process with many entangled intra-actions—place, people, ideas, every aspect of the political-economic context. Commitment is strengthened as a result of what the research subject encounters.

Critical pedagogy emphasizes ways of knowing oppression from the perspective of the oppressed and advocates for them to take action on their own behalf to transform power relations in society. Teachers who practice critical pedagogy in their classrooms typically embrace a disposition of inquiry, have a passionate commitment to radical democracy, and

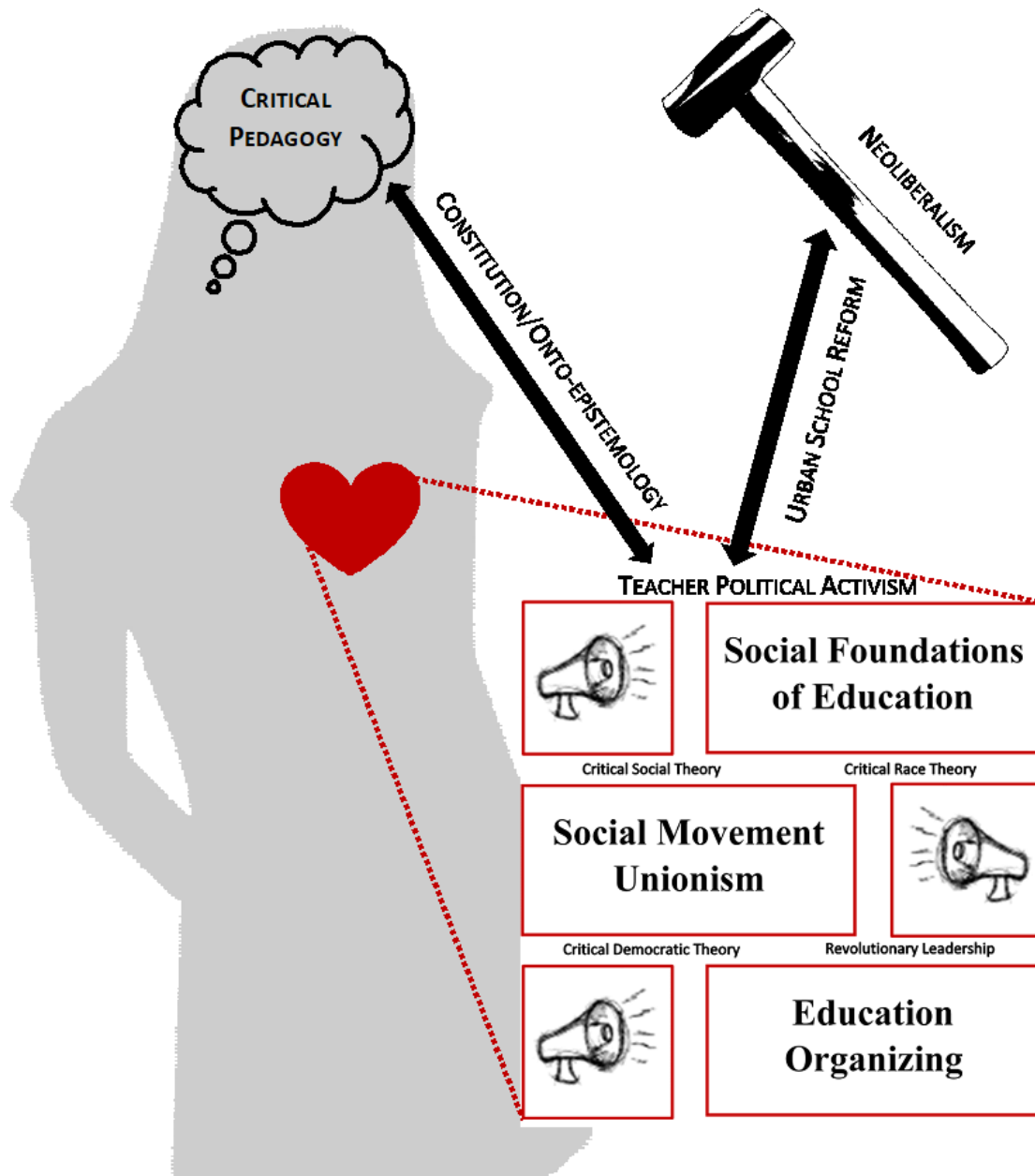


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

encourage student activism; however, this does not necessarily transcend the classroom. The relationship between critical pedagogy and political activism is an onto-epistemological one. It is not enough for a teacher to know; she also has to be.

As mentioned, teacher political activism is built with social foundations of education, social movement unionism, and education organizing. They are the bricks of teacher political activism. The mortar consists of critical social theory, critical race theory, critical democratic theory, and revolutionary leadership. Each of these constructs looks to transform power relations so that they are equitable and just. The bricks, while strong individually, become a cohesive structure with the abovementioned theories bonding them together. The bullhorns symbolize teacher leadership, as in their voices.

Neoliberalism, as the contemporary hegemonic ideological force, orders society in a way that places the interests of the individual over the collective and frames social phenomena in economic terms. It is the sledgehammer that undermines and threatens to destroy the fortitude of teacher political activism. The neoliberal education agenda is executed through urban school reform in the forms of accountability, choice, union busting, and the deprofessionalization of teachers' work. Nevertheless, the implementation of urban school reform also can have an impact in the other direction. Urban school reform aligned with the perspective of teacher political activism keeps the force of neoliberalism at bay, sometimes even breaking the head off the handle, by enacting critical democratic public education. This kind of education seeks to achieve social, political, and economic justice for citizens.

1.9.2 Critical Pedagogy

Education is a process of socialization, and the methods, strategies, and techniques a society implements to go about this process is considered pedagogy. Contrary to what some argue, education is value-laden—not value-neutral (Shor, 1999). The selection of one set of pedagogical practices over another demonstrates that competing choices exist, and

will most likely be a reflection of the dominant ideology of that community (Kumashiro, 2008). One such choice is critical pedagogy. McLaren (2007) gives a comprehensive definition of critical pedagogy:

First and foremost, it is an approach to curriculum production, educational policymaking, and teaching practices that challenges the received “hard sciences” conception of knowledge as “neutral” or “objective” (i.e., epistemological positivism) and that is toward understanding the political nature of education in all of its manifestations in everyday life as these are played out in the agonistic terrain of conflicting and competing discourses, oppositional and hegemonic cultural formations, and social relations linked to the larger capitalist social totality. Critical pedagogy has its importance in understanding the mechanisms of oppression imposed by the established order. But such an understanding is approached from the perspective of the dispossessed and oppressed themselves. (p. 265)

This delineation aligns with Freire’s (1970/2000) *conscientização*—a social justice disposition of critical consciousness.

There are several concepts within the field of education that use the term “critical,” so it is important to draw the distinctions. Both critical thinking (Keesing-Styles, 2003) and critical reading (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2010) focus upon teaching students how to use rational methods to analyze a text for the author’s meaning, thus uncovering the “correct” interpretation of a text. Critical literacy, on the other hand, is used most often when referring to the practices employed in classrooms to learn how “to interpret, deconstruct, produce, and distribute language and texts that name and ultimately destabilize existing norms and power relations in the cause of promoting change” (Morrell, 2008, p.

208). Jones, Webb, and Neumann (2008) recognize the significance of the role of literacy teachers:

Because language is used as the primary means to negotiate one's place(s) in society, teachers of literacy have the power to liberate, empower or oppress their students. Therefore, to meet the challenges of developing students' abilities to fully participate as active citizens in a democracy, literacy educators utilize a *pedagogy of possibility* in order to develop students' *epistemic literacy* and *sense of social responsibility*." (p. 10, emphasis in original)

Students of critical literacy are guided to question issues of power and not to simply be vessels for information (Coffey, 2010). Life is the curriculum as students and teachers investigate those topics most meaningful to their own lives with the purpose of transforming their worlds; in that way, it is essential that learning and knowledge production are contextualized (McDaniel, 2006; Shor, 1999). Critical pedagogy is essentially synonymous with critical literacy, expecting action to be taken in order to resolve the unveiled societal inequities and unequal power relations (Keesing-Styles, 2003).

1.9.3 Education Organizing

Since it is rooted in the quest for liberation and made real through the context of participants' daily lives, critical literacy is found both in the traditional classroom and outside of it. Outside of the classroom, we see critical pedagogy in action via education organizing. Oakes and Rogers (2006) document students, teachers, parents, and grassroots organizations engaged in what they term "social design experiments" (p. 41-42). The participants use social inquiry for policy change, making their work both research and

intervention. Drawing upon the work of John Dewey (1935), Oakes and Rogers outline the following four principles of participatory social inquiry: “(1) engage those most affected by inequality, (2) ensure access to knowledge and its construction, (3) adopt a critical stance, and (4) develop a transformative goal” (p. 39-41). Parent-U-Turn was one of these social design experiments. After learning research skills and then getting pushback from school administrators for “asking too many questions,” parents from a low-income community in Los Angeles created their own organization in order to give parents a more powerful role in educational decision making. Now both researchers and activists, members of Parent-U-Turn were able to win concrete improvements in their local schools, including preventing the school district from making their schools even more crowded than they already were.

1.9.4 Social Justice/Movement Unionism

Social justice unionism, also referred to as social movement unionism, is described by editors at *Rethinking Schools* as having three elements: defending public education and the rights of teachers, strong emphasis on professionalism, and commitment to children and community (Peterson & Charney, 1999). Tensions exist within this kind of unionism as adherents debate plans of action to reach these goals (Hagopian & Green, 2012). Even so, Weiner (2012) notes, this style of unionism promises to “spearhead development of the broad political and social resistance needed to reverse the tidal wave destroying public education” by “mobiliz[ing] its members to struggle on their own behalf” (p. 36). While the term “social justice/movement unionism” has reached prominence in the discourse of teachers unions within the last decade, militancy, activism, and social justice are hallmarks of teachers union history, particularly with the inception of the American Federation of

Teachers, one of the two national teachers unions in the United States (Braun, 1972; Murphy, 1990; Rousmaniere, 2005).

Studies of unionism indicate the numerous philosophies about unions fall into one of two categories which, in turn, have been described in different ways. One category has names such as individualistic, collaborative, service, business, and bread and butter, while the other has been called collective, rank-and-file, social justice, and social movement (Braun, 1972; Hagopian & Green, 2012; Murphy, 1990). Moody (1988) argues a major factor in the decline of unionism in the U.S. is the way workers view themselves; they tend to focus on individual as opposed to collective issues. This is not surprising since “the [American Federation of Labor] was founded in 1886 largely with the view that the sole purpose of collective action was the advancement of the individual worker” (Moody, 1988, p. xiv). Orienting workers toward a working class, social justice perspective is a protracted project. For teachers, it has been much more difficult due to the tension between being a “worker” versus being a “professional.”

According to Murphy (1990), from the 1890s through the 1970s, education workers were faced with three recurring obstacles: ideology of professionalism, red-baiting, and fiscal crises. In response, teachers chose to be militant, aligning with the trade union tradition (Murphy, 1990). One early example of an activist teachers union is the Chicago Teachers’ Federation (CTF), which organized in 1897 to defend and expand the newly passed teachers’ pension law but had an overall mission of improving the working conditions and rights of teachers. The CTF, whose membership consisted largely of women elementary school teachers, fought for school funding equity and fought against corporate interests (Rousmaniere, 2005). The union won many of these battles before it was

dismantled by a school board policy that allowed the district to fire any teachers belonging to an organization that was affiliated with labor (Lowe, 1999).

Contemporary attacks on teachers unions are sparking militancy once more. The main cause of the resurgence is neoliberal education reform. Most charter schools are not unionized, so with their growth has come the decline in the number of teachers represented by unions (Russom, 2012). Education policies under neoliberalism create working conditions for teachers that have been characterized as “the industrial classroom” (Gude, 2014, p. 21). These industrial classrooms are driven by lean production, a practice adopted from the private sector, which causes “increased workloads for decreased pay” (Johnson, 2014, p. 12); dehumanization of teachers and students through a narrow, regimented curriculum and emphasis on standardized test scores (Gude, 2014); and “[a] carceral logic, or punishment mindset” which results in pushing out students of color, especially those who are considered low-performing (Kaba & Meiners, 2014, p. 34). Hagopian and Green (2012) assess the ability of unions to withstand these attacks on teachers’ working conditions as weak given union leaders’ collaborative relationship with management and complacency with both the Democratic Party and Corporate America. Unions did not arrive at this state overnight. Moody (1988) points out another reason for the decline in unionism:

With rare exceptions, American unions cannot claim to have been schools of workers’ democracy for decades. They are bureaucratic institutions that deny rank-and-file participation in decision-making and that have abandoned the fight against the authority of the capitalist boss both on and off the job. This, the heritage of nearly forty years of modern business unionism, explains much of their inability to respond to capital’s initiatives. (p. xx)

Though written thirty years ago, Moody's analysis of the state of unionism still stands. However, Hagopian and Green (2012) contend unions hold the possibility of being a springboard to authentic democratic participation in society at large. Weiner (2018), in her description of recent teacher walkouts in red states, remarks: "By demanding recognition and respect for their labor and the rights of their students, teachers are reviving the most essential element of labor unionism: respect for democracy and the dignity of work" (para. 11).

Militant, active, social justice oriented teacher unions are on the rise again and are utilizing proven practices—organizing and educating. The resurgence looks like the organization of rank and file caucuses within locals (Johnson, 2017; Maton, 2016; Uetricht, 2014). Most notable is Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). Uetricht (2014) recounts the formation and growth of CORE, its takeover of the CTU, and the subsequent successful strike in the fall of 2012. Earlier that year under this new leadership, the CTU published *The Schools Chicago's Students Deserve*, which detailed a number of research-based proposals to transform the city's school district to one that places a high value on equity and equality; this was the centerpiece of the strike. North Carolina, noted as the second least unionized state in the country, is home to another one of these caucuses, Organize 2020. Even in an anti-union environment, teachers are organizing and educating each other in order to push back against the corporate reform agenda and envision a public education that supports all students (Johnson, 2017).

The resurgence looks like heeding the advice to revive the alliance between progressive workers and progressive intellectuals. This partnership, Moody (1988) points

out, gave “union activists access to the same information and analysis as their bureaucratic rivals had. It also gave intellectuals a grounding in the realities of work and unionism” (p. 51). One such scholar who bridges this divide is Lois Weiner. In *The Future of Our Schools* (2012), Weiner writes for teachers who are committed to social justice and democracy, not only urging them to reframe the dialogue about education reform and teachers’ work in human terms but giving them the tools to do so. As both workers and scholars, rank and file teachers are studying and writing about their experiences (Jacobin & CORE Caucus, 2014), in addition to conducting systematic research about social justice movement unionism (Johnson, 2017; Maton, 2016).

1.9.5 Social Foundations of Education

Social foundations of education was established at Teachers College in the 1930s by scholars of multiple disciplines with “a commitment by the department ‘to study, analyze, and predict the most important cultural trends and critical problems of our times as they bear upon the future of education’” (Tozer & Butts, 2011, p. 5). The Council for Social Foundations of Education has produced standards that govern the professional preparation and practices of educators and researchers. Standard IV: The Profession of Education and Democratic Educational Practice reads, in part: “In recognition of cultural pluralism and common humanity, Social Foundations of Education aim to reclaim professional educators as ethical agents envisioning and acting on needed educational and social reforms for pursuing and implementing educational equity and excellence in a culturally diverse society” (Tutwiler, et al, 2013, p. 115). Dottin (2011) argues that the inclusion of social foundations of education in teacher preparation programs consists of

employing practices of inquiry in order to develop both reflective and intellectual dispositions within teacher candidates.

1.10 Description of the Three Articles

Three separate, publication-ready manuscripts comprise the body of this dissertation. Each represents the findings of this inquiry from three different perspectives, in turn drawn from the teacher political activism block in the conceptual framework. The first manuscript, “From Apolitical to Elected Official: Cultivating Teacher Leadership to Combat Racism and Generate Critical Democratic Practice in Urban Schools” illuminates education organizing and has been submitted to *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. The second manuscript, “Teachers Rising: Democratic Possibilities of Social Justice Unionism” illuminates social movement unionism and has been submitted to a special series of *Critical Education* on Contemporary Educator Movements: Transforming Unions, Schools, and Society in North America. And the third manuscript, “Becoming BlackWomanTeacher: Tensions and Possibilities in Cultivating Social Justice Dispositions in Teacher Leaders” illuminates social foundations of education and has been submitted to *Teachers College Record*.

For each manuscript, I first narrate my lived experiences through a series of vignettes, foregrounding and backgrounding details according to the sub-theme being explored (see Table 1.1). The narratives span from 2004 to 2018 and take place in Newark, NJ, the research site. These vignettes are followed with analysis and implications sections. Using the thinking with theory approach (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017), I think about my re-constitution into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education with critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), critical democratic theory (Mirra & Morrell,

2011), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). In each implications section, I use what I have learned from the sub-theme explored to make recommendations for teacher preparation programs.

Table 1.1 *Chronological Order of Key Events for Each Manuscript by Vignette*

DATE	KEY EVENT FOR MANUSCRIPT	MAN #1	MAN #2	MAN #3
July 2004	Attend Teach For America (TFA) Summer Institute			Vign 3.1
Sept 2004	Start teaching at Barringer High School			Vign 3.2
Jan 2006	Start attending Abbott Leadership Institute classes	Vign 1.1		
Sept 2006	Start working as TFA Learning Team Leader			Vign 3.2
Sept 2007	Start graduate school, Master of Public Administration program			Vign 3.3
June 2008	Launch Teachers as Leaders in Newark (TaLiN)	Vign 1.1		Vign 3.3
Sept 2008	Attend first rally, NJ State House	Vign 1.1		
Sept 2008	TaLiN starts holding meetings at Central High School			Vign 3.3
Sept 2009	Start Urban Systems doctoral program	Vign 1.1		Vign 3.3
Mar 2010	TaLiN co-organizes March 4th Day of Action in response to Gov. Christie's proposed budget cuts	Vign 1.2		Vign 3.3
April 2010	United Front to Defend Public Education formed	Vign 1.2		
July 2010	SIG funding awarded to six NPS schools; \$6M awarded to Central High School	Vign 1.2		
Sept 2010	Resign from being TFA Learning Team Leader			Vign 3.3
Oct 2010	Gov. Christie and Mayor Booker receive Zuckerberg \$100M donation on <i>Oprah</i>	Vign 1.2		Vign 3.4
Nov 2010	Coalition for Effective Newark Public Schools formed	Vign 1.2		
Jan 2011	Teach 21st Century Urban Educator in Rutgers-Newark Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP)			Vign 3.4

May 2011	United For Change loses Newark Teachers Union (NTU) election		Vign 2.1	
Sept 2011	Teach Social Foundations in UTEP			Vign 3.4
Jan 2012	Newark Education Workers (NEW) Caucus formed		Vign 2.1	
Jan 2012	Teach 21st Century Urb Educator again in UTEP			Vign 3.4
Apr 2012	Start teaching at Central High School			Vign 3.5
May 2012	Elected first chair of NEW Caucus		Vign 2.1	
Feb 2013	Mental, emotional breakdown at Central High School			Vign 3.5
June 2013	NEW Vision slate loses NTU election by 8 votes		Vign 2.2	
Oct 2013	Resign from Central High School			Vign 3.5
Mar 2014	Start working at New Jersey Communities United (NJCU) as community/labor organizer		Vign 2.3	
June 2015	NEW Vision runs in NTU election and loses again		Vign 2.3	
Apr 2016	Unity Slate wins school board election; I become Newark Board of Education (BOE) member	Vign 1.3		Vign 3.5
Sept 2016	Newark BOE votes to eliminate One Newark	Vign 1.3		
Sept 2016	Teach Secondary Classroom Management at Rutgers-Newark Graduate School of Education			Vign 3.5
Oct 2016	Newark BOE rescinds vote to eliminate One Newark	Vign 1.3		
Jan 2017	Teach Developmental Reading at Essex County College			Vign 3.5
Sept 2017	Teach Developmental Writing at Essex County College			Vign 3.5
Apr 2018	Run for chair of the Newark BOE and lose	Vign 1.3		

Chapter 2. Manuscript 1: From Apolitical to Elected Official: Cultivating Teacher Leadership to Combat Racism and Generate Critical Democratic Practice in Urban Schools

Abstract: Through this inquiry, the author invites you to discover with her how an “apolitical” teacher is re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education. After providing three autoethnographic vignettes relating her participation in education activism and organizing, she performs the analytical practice of co-reading using critical social theories. This article illuminates the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership, and makes recommendations for teacher preparation.

Twenty-five or so people dot the Rutgers-Newark executive dining room. We are here for the Abbott Leadership Institute (ALI) class. The title page of a slideshow is projected on a pop-up screen: “Chicago’s Renaissance 2010.” I sign in and sit alone as regulars greet each other with wide smiles and inside jokes on this sunny but cold Saturday morning. My eyes widen as I learn this renaissance is a plan to privatize Chicago’s public schools in four years, by 2010 (Lipman, 2011).

I invite you to discover with me how an “apolitical” teacher is re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education. I answer Packer’s (2018) call to focus qualitative inquiry on how we are re-constituted for emancipatory interests. The discoveries reported in this article come from a critical autoethnographic (Holman Jones, 2016) study of teacher leadership and political activism. Storytelling and counternarratives are integral parts of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and Black feminist theory (Dillard, 2014). Counternarratives of defining moments that mark

individuals' commitment to social justice (marbley et al., 2015) become a racial/cultural memory with the power to transform (Dillard, 2009).

This article focuses on my political activism and community organizing from 2008 to 2018, which includes creating a teacher leadership organization, building coalitions, and being elected to the Newark Board of Education. Due to space constraints, three vignettes provide select moments from my leadership development. These experiences have been co-created with fellow-participants; therefore, I employ member-checking in the research process (Hughes & Pennington, 2016). Specific names are included when the public record coincides or permission has been granted; otherwise, names are pseudonyms. First, I share thoughts as experienced at the time. Then, I map the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership using the analytical practice of co-reading (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) with critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), critical democratic theory (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). This article illuminates some of what may be missing in teacher preparation and concludes with recommendations.

Becoming

Always already seeing race is normalized for me at a young age. I grow up in a majority White, lower middle-class community in upstate NY as a Black girl in a working-class family. I attribute my school success to my love of reading. A quiet student whose teachers rarely challenge her intellectually, I only recall a half-year course in high school inviting me to be an active citizen. I attend an elite university and part-time tutoring inspires me to become a teacher. I am accepted into Teach for America (TFA) and placed at Barringer High School in Newark, NJ to teach English.

Identifying as an apolitical teacher stems from the lack of a civics education and is fostered by my five-week TFA training in the summer of 2004. While TFA sees itself as “build[ing] a true democracy” (Wetzler, 2010, p. 25), others argue the organization applies neoliberal concepts to teacher preparation (Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017) by emphasizing management (Scott, Trujillo, & Rivera, 2016) over pedagogy. TFA outsources the public teacher workforce by placing corps members at nonunion charter schools and contributes to pushing out veteran teachers so that lower salaries can be paid (Brewer, Kretchmar, Sondel, Ishmael, & Manfra, 2016; Sustar, 2013). These practices marginalize the role of teachers unions and deemphasize the political nature of teaching. Unlike some other alumni who embrace management, entrepreneurship, and accountability as practices for achieving educational equality (Trujillo, Scott, & Rivera, 2017), I embark on a search for solutions that are grounded in critical social theory (Anyon, 2009). Studying the hegemonic, racist ordering of public education is my strategy for reconceptualizing this system so it centers the humanity of students, teachers, and parents (Rosiek, 2016).

In the middle of my second year of teaching, I attend this ALI Saturday class. The director, Junius Williams, an attorney and civil rights activist with a history of making change in the city, founded ALI as a space where parents build their advocacy and leadership skills through their participation in school reform (Williams, 2014). ALI’s name comes from the state’s history of school finance fights. In the landmark decision of *Abbott v. Burke* (1985), the Supreme Court of New Jersey recognizes the unconstitutionality of the state’s school funding system. After several inadequate legislative attempts to determine the amount of funding necessary to fulfill the constitutional standard of providing a “thorough and efficient” education, the court orders these urban districts

receive funding in near-parity with their suburban counterparts (*Abbott IV*, 1997). Supplemental funding is also ordered for students attending “Abbott districts” to implement full-day kindergarten, high-quality pre-kindergarten for all three- and four-year olds, whole school reform, as well as school-based health and social service programs (*Abbott V*, 1998).

In addition to school finance, school governance has a significant history as education reform in New Jersey. The state takeover law is enacted in 1987 and, in 1989, New Jersey becomes the first state to takeover a school district (Institute on Education Law and Policy, 2002). Newark Public Schools (NPS) becomes a state-operated school district in July 1995 following a comprehensive investigation that uncovers financial mismanagement, widespread nepotism, and low academic achievement (New Jersey State Department of Education, 1994). Under this governance structure, the local school board remains elected, but only in an advisory capacity with the ultimate decision-making power in the hands of the state education commissioner and the state-appointed superintendent. Also in 1995, New Jersey’s charter school law is enacted, establishing a new type of governance for the public schools. Groups of individuals—whether they be parents, educators, other citizens, or some combination thereof—are given the power to submit a charter application for approval by the state. The local school district has no control over a charter school opening within the municipality.

Nearly fifteen years after the enactment of the state takeover law, elected officials and public administrators call for an overhaul of the state’s monitoring system to devise a method for returning local control to the state-operated districts (Institute on Education Law and Policy, 2002). In 2005, the Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC)

Act creates a new rubric by which all New Jersey school districts are to be evaluated annually in five areas: instruction and program, operations, fiscal management, personnel, and governance. To be considered “high-performing,” a district must score 80% or better in each area. Failure to meet this minimum score requires the development of an improvement plan in the “failing” areas and possibly state intervention (Institute on Education Law and Policy, 2006).

In the fall of 2007, I begin graduate school at Rutgers-Newark with an inaugural fellowship that creates an educational leadership pipeline into NPS for TFA alum. Coursework in education policy and ALI classes immerse me in the history and present state of Newark school reform. The New Jersey Legislature narrowly passes the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) in January 2008, eliminating the Abbott mandates for parity and supplemental funding. Instead, the state shifts to a weighted formula that provides extra funding to districts based on the “special needs” of students, e.g., special education status, English language learners, and eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch.

In the 2007-2008 school year, NPS enrolls 40,507 students; the two largest racial and ethnic categories are Black and Hispanic at 58% and 33.6%, respectively; 8.9% of students are categorized as limited English proficient; and 69.9% of NPS students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (New Jersey Department of Education, 2019). (See Table 2.1 for change over the years.) Barringer is located in Newark’s North Ward, where the residents are predominantly Latinx; the school population reflects this part of the city.

Table 2.1. *Newark Public Schools District Enrollment, Select Years*

	2007-08	2012-13	2017-18
--	---------	---------	---------

	<i>Total (%)</i>		
<i>District Enrollment</i>	40,507 (100%)	36,427 (100%)	35,714 (100%)
<i>White</i>	3,042 (7.5%)	2,876 (7.9%)	2,780 (7.8%)
<i>Black</i>	23,479 (58.0%)	18,751 (51.5%)	15,159 (42.4%)
<i>Hispanic</i>	13,604 (33.6%)	14,417 (39.6%)	17,213 (48.2%)
<i>Asian</i>	350 (0.9%)	294 (0.8%)	299 (0.8%)
<i>Native American</i>	32 (0.1%)	61 (0.2%)	88 (0.2%)
<i>Other Races</i>	0 (0.0%)	28 (0.1%)	175 (0.5%)
<i>Free Lunch Eligibility</i>	24,388 (60.2%)	29,769 (81.7%)	28,036 (78.5%)
<i>Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility</i>	3,938 (9.7%)	2,688 (7.4%)	2,205 (6.2%)
<i>Limited English Proficient</i>	3,588 (8.9%)	3,460 (9.5%)	4,592 (12.9%)

Source: New Jersey Department of Education

Teachers as Leaders in Newark (Vignette 1)

A faithful attendee of ALI, classes have titles such as “Drop-outs or Push-outs?” and “Is Abbott Enough? Cross Examining Our Own Assumptions.” I participate in ALI advocacy projects such as conducting surveys on parent engagement and advising on how we can develop a “Grow Your Own Teachers” program. At the May 2008 graduation luncheon, I receive the “Abbott Leadership Advocacy In Teaching Award” which reads: “In Recognition of your advocacy work for Newark’s children, above and beyond the call

of duty.” Most attendees are parents and their children. I scan the room and wonder, where are the teachers?

Out of my ALI participation and graduate studies, I launch Teachers as Leaders in Newark (TaLiN) a month later. The book *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice* (2006) inspires me to engage participatory social inquiry practices “that challenge cultural norms and seek to alter power relationships” (p. 17) and are grounded in the democratic traditions of John Dewey, Ella Baker, and *Brown v. Board* (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). I see TaLiN as a vehicle to organize teachers around the politics of education.

I send a districtwide email inviting teachers to join me in bringing revolutionary change to public education in Newark. At a July organizational meeting, about fifteen of us begin formulating the organization. One member sends an email, asking how we see ourselves as different from other organizations so as not to reinvent the wheel. I reply:

Theresa,

TaLiN is about developing teachers into leaders so that together we can effect [sic] change that we know will benefit the students . . . As an organized group, we can say what will and will not work in our schools, not just sit back and watch as the innovations come and then go . . . We want to take charge of how the education system is working in Newark . . . When I chose the particular foundations that are exhibited on the website, it was purposeful. Most people do not respond favorably to "Black Power" . . . But the ideology of it, and what was able to be accomplished based on that set of values was tremendous . . . no other program is training teachers to be activists and see beyond the classroom.

We initiate a book bag drive and brainstorm how we can develop partnerships with community organizations and schools. By the end of August, few supplies are collected for

the book bag drive and the membership dissolves. I request a leave of absence from Barringer but am denied by the new principal. Reluctantly, I resign; however, being a full-time graduate student gives me the flexibility to plan and develop TaLiN.

I identify three symptoms of why so few Newark teachers enact a pedagogy that lends itself to preparing students to be citizens in a democracy: inadequate working conditions, insufficient professional development, and lack of understanding of the political-economic context of urban areas. I create “Think Tank” sessions around policies such as teacher evaluation and standardized testing. I present TaLiN to a progressive principal, Ras Baraka, and he allows me to hold the sessions at the school, Central High (CHS). A new, smaller group of teachers become involved.

Johnnie Lattner and I meet at ALI. He is a community organizer for One Newark Education Coalition (ONEC). ONEC is the Newark branch of the Statewide Education Organizing Committee (SEOC). There are also branches in Paterson, Asbury Park, and Jersey City. These organizations are parent-led and have the mission of building collective power to change education policy for all schools. ONEC’s local issue-based campaigns include healthy school food, school construction, school safety, and special needs; through a statewide collaboration with advocacy groups, another campaign is school funding. In the fall of 2008, I participate in my first direct action, a rally and press conference at the state courthouse organized by the collaborative. A handout attached to the press advisory reads:

What’s Wrong With It?

The SFRA has *many* flaws. Here are just a few:

- The new, average, per-pupil cost for Abbott districts is almost \$3,000 less than in the 2007-8 school year.
- The accountability process built into Abbott, which requires that money be spent on proven academic programs, is missing from the SFRA.
- The level of State aid directed to many Abbott and other districts won't be enough to cover rising fixed costs or ease pressure on local property tax payers.

In November, the supreme court remands the matter and orders all remedies stay in effect for the thirty-one Abbott districts. Johnnie invites me to attend SEOC's annual meeting. I become an active member. In the spring, SFRA is found constitutional, and the new formula goes into effect (*Abbott XX*, 2009).

In the last semester of my master's program, I enroll in an internship with a nonprofit consultant; his input serves as a guide for the TaLiN membership meetings. The last component of the fellowship, working as a principal at a TFA Summer Institute, falls through and so does the job as a district principal. Instead, I am given a research assistantship in the Rutgers-Newark Urban Systems Doctoral Program. Over the summer of 2009, five of us deliberate the vision statement and organizational structure, and choose our first TaLiN campaign—returning local control of the Newark Public Schools.

We plan a voter registration drive for the November report card night and set two goals: register 1,000 voters by the April 2010 NPS Advisory School Board election and double the turnout rate from 3.4% to 6.8%. We table at three schools, register eighteen new voters, and speak to many people about the issue of local control.

We also partner with the teen center of a local nonprofit to provide workshops on critical literacy to the students. This is not my idea of revolutionary change. I want to attack

structures, policy. What kind of impact can we have with only fifteen students in the program? However, I am happy others have bought into the organization's vision, so I follow their lead.

Coalition Building (Vignette 2)

Chris Christie is elected governor in November 2009. In his first budget address, Christie proposes to cut \$820 million from state aid to school districts, underfunding SFRA. Hundreds of students from Newark high schools walk out of their school and onto the steps of city hall in protest of these proposed cuts. A TaLiN member suggests we co-sponsor a protest as part of the national March 4th Day of Action to Defend Public Education. With a handful of other organizations, we turn out about a hundred people—students, teachers, parents, and veteran activists. Student-made signs call out the budget cuts and carry messages like, “We need jobs and education NOT war and militarization.”

In 2006, I started my journey into education organizing by using a policy lens to examine the educational experiences of Newark students. Four years later, a full-fledged activist, I center the political economics of public education. Johnnie and I propose a new coalition, United Front to Defend Public Education (UFDPE), and ask other groups to sign on:

Why a broad-based coalition? Unjust, inadequate education systems are the antithesis of a democratic education which would in turn foster a democratic citizenry. Persistent acts of injustice that many children in low-income communities endure deny them an equal opportunity to develop their capacity for critical thinking, for independence and self-determination, and for becoming informed and dedicated participants in democratic public discourse.

The first UFDPE action is a march to the advisory school board meeting to insist the superintendent and board members fight for full funding. Although NPS operates on a billion dollar budget, the proposed loss of \$43 million dollars will have a significant negative impact. Simultaneously, the NJ Department of Education identifies ten NPS schools as “persistently lowest achieving” and eligible for the federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. SIG is created through funding from the No Child Left Behind Act and offers up to \$6 million over a three-year period per school. Application requires schools to select from four models: Turnaround, Restart, School Closure, or Transformation. NPS calls a last minute meeting for community input at CHS. UFDPE organizes a rally and march to CHS; we want a fifth “model”: Fully Fund the SFRA. I disrupt the sign in sheet process, telling people not to sign in because these sheets will be used as support for the district’s applications even if the signers do not agree with the proposed plans. An assistant superintendent, an older Black woman, yells at me for doing this. A week later, emails I send to district administrators bounce back; my TaLiN email address has been blocked.

The state budget is passed (with the education cuts) at the end of June, and UFDPE disbands. Six out of the ten SIG applications are approved. CHS is awarded the full \$6 million to enhance a reform effort that is already underway—the Global Village School Zone. The Global Village, which includes CHS and six feeder elementary schools, is part of the Broader, Bolder Approach, a national initiative that seeks “to develop a comprehensive school-reform strategy that will address issues and challenges arising out of the distressed social contexts in which families and public schools are situated through a variety of school-based interventions” (Noguera & Wells, 2011, p. 12-13). Reforms include an extended school day, a health clinic located within the building, and an enriched

curriculum. It is a reform effort from the ground up and supported widely by the community.

Just before the start of the 2010-2011 school year, Governor Christie announces he will not be renewing the current superintendent's contract (Star-Ledger Staff, 2010); the superintendent resigns soon after. Mayor Cory Booker and Governor Christie appear on *Oprah* in October to accept a donation of \$100 million from Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, for Newark's public schools (Russakoff, 2015).

PENewark, a nonprofit established overnight, is given \$1 million of the \$100 million to develop and administer a survey about education in Newark and provide a report in three months. Half of the money is spent on advertising and the other half is spent on salaries for staff and canvassers (Giambusso & Calefati, 2010). A group of us—public education advocates, activists, and organizers—immediately spring into action as not to be left out of the future of Newark's education. The Coalition for Effective Newark Public Schools is formed to represent grassroots efforts to reform Newark schools. The Coalition organizes forums around the city to generate a community vision for our public schools.

Skeptical of the PENewark survey effort, I ask the directors to attend the next TaLiN meeting so we can ask questions. It turns out a forum specifically for educators' input is scheduled for the same date. Asked if TaLiN will co-sponsor the event, I express interest but also pose questions about the format and my role. One of the directors says she will get back to me with those answers. About a week later an email is sent out advertising the forum with TaLiN as a co-sponsor. I email the directors to demand TaLiN's name be

removed. A new email is sent with TaLiN's name removed but with no explanation about the change.

The February 2011 advisory school board meeting is packed with students, parents, teachers, and residents in dismay over an announcement to close eighteen schools. Outside the meeting, I help pass out copies of a leaked secret plan that outlines the consolidation, phase out, and closure of these schools. Global Education Advisors (GEA), the company that drew up the plan, was hired by Mayor Booker and founded by Acting Education Commissioner Chris Cerf, though he denies having anything to do with the creation of the plan since he divested from GEA soon after becoming commissioner (Mooney, 2011a).

I am one of ten members of the leadership of the Coalition and play a major role in the communications aspect of our work. As a full-time doctoral student, I have the time to do this. I format our pamphlet entitled, "Voices for Progressive Education." It contains our vision, mission, and a synthesis of the ideas shared at the forums. We hold general meetings and launch several projects that include organizing volunteers to assist in NPS's goal to increase the submission of lunch applications and organizing a community literacy program initiative.

A former teaching colleague who has retired asks me to volunteer for her advisory school board campaign. She and two others make up The Children First Team, an all-Black team endorsed by several Newark Black elected officials and community leaders, most notably Ras Baraka who became the South Ward Councilman in May 2010. Two of the team (including my colleague) win in the April election. For many years, a North Ward power broker dominated the school board elections, so this victory contributes to a possible

power shift. We create an organization—NewArk Political Action Committee—with the purpose of building an infrastructure of Black leadership to set policy. In my doctoral studies, I have been purposefully reading texts written about the Black radical tradition (Carruthers, 2018). Amiri Baraka—poet, political activist, and Ras’s father—is central to this tradition. His leadership in the arts, politics, and community building helped to shift power relations in the 60s and 70s in favor of the local Black and Puerto Rican populations and positioned Newark on the national Black Power stage (Woodard, 1999). We aspire to build a new iteration of this tradition.

In May 2011, Cami Anderson is chosen as the new state-appointed superintendent. She is a White transplant from New York City and a Broad Academy graduate, a center established by philanthrocapitalist Eli Broad to train superintendents for large school districts. Standardized test results released in the summer show the number of CHS students passing the language arts section almost double compared to 2010 and more than double for the math section (Mooney, 2011b). The Global Village reform is making a positive difference. In July, Commissioner Cerf sends a letter to Superintendent Anderson with the results of the latest QSAC assessment. The district scores higher than 80% in four of the five areas; the last area still needing improvement is instruction and program. Cerf highlights examples of why “much work remains for the Newark School District to ensure that every student receives a high quality education” and concludes with the following:

N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-15(d) and N.J.A.C. 6A:30-7.1(b) stipulate that the Commissioner, in determining whether to recommend to the State Board of Education that the process for partial withdrawal from intervention be initiated, shall consider whether the district sufficiently demonstrates (1) evidence of sustained and substantial progress and (2) substantial evidence that the district has adequate programs, policies and personnel in place and in operation to ensure that the demonstrated progress will be

sustained. At this time, I am not prepared to recommend that any partial withdrawal be initiated.

Cerf's denial of return to local control intensifies the community's organizing efforts in the fall. The Coalition, local unions representing various district employees, and elected officials come together for a rally at Bethany Baptist Church. I am the mistress of ceremonies. Several panels and speeches educate the audience about Newark's protracted fight for democracy. The decision is not overturned.

It is April 2012 and I want to teach again, but who will hire such a troublemaker? I ask Ras. Coincidentally, an English teacher just resigned. I start teaching at CHS right away. I have been organizing with other social justice educators since the fall to create the Newark Education Workers Caucus, a caucus within the Newark Teachers Union (see Manuscript 2). I do not want a duplication in efforts, so I suspend TaLiN. I am elected the first chair of the caucus. We organize rallies and marches, prepare and deliver coordinated speeches at advisory school board meetings, publish a critique of the proposed union contract, and run a slate for union leadership in the June 2013 election. Our presidential candidate loses by eight votes.

Teaching at CHS under the SIG reforms is draining (see Manuscript 3). For one, I agree to take on an extra class during the regular school day. Then, I have overenrolled classes. Yet, the most stress is caused by corporate education reform accountability measures, including spreadsheets to be filled in with student assessment data and regular classroom walkthroughs by groups of administrators with checklists in hand. I am stretched to my limit (Johnson, 2014). After a year and a half, I leave teaching. In fall 2013,

Superintendent Anderson announces “One Newark,” an updated version of the GEA school closure plan from two years ago that now adds a universal enrollment system to provide families with one application for both district and charter schools. Most of the city’s charter schools opt-in. The Global Village is dismantled by Anderson; it is not part of One Newark.

Vignette 3: Veto Power

It is March 2014. I am hired as a community organizer with New Jersey Communities United (NJCU). NJCU is new to Newark, only about two years old, and has developed a partnership with the Newark Students Union (NSU) to assist the students with strategic planning, meeting space, and other needed resources. NJCU fills an organizing void left after the defunding of the parent-led groups SEOC and ONEC. The education fight in Newark shifts back to direct actions.

As a result of this shift, the efforts of the community are re-named the Alliance for Newark Public Schools (since ALI is at the center of the Coalition, there are restrictions on political work due to its nonprofit status). The Alliance takes up the charge of increasing the number of community schools in Newark. We organize informational forums for the public, write letters to politicians and op-eds for the newspaper, conduct rallies around the city, and speak at school board meetings. Members also visit community schools in other cities. We publish a plan for Newark schools which aligns with the theory of the Broader, Bolder Approach and Global Village, and foregrounds the return to local control as the way to achieve this plan (Take Back Newark Schools, 2014). Ras Baraka is elected mayor and follows through on his campaign promise to support the expansion of community schools.

The Alliance calls for the resignation of Superintendent Anderson, but NSU leads the charge by staging a four-day sit-in in her office in February 2015. They pronounce four demands: Cami Anderson's immediate resignation; local control over NPS; NPS be fairly and fully funded; and all schools remain open (stop closing schools). Anderson resigns at the end of the school year.

Governor Christie appoints Chris Cerf, former Commissioner of Education and mastermind of One Newark, to finish what Anderson started. In a presentation at his first advisory board meeting, Superintendent Cerf declares that his primary goal is to return Newark to local control. During the meeting, I am approached by Mayor Baraka's Chief Education Officer about running for a seat on the school board. A few months pass before a sit-down conversation occurs. Even with Cerf seemingly wanting to return Newark to local control, I know now more than ever that we need board members who are committed to ensure this process is democratic and who will hold those in power accountable. I know I am capable.

I am asked to run for the school board on a slate with two other candidates known to support the proliferation of charter schools. This is an attempt to bring unity between public school and charter school advocates in Newark, entailing various Newark power brokers to work together rather than in competition. The growth of the charter sector has won them a seat at the table, so they choose a candidate; the North Ward political machine chooses a candidate; and I will be considered "the Mayor's candidate." I am conflicted about how I may be perceived as supporting two charter school advocates. I determine I am strong enough to hold my position. I am no longer the heartbroken teacher who left

CHS with her head hung low. In April 2016, all Unity Slate members win in the school board election.

In August, the state board of education approves the return of local control in the area of personnel to the school board as a result of scoring 100% on the latest QSAC assessment. We also score 88% in governance, for the second time; however, this is still not considered scoring high “consistently,” and we do not receive control in this area.

One Newark has been implemented for three years now. Each year, Anderson’s administration tweaked the enrollment policy in response to calls for transparency and equity. Such changes included adding sibling and neighborhood preferences to the algorithm that determines student-school matches. Still, it remains a highly contentious policy. I am contacted by parents to resolve issues regarding transportation, wait lists, seat availability, and limited education program offerings.

The district’s enrollment center remains busy into the start of the school year, and parents continue to complain. Concerns are raised at the school board’s September meetings. At one meeting, Board Member Marques-Aquil Lewis makes a motion to end One Newark. A discussion ensues, and Board Chair Antoinette Baskerville-Richardson reminds us of the agreement that no motion be put on the floor without first going before the full board, or at least committee. I say, “It’s my understanding a motion has been put on the floor to end One Newark, and I second it.”

Each board member is called to vote. As I count the fourth “yes” vote, feelings of apprehension mix with elation. This actually might pass. And it does. The vote passes with six affirming, two denying, and one abstaining. I am not surprised the chair votes “no” nor

am I surprised the two people I ran with make up the other “no” vote and the abstention. I deliver on my campaign promise to act to end the privatization of public education.

Three weeks later at an October meeting, Board Member Lewis makes a motion to rescind the vote to end One Newark. Those in the audience who want to see an end to One Newark break out in an uproar. I suspect the newfound “unity” has come into play as a negotiation to protect Newark’s charter school sector. Only I and two others vote “no” to the retraction. At the following week’s meeting, a resolution entitled, “Supporting a Committee on Placement and Enrollment” passes. Only two vote “no” this time—my two running mates. Board Member Kim Gaddy states she cannot support this resolution because there is no plan for an alternative way to enroll students; plus, the universal enrollment process has allowed parents to seek options for their children. I support the resolution because it explicitly calls for an end to One Newark and because the charge of the committee is to determine an alternative enrollment process beginning with the following school year.

We are reminded that we are a school board under state control:

New Jersey Statutes Annotated RE: QSAC

...If some voting functions are returned to the board of education, the commissioner or his designee shall have the authority to veto any action by the board of education until the governance component of school district effectiveness is returned to local control...No action taken at that meeting of the board of education shall have force or effect until 15 days after a copy of the minutes shall have been so delivered...If, in the 15-day period, the commissioner or his designee returns the copy of those minutes with a veto of any action taken by the board of education or any member thereof at that meeting, the action shall be null and void and of no effect. (N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-49, 16.c & 18A:7A-53, 37.c)

On October 27th, Cerf sends a memo to Acting Education Commissioner Kimberley Harrington requesting she veto the board's vote. I take the initiative to draft a response to this request, some of which ends up in the official letter sent to Harrington by the board chair. On December 7th, Harrington sends a memo approving the veto request.

Although our resolution is vetoed, Cerf agrees to cooperate in the establishment of a committee to review the enrollment policy and make recommendations for improving the process. The push to abolish One Newark continues, mainly through the efforts of the Alliance. Board members and district staff do not come to a consensus as to how individuals will be selected to sit on the committee; it never comes to fruition. Another QSAC evaluation occurs, and the district scores 100% in governance. On September 13, 2017, the State Board of Education grants control in this last area. Local control begins on February 1, 2018; the newly hired superintendent (the first time in nearly thirty years the Newark school board makes this appointment) starts on July 1, 2018, yet One Newark is still in place.

Thinking with Theory

A thinking with theory approach to analysis asks “what?” and “how?” as opposed to “why?” questions. As Jackson and Mazzei (2017) explain, “We use theory...to open up previously *unthought* approaches to thinking about what is happening in our research sites and encounters” (p. 720, emphasis in original). I invite you to think with me about my reconstitution into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education. We will plug critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), critical democracy (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) into assemblages with the above

vignettes. Though I take each one at a time in thinking about a critical democratic public education in the current neoliberal era, I acknowledge these constructs are in fact entangled.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) embraces the practice of providing narrative accounts of the realities of racism; this serves many purposes, including “contributing to the transformation of oppressive social conditions” and “assuag[ing] feelings of isolation and self-blame” (Rosiek, 2016, p. xxi). For Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT “speak[s] to innovative theoretical ways for framing discussions about social justice and democracy and the role of education in reproducing or interrupting current practices” (p. 9). As one such innovation, Picower and Mayorga (2015) advocate the use of a racial economic framework to call attention to the dominant ideology of White supremacy in U.S. education policy. A co-reading of critical race theory with the vignettes asks: *How does adopting a racial economic framework inform my re-constitution?*

The development of TaLiN reflects my re-constitution. As I note in my email to Theresa, Black Power is part of the foundation of the organization. I choose this concept because of its key principle of self-determination (Ture & Hamilton, 1967/1992). My consciousness of racial politics expands as new members of TaLiN contribute an anti-racist, anti-imperialist analysis to the organization. We rewrite TaLiN’s vision to include that “TaLiN members recognize how the hierarchies of class and economics permeate our society and institutions” and “the public schools must actively challenge race, gender, culture, and class biases.” Explicitly naming a racial economic framework works as a powerful tool in my re-constitution. Later, as a school board member, I use this framework

to analyze the political disenfranchisement of Newark citizens as a result of the school system being under state control and act to empower families displaced by OneNewark.

New Jersey has been described as having an apartheid system of education (Tractenberg, Orfield, & Flaxman, 2013). The thirty-one Abbott districts and the four districts that have been under state control predominantly enroll children of color who live in low-income families. The dissolution of local elected governance further disenfranchises these communities which historically have borne the brunt of institutional racism and economic inequality (Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, 2015). Underfunding urban school districts and state takeover are both methods of dispossession that stem from the belief that communities of color have nothing of value to provide to the governance of their own schools (Dixon, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015; Picower & Mayorga, 2015). The lived experiences I describe above demonstrate otherwise. As I learn about the historical and social context of public education in Newark, and as I listen to the stories of people of color in organizing meetings, I am compelled to act. Each issue-based campaign I participate in highlights another “head on the Hydra” of neoliberal education reform (Picower & Mayorga, 2015). Examining school reform through a CRT lens produces counternarratives that empower me. They reframe narratives of individualism and meritocracy offered by racial capitalism as false hope. I then freely act with others in ways counter to the dominant ideology of White supremacy.

Critical Democratic Theory

Contemporary political scholars theorize an inclusive, participatory democracy (Oakes & Rogers, 2006) that creates a “shift from criticizing the presumed deficits of individual schools and specific racial groups to analyzing the problematic assumptions in

curriculum, pedagogy, and policy that structure success and failure” (Mirra & Morrell, 2011, p. 411). Mirra and Morrell (2011) identify “elements of the democratic tradition that provide us with the ideological tools to name and challenge systemic inequality”—namely collectivism, production, and activism—in order “to create a framework for a critical democratic theory” (p. 411). A co-reading of critical democratic theory with the vignettes asks: *How does employing elements of critical democracy affect my re-constitution?*

As I start my teaching career, improving the quality of education means making changes at the school level and in the classroom, being the best teacher I can be—a narrative closely aligned with my TFA training. Then, ALI and ONEC invite me to examine these assumptions from a critical perspective and imagine structural change through policy. I am activated to participate in organized actions and later to co-organize campaigns. Although the organizing collaborative is not successful in having SFRA found unconstitutional, the actions we take in that campaign become a framework for me in how to take future actions. But even then there are many “failed” attempts in my activism, in the sense that they do not reach the proclaimed vision or they end abruptly, such as the short-lived UFDPE coalition. The “win” in these cases is the production of a citizen committed to critical democratic public education. As Marshall Ganz explains, “three domains of activity—building relationships, developing common understandings, and taking action—combined into campaigns, are what enable ordinary people to develop the knowledge, capacity, and power that social change requires” (Oakes & Rogers, 2006, p. 98).

The school board is a frontier for neoliberalism and White supremacy as Whites reclaim positions of governance in cities, New Orleans being a prime example (Dixon,

Buras, & Jeffers, 2015). At the time I am elected to the school board, I have already been inoculated against these structural forces. For example, I disrupt the district's passive democratic process by blocking the SIG community participation meeting sign-in sheet, and resist PENewark's cooptation of TaLiN's reputation as an authentically democratic organization. Serving as a school board member provides a platform to speak and act through a critical democratic lens in front of a broad audience on a regular basis. In talking back to Superintendent Cerf, I—and other board members—produce the kind of knowledge which “is aimed at constantly evaluating and reconstructing society in ways that work for all citizens” (Mirra & Morrell, 2011, p. 412). The more I engage in critical democratic practices, the more committed I become.

Black Feminist Thought: An Epilogue

It is a week after the April 2018 school board election and the beginning of my third year as a school board member. Serving as chair of the Program and Instruction Committee for the first two years, I gain valuable experience and confidence to pursue becoming the chair of the school board.

Three new board members are sworn in and take their seats on the dais. The next order of business is election of the board chair and vice chair. I am nominated and there is an eruption of applause from the audience. Josephine Garcia is also nominated. She has served on the board for one year and is a leader in the North Ward political machine.

After nominations close, I motion to speak. I open with a quote from Karen Lewis, president of the Chicago Teachers Union, about the rules, who makes them, who are the losers and winners, and how the winners keep the losers playing the game. I then move on to critique the KIPP charter school motto, “Work hard. Be nice.” I follow this by outlining

the personal characteristics I believe most qualify me for election—intelligence, passion, courage, self-determination, and integrity—and confirm that none of these can be bought. I then explain how I already know the outcome of the vote and how it is a manifestation of structural oppression. I conclude with a call to action for us to be transformative and courageous.

General counsel asks if anyone else wishes to speak before the vote. Silence.

General counsel explains that since there are two nominees for the position, when he takes roll call, the board member will say the name of the nominee who she or he wants to be chair.

“Josephine Garcia” is repeated four times in a row.

I vote for myself and Kim Gaddy, my Unity Slate teammate, votes for me as well.

The last three votes go to Josephine Garcia.

Collins (2000) asserts, “Struggles around educational issues have politicized Black women” (p. 212) since education is not solely for our own personal development but also for race uplift and Black community development. Neoliberal education reform threatens U.S. Blacks as it undermines public sector unionization, a key victory in the movement of Blacks to the middle-class; and as women are the majority of teachers, this poses an acute threat to Black women (Jones, 2015). Black women’s activism has been classified into two primary dimensions: the struggle for group survival by undermining oppressive structures and creating oppositional identities, and institutional transformation through coalition building (Collins, 2000). A co-reading of the vignettes with Black feminist thought asks: *How does centering Black women’s standpoint influence my re-constitution?*

I choose “apolitical” as the descriptor of the beginning state of my leadership development because at this time I am minimally active in any sense of democracy. I tend to think of myself through my racial identity, rarely in terms of class, and even less often as a woman. Once I am activated through education organizing, the latter two become figured into my worldview. I am a teacher. I am in a working-class profession that has been feminized—and I am a Black woman. Taking on this standpoint generates an oppositional identity to the dominant ideology which privileges White, male, and wealthy identities. This grants me new vantage points from which to understand society and the nature of oppression.

I infuse this standpoint into TaLiN. This shows up in what I call the “foundations” of the organization; I have already identified Black Power as one. Ella Baker, one of the Black women civil rights leaders, is another foundation, particularly in terms of how her democratic practices and leadership have been described as “[f]ocused on inquiry and engagement, rather than indoctrination” (Oakes & Rogers, 2006, p. 104). Additionally, she has created a path for connecting local troubles to broader political issues (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). I walk in this tradition, for example in the call to create the UFDPE coalition. Both UFDPE and TaLiN provide platforms for me to work collaboratively on an institutional level. Though neither is an organization solely for Black women, coalition building is at the core of each organization, drawing on the second dimension of Black women’s activism.

I possess a strong desire to be authentic in my practice and leadership. This aligns with an ethic of personal accountability, an ethic of caring, use of dialogue, and lived experience, contours of a Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000). I apply these

standards in assessing what I know to be true. My speech for the chairship, above, is a product of this epistemology. I have “walked the walk and talked the talk.” Even in knowing I will not be chosen, I make an impassioned speech, and I do so as an offering to a space where others want to engage in dialogue about what public education means and what it should look like, particularly for minoritized groups. My graduate studies and the inquiry elucidated in this article provide a unique opportunity to understand my commitment to a Black feminist epistemology. I cannot just study activist leadership and claim it that way; I live the experience of activism and commit to an ontological positioning of scholar-teacher-activist (Picower & Mayorga, 2015).

Implications for Teacher Preparation

Educator preparation providers (EPPs) play a crucial role in preparing politically active teachers. Implications exist regarding how they structure coursework and field experiences for preservice teachers practicing in urban environments.

When teachers fail to explicitly name the philosophical and theoretical frameworks which undergird their teaching, the dominant ideology is enacted by default— namely institutionalized racism as well as neoliberalism. Market-based reforms have shaped urban education policy significantly, deteriorating the democratic social order (Lipman, 2011). Since education policies at all levels of government have a direct impact on the teaching delivered in public school classrooms, preservice teachers must do policy analysis. For example, they can trace the genealogy of education reform in their state. This will provide context for their teaching practices. After conducting analysis, preservice teachers should be required to articulate their philosophy of education, which should be a living document

that serves as a guide when encountering future challenges related to policy and teaching practices.

Encounters that awaken political activism will differ for each, but EPPs must cultivate strong critical democratic dispositions. Infusing a womanist pedagogical approach into teacher preparation programs—an approach that centers Black women’s legacy to overcome struggles and move their communities forward— will support EPPs in producing the social justice educators we need (Hill-Brisbane & Dingus, 2007) to combat racism and generate critical democratic practice in urban schools. A critical manifestation of this approach is for EPPs to partner with community-based organizations to provide field experiences for preservice teachers. These have the potential to be eye-opening experiences into the lives of children beyond the classroom, into getting to know the adults who take care of them, and into democratic mechanisms of the urban community. When perceived through a critical democratic lens, what may occur as neglect and apathy is re-ordered as a protracted struggle by parents, teachers, and students to resist institutional racism and political disenfranchisement.

Chapter 3. Manuscript 2: Teachers Rising: Democratic Possibilities of Social Justice

Unionism

Abstract: Centering the leadership of those most affected by neoliberal reforms and decentering the issues of salary and benefits open up possibilities for unions to be a driving force in bringing about critical democratic public education. Using a critical autoethnography methodology, the author narrates her participation in social justice unionism through a series of episodes and then performs the analytical practice of co-reading with critical social theories. This article illuminates the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership, as well as some of what may be missing in teacher preparation. It concludes with recommendations for teacher preparation programs.

The door shuts out the December air as I proceed to climb three flights of stairs. An older Puerto Rican man opens the apartment door and ushers me in with a jovial greeting. Jose is the building union rep for the magnet high school where he teaches history and law. He has been an active member of the Newark Teachers Union (NTU) for twenty-three years. Sitting in the living room are two White veteran history teachers, Matthew and Branden, who are also union reps at magnet high schools in the district. Branden invited me to this meeting. Our agenda is to organize a slate to run against the president who has held the position for the last fifteen years.

Within the contemporary anti-union environment fueled by neoliberalism, teachers are organizing and educating each other in order to push back against the corporate reform agenda and envision a public education that supports all students (Maton, 2016; Uetricht, 2014). Weiner (2018) remarks on the 2018 red state teacher walkouts: “By demanding recognition and respect for their labor and the rights of their students, teachers are reviving the most essential element of labor unionism: respect for democracy and the dignity of work” (para. 11). If we are to imagine a democracy for collective, productive, and active

purposes (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), these purposes must be put to work as social practices. Additionally, centering the leadership of those most affected by neoliberal reforms and decentering the issues of salary and benefits open up possibilities for unions to be a driving force in bringing about critical democratic public education.

I invite you to discover with me how an “apolitical” teacher is re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education. I answer Packer’s (2018) call to focus qualitative inquiry on how we are re-constituted for emancipatory interests. The discoveries reported in this article come from a critical autoethnographic (Holman Jones, 2016) study of teacher leadership development through political activism.

Identifying as an “apolitical” teacher stems from the lack of a civics education and is fostered by my five-week training from Teach for America (TFA). While TFA sees itself as “build[ing] a true democracy” (Wetzler, 2010, p. 25), others argue the organization applies neoliberal concepts to teacher preparation (Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017) by emphasizing management (Scott, Trujillo, & Rivera, 2016) over pedagogy. TFA is charged with outsourcing the public teacher workforce by placing corps members at nonunion charter schools and pushing out veteran teachers so that lower salaries can be paid (Brewer, Kretchmar, Sondel, Ishmael, & Manfra, 2016; Sustar, 2013). These practices marginalize the role of teachers unions and deemphasize the political nature of teaching. Unlike some other alumni who embrace management, entrepreneurship, and accountability as practices for achieving educational equality (Trujillo, Scott, & Rivera, 2017), I embark on a search for explanations of and solutions to educational inequality that are grounded in critical social theory (Anyon, 2009).

In this article, I focus on my participation in social justice unionism from 2010 to 2016. Specifically, this includes formulating a social justice caucus within the NTU, conducting a critical analysis of a proposed union contract, and organizing childcare center workers. These experiences have been co-created with fellow-participants; therefore, I employ member-checking in the research process (Hughes & Pennington, 2016). Specific names are included when the public record coincides or permission has been granted; otherwise, names are pseudonyms. First, I share my thoughts as experienced at the time. Then, I map the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership using the analytical practice of co-reading (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). I co-read with critical democratic theory (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). I conclude with recommendations for teacher preparation programs.

Background

Within twenty-four square miles, nearly 282,000 people call Newark home. According to New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) (2018) data, Newark Public Schools (NPS) enrolled close to 36,000 students in the 2017-2018 school year; the two largest racial and ethnic categories are Black and Hispanic at 42.4% and 48.2%, respectively (a mirror of the city's racial demographics); and 85% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. NPS budget projections for the 2017-2018 school year show an almost three-fold increase in public funding to charter schools in less than a decade, from \$91M in 2010 to \$242M in 2018, and just over a third of all public school students would be enrolled in two dozen charter schools (NPS, 2017).

I grow up in a majority White, lower middle-class community in upstate NY as a Black girl in a working-class family. I attend an elite university with the goal of becoming a pediatrician because I want to have a positive impact on the lives of children. Unspoken messages have told me that smart people become lawyers or doctors. To pay for college costs, I hold a number of part-time jobs, including being a tutor and afterschool program instructor. Working directly with students creates a new possibility of what it means to “help” children and I am inspired to become a teacher. I am accepted into the TFA-Newark (NJ) 2004 corps and placed at a high school to teach English.

In my second year of teaching, a fellow TFA corps member tells me about Abbott Leadership Institute, an organization that holds Saturday classes to educate parents about school reform and build their advocacy skills. I learn about the ground-breaking Abbott legacy, a series of court cases heard in the New Jersey Supreme Court that brought near-parity funding to property-poor districts around the state (Yaffe, 2007). I learn NPS has had a contentious history in terms of governance—there were transitions from mayoral to state control with an elected school board in between (Rich, 1996). When the state took over the district in 1995, the school board remained elected; however, its powers were given to the state-appointed superintendent. ALI membership compels me to learn all I can about Newark’s education history and to take on a leadership role at my school.

The majority of the student population at my placement school is Latinx, mostly Puerto Rican. The school has been reformed into career-based academies. One academy is aerospace. Some students graduate with a pilot’s license. In my fourth year of teaching, I learn through my master’s degree internship with the scheduling vice principal that the reform is not being carried out with fidelity. Teachers assigned to the same academy are

supposed to have the same prep period so they can plan together, but this rarely happens. I see an opportunity to organize teachers into a professional learning community based on solutions-oriented policies. Our proposed tardy policy is implemented but soon after abandoned.

Seeing curriculum as another strategy to affect educational change, I co-create an elective course on Puerto Rican and African American literature with another English teacher—herself Puerto Rican and Chilean—and infuse culturally-responsive teaching units into the district curriculum (see Manuscript 3).

In June 2008, I create an organization named Teachers as Leaders in Newark (TaLiN) with the following vision statement: TaLiN seeks justice and equality for all students through empowering Newark educators to be catalysts in the creation of social and educational alliances. TaLiN opens space to be an education activist and organizer and to develop relationships with teachers within the district who also want to bring radical change to public education (see Manuscript 1). Two months later, I decide to pursue graduate studies full-time. My request for a leave of absence from NPS is not approved, so I reluctantly resign.

Now in a doctoral program, I learn how the Great Migration of Blacks from the South, coupled with urban decline, political corruption, failed revitalization, and racial tensions, precipitated a rebellion in Newark in 1967 (Mumford, 2007). These forces served to undermine the viability of the local system of public education (Anyon, 1997). I pay specific attention to texts written about the Black radical tradition (Carruthers, 2018). Amiri Baraka is at the center of this tradition in Newark; his leadership in the arts, politics, and community building helped to shift power relations in favor of the local Black and

Puerto Rican populations and position Newark on the national Black Power stage (Woodard, 1999).

In the spring of 2010, Governor Chris Christie proposes a slew of budget cuts, the most damaging to education. Underfunding public education is a predominant practice of neoliberalism, which drives contemporary U.S. education policy with its goal of privatizing public functions (Russom, 2012). Hundreds of students from high schools in Newark walk out of school and onto the steps of city hall in protest of Christie's proposed cuts. TaLiN organizes rallies and marches during budget season to demand full funding of the public schools. Branden and I meet at one of these actions and start working together.

A pact between Mayor Cory Booker and Governor Christie—a Black Democrat and a White Republican, respectively—to unleash neoliberal education reform tactics on Newark becomes public when they appear on *Oprah* in October 2010 with Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to announce his \$100M donation to Newark public schools (Russakoff, 2015). The story below begins shortly after this announcement.

Episode #1: From Campaign to Caucus

Press Release
February 8, 2011

Newark Teachers Union Faces Electoral Challenge

...Calling themselves “*United For Change*,” the group...is calling for new leadership to emerge that is more diverse and reflective of the NTU membership... Furthermore, noting that the NTU has been slow to react to the enormous challenges faced by Newark teachers, United For Change is calling for the membership to join efforts to renew the NTU in the face of politically motivated attacks on teachers.

Troubled by increasing erosion of support for public education, United For Change is calling on the Newark Teachers Union to play a leadership role in school reform and transformation...At the same time, United For Change

is calling for major internal reforms within the Newark Teachers Union aimed at strengthening union democracy and revitalizing the NTU's voice in public forums...

Everyone on the United For Change (UFC) slate is fed up with the business style unionism (Hagopian & Green, 2012) of Joe Del Grosso, NTU president since 1995. We embrace social justice unionism, described by editors at *Rethinking Schools* as having three elements: defending public education and the rights of teachers, strong emphasis on professionalism, and commitment to children and community (Peterson & Charney, 1999). Weiner (2012) notes this style of unionism promises to “spearhead development of the broad political and social resistance needed to reverse the tidal wave destroying public education” by “mobiliz[ing] its members to struggle on their own behalf” (p. 36). Although Hagopian and Green (2012) assess the ability of unions to withstand neoliberal attacks on teachers’ working conditions as weak given union leaders’ collaborative relationship with management and complacency with both the Democratic Party and Corporate America, they also contend unions hold the possibility of being a springboard to authentic democratic participation in society at large. It is this possibility that anchors my commitment to UFC.

We have only five months, but we believe the membership is ready for change. Jose and Matthew top the UFC slate as our presidential and secretary-treasurer candidates, respectfully. Through TaLiN, I play an organizational support role to the slate. We begin attending school board meetings, public forums, and local protests as a group.

To: UFC Slate; LZOWens@TaLinNewark.org
From: Branden
Date: February 18, 2011
Subject: A few things...

Friends and Brothers and Sisters:

. . .

2) On Monday February 28, there will be a full NTU Membership meeting at 3:30 at Raphael Hernandez. Randi Weingarten will be there. The NTU leadership obviously views this as a platform to demonstrate that they have the support of national leadership. Weingarten may even be there to tell us that "now is a dangerous time, not the time to change leadership", etc, etc. (as two of use [sic] were told by NTU leadership yesterday).

A few days after Branden sends this email, a secret plan for school closures and charter school expansion is leaked to the press. The company that created the plan was hired by Mayor Booker and founded by Acting NJ Education Commissioner Chris Cerf, a White man and graduate of the Broad Academy, a center established by philanthrocapitalist Eli Broad to train superintendents for large school districts. Cerf denies having anything to do with the plan, insisting his only role was allowing the company to use his home address. This discovery foments an uproar from the community. Attendance at the school board meetings goes up.

To: UFC slate; LZOwens@TaLinNewark.org
From: Branden
Date: March 22, 2011
Subject: (no subject)

Tonight's Advisory Board Meeting:

. . .

- When [NTU President] Joe D. was speaking, he was cut off at 3 minutes...Jose, however, stood and protested that, by contract, the NTU is allowed 10 minutes at all Advisory Board Meetings. Jose...got the contract from his car, and...went back in and forced [Board President Shavar] Jeffries to read it and allow Joe D. 7 more minutes to speak.

ie: Jose is fighting for the rights of the NTU more than our president, who barely knows the contract or barely cares enough to speak. (fyi - Joe and his supporters left the meeting after that, never to return).

- Later, the Advisory Board, although it was not on their agenda, put forward a motion to...raise the acceptable average NPS class size to 30!!! Again...Jose stood and protested. He criticized them for 2 things: their violation of the sunshine law and Roberts Rules of Order by attempting to bring something to the floor that was not on the agenda and that was not properly agreed to.

And, Jose was SUCCESSFUL in stopping them!!!

. . .

The UFC slate has sixteen executive board member candidates, just over half of a full slate. Through the spring, we meet weekly. The NTU election is held in May by mail-in ballot. Del Grosso runs for re-election to the presidency. A third slate runs as well. Both challengers are crushed; Del Grosso gets three times as many votes as Jose and nearly ten times as many votes as the third slate candidate. Only about a third of the membership vote. At the beginning of June, we host a post-election rally to share the future plans for continuing to build a countermovement within the NTU.

Although the election is lost, it's not a loss to me. We have built a foundation for the movement I had imagined TaLiN to be: a diverse group of teachers fighting collectively for social justice. While we were campaigning, a committee was interviewing candidates to be the next state-appointed superintendent. Cami Anderson, a White woman, is hired for the job. She is a transplant from New York City and another Broad Academy graduate.

Over the summer, TaLiN and UFC co-host a reading group on teachers and the labor movement. We read four books, including *The Newark Teacher Strikes: Hopes on the Line* (Golin, 2002). We invite Carole Graves, president of the NTU during the strikes, to join us for this session. Carole provides intimate details about the union and its development during her time as president from 1968 to 1995, along with her perspective

on these matters as a Black woman. She expresses some distrust in Golin's account, possibly because he includes how her participation in graft led to her end as union president. Branden and I take the lead on organizing another set of sessions on union history for the fall. Besides UFC members, college students preparing to be teachers and community members attend.

To: Branden
From: Leah
Date: October 7, 2011
Subject: Re: Meeting space for new NTU caucus

. . . I was reading over some notes I wrote a couple of years ago in preparation for teaching and I saw things I didn't get then but now I do because of your lecture! ... And then I was talking with one of my students as to why I support unions and I could explain the inherent conflict between workers and owners. I felt worthy of being a doctoral student.

A steering committee is formed to develop a social justice caucus within the NTU. Nine of us deliberate over the name, vision, and mission of the caucus in weekly meetings. The five males are White except Jose, and all four women are of color. Only one is a non-high school teacher. Wanting to distinguish the campaign from the movement, we agree to New Reform Caucus as the name. The inaugural meeting of the caucus is scheduled for December and the call reads, in part: "Consequently, The NEW REFORM CAUCUS will be a working group whose goals will be to bring about greater democracy and transparency within the NTU, while working to strengthen our union's ties to the greater Newark community."

Six more teachers join the steering committee as a result of the meeting—three women and three men, three Black and three White. The group becomes more diverse in not only teaching area and number of years teaching but also in political activism

experience. At the January steering committee meeting, concerns about the name of the caucus are discussed. Alan, a White male history teacher, suggests a change to Newark Education Workers (NEW) Caucus in order to show solidarity with the class nature of the majority of Newarkers. All agree—except Jose who resigns from the group citing a lack of political trust and, as a person of color, a longtime inability to work with those who consider themselves part of the White left.

With the launch of NEW Caucus, TaLiN becomes a duplication in effort to organize teachers, so I suspend it. I want to teach in the district again, but who will hire such a “troublemaker”? I ask Ras Baraka, son of Amiri Baraka and then principal of Central High School. Coincidentally, an English teacher has just resigned. I start teaching at Central in April 2012. A union member again and now an “official” member of NEW Caucus, I’m chosen to be its first chair. NEW Caucus maintains a constant presence at community and school board meetings, and we organize protest actions to bring awareness of the efforts to privatize our public schools.

At the meeting that we select me as chair, the discussion includes emphasis on how the chair and vice chair positions will mostly be in name. Decisions will continue to be made collectively and by consensus. Though I am honored to be selected as chair, I don’t feel the most qualified. Participating in our sessions on union history has grown my confidence in my political activism, but I wonder why Jose left. The internal racial dynamics of our group are lost on me. Should I have left too, in solidarity? Is my Black female face being used to bring viability to the caucus? I move forward with the caucus, determined to grow into the position, inspired to be as strong a union leader as Carole Graves.

Episode #2: Defending Public Education

In the fall of 2012, NEW Caucus dives into a battle to protect the contractual rights and working conditions of education workers and the learning conditions of students. After three years of being out of a contract, the NTU leadership presents the membership a proposed contract which includes a new pay scale that eliminates higher pay for teachers with advanced degrees, an allowance of how many schools can be closed each year, and merit pay to be funded by the Zuckerberg donation.

As soon as the NTU disseminates the proposed contract in mid-October, we meet at Alan's house to spend the day analyzing the contract line-by-line. We type up our analysis and create a cover page that reads: "VOTE NO (Emphatically)." It concludes, in part:

...NPS has rushed this contract because they wanted NTU ratification in time to make the deadline for Race to the Top, the very federal law that coerces states with billions of dollars in aid in return for closing schools, removing entire staffs from struggling schools, opening more charter schools, and increasing the use of standardized tests...

This is not a social justice contract that views public education as a sacred duty that the state and local governments owe to all students, parents, and education workers. This is a cut-throat BUSINESS contract that will bring the forces of the market to public education. It turns education into a business which does nothing to directly address students [sic] needs. In fact, many of these provisions will ultimately hurt students...

We spend a couple of weeks promoting the contract critique, and the response to our analysis is favorable. However, Hurricane Sandy causes a postponement. By the time the vote occurs, we have lost momentum. The contract passes.

This loss feels like a loss. Two-thirds of the membership who voted are in favor of the contract. We don't receive a demographics breakdown of the votes and don't conduct

a post-analysis. Several post-voting interviews, however, confirm our suspicions that members feel the terms are the best we can get (Mooney, 2012). Still, we view this sense of hopelessness as a desire to have something different, just not knowing what this difference can be.

We run another campaign for election to the NTU leadership. Branden is the presidential candidate on our slate, NEW Vision. I serve as the campaign manager as I am not eligible to run; the requirement is membership for two consecutive years. A third member runs for president without a slate. The mail-in ballots are counted at the end of June 2013. The results are gut wrenching. Del Grosso receives 589 votes, Branden receives 580 votes, and the other member 40 votes. NEW Caucus presses on.

In October, I am mentally, emotionally, and spiritually drained. I have overcrowded classes. I never get to teach an elective writing course for which I wrote the curriculum because the core English courses need to be staffed first. Furthermore, I agree to teach an extra period within the contractual day but only get paid the hourly wage instead of one fifth of my salary as per the contract. On my last day at Central, I use a Home Depot cart to move my personal belongings from my classroom to my car as the rest of the faculty engages in a staff development session in the library. Only a year and a half back into teaching, I quit.

I am heartbroken. And I feel like a phony. I cannot figure out how to be both an effective teacher for urban students and an organizer for social justice unionism. Defending public education is exhausting. How can I be the critical educator I want to be if I have to exist in the reality of neoliberal education reform while fighting against it?

Episode #3: Becoming an “Official” Organizer

In March 2014, I start working as a community organizer with New Jersey Communities United (NJCUC). NJCUC is new to Newark, a nonprofit about two years old, and has a close connection to a Communications Workers of America (CWA) local. NJCUC also has developed a partnership with the Newark Students Union (NSU) to assist the students with strategic planning, meeting space, and other needed resources. NSU describe themselves as: “an organization founded by and for Newark students with the goals of protecting student rights, ensuring we receive a quality education, and empowering the student voice in the political process” (<http://www.facebook.com/NewarkStudentsUnion>). One of the co-founders of NSU also works at NJCUC part-time as a student organizer.

A coalition of labor and community organizations, the Alliance for Newark Public Schools, has also been created. The NTU supplies meeting space in addition to material resources. The Alliance takes up the charge of increasing the number of community schools in Newark and foregrounds the return to local control as the way to achieve this plan.

My work at NJCUC focuses upon improving the quality of and access to early childhood education and care by organizing working parents and unionizing childcare center workers. It is an ongoing campaign called Better Beginnings that started with the unionization of in-home childcare providers. I learn that some years ago, CWA and another non-teacher union co-organized the in-home providers in New Jersey. In-home providers in half the counties became CWA members and the other half went to the other union. At weekly staff meetings, I join with my co-organizers in debriefing the work of our campaigns, which include housing justice, immigration justice, bank worker organizing, and education. I spend nine months base-building for a childcare center workers union.

Immersed in a world of social justice beyond the education struggle, sociopolitical theories and history of the urban context I learned in graduate study play out in front of me. I am inspired by the students of NSU who stage a four-day sit-in at the Board of Education in February 2015. They take over the superintendent's office with four demands: Cami Anderson's immediate resignation; local control over NPS; NPS be fairly and fully funded; and all schools remain open (stop closing schools).

I continue to be a part of the leadership of NEW Caucus and attempt to apply the strategies and tactics I learn at NJCU to organizing education workers. Though we remain active, we aren't building a base, which is imperative because we have plans to run again in the June 2015 NTU election. With the failing health of Del Grosso, it is unlikely he will run for another term; however, two of the union leaders under him are vying for the top spot. We predict there will be three slates again. The ballot count for the NTU election occurs the day after Cami Anderson's last day as superintendent. We lose again, the winner being the candidate who most resembles Del Grosso and his business unionism leadership. Matthew, who had run with us under United For Change, is elected as the secretary-treasurer under this new president. He had left NEW Caucus shortly after the contract vote.

Frustrated with our inability to prioritize organizing conversations with individual NTU members, I conclude this is the reason for our stunted growth. All of the training and networking from being a part of UCORE, the national network of social justice caucuses, has shown us direct organizing of the membership is key.

"I know who you should talk to. Her name is Maria."

By May 2015, I have twenty-nine union authorization cards signed by workers, primarily women of color from working-class and low-income backgrounds, across fourteen childcare centers; however, two workers per center is nowhere near enough to get a union started. I call Maria and explain I am an organizer and received her phone number from one of her colleagues at La Casa. La Casa is located in the North Ward of Newark, where the majority of the population is Latinx. She wants to talk and gives me her address. A Puerto Rican woman in her sixties, Maria has worked at La Casa for more than twenty years, most as a teacher's aide in preschool classrooms. She is interested in organizing and allows us to use her house for a meeting. Kim (my co-organizer) and I plan for ten or so workers. Six or seven are already at Maria's when we arrive. Within half an hour, there are at least twenty-five workers filling up Maria's small dining room, spilling into her kitchen and the hallway. Maria's husband brings more chairs. No one is worried about the food we brought; they want to talk about unionizing.

Kim and I continue to make house calls. The second center at which we gain traction is Unified Vailsburg Services Organization (UVSO). UVSO is located in Newark's West Ward, one of three predominantly Black wards. A NEW Caucus member connects me with one of the preschool teachers, Pamela, who comes to the NJCU office in August to meet with us. Pamela tells us how she co-organized a previous work site, a local nonprofit agency, some years ago under CWA. Soon after, we hold a meeting with a few of her co-workers—three other Black women—at a local IHOP. We bring together the organizing committees of both La Casa and UVSO and they motivate each other.

We strategize to get 80% of workers at each center to sign authorization cards. La Casa reaches the goal first. Mid-December, a delegation of workers hand delivers the cards

and the petition for a union vote to the executive director. The group emerges from the door triumphant and we all cheer. The picture we take is full of beaming faces and fists thrust high. A month later, a union election is held and a majority of the workers vote “yes.” In March 2016, UVSO also files for a union election and a majority of the workers vote for a union. Another win occurs in April when I am elected to the Newark school advisory board as a result of running on a slate supported by Mayor Baraka (see Manuscript 1).

As we get the center workers geared up for bargaining, I shift focus to organizing working parents. We create a “Declaration of Rights by Working Parents” which is prefaced in part:

As working parents, we value the support systems and safety nets meant to provide for our communities. In the past, we could rely on our neighborhood public schools to be community centers where wrap-around services provided before school and after school programs to accommodate the often chaotic work schedules of working parents...Unfortunately, budget cuts to education and other social services have put us back at a disadvantage, while the expansion of charter schools have also drained the public schools budget.

Now a successful organizer, I authentically wed theory with practice. In building a union from the ground up, I realize how I take NTU for granted. In conducting all of those organizing conversations, I realize the need for union protection of all workers. I realize, as I write in my notebook at one NJCU staff meeting: “democracy = control over the resources in our neighborhoods.” Education is a resource and so is childcare. I refocus on my doctoral studies, empowered by my changed embeddedness as a result of intra-action between political and educational theory as well as organizing practices.

Thinking with Theory: Social Justice Unionism and Democracy

A thinking with theory approach to analysis asks “what?” and “how?”, as opposed to “why?” questions. As Jackson and Mazzei (2017) explain, “We use theory...to open up previously *unthought* approaches to thinking about what is happening in our research sites and encounters” (p. 720, emphasis in original). I invite you to think with me about my re-constitution into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education. We will plug critical democracy (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) into assemblages with the above episodes.

Critical Democratic Theory

Contemporary political scholars theorize an inclusive, participatory democracy (Mirra & Morrell, 2011; Oakes & Rogers, 2006). Mirra and Morrell (2011) contrast “neoliberal democracy” which advances individualism, consumerism, and political passivity with the collectivism, production, and activism of “critical democracy.” They argue for a “shift from criticizing the presumed deficits of individual schools and specific racial groups to analyzing the problematic assumptions in curriculum, pedagogy, and policy that structure success and failure” (Mirra & Morrell, 2011, p. 411). A co-reading of critical democratic theory with the episodes asks: *How does employing elements of critical democracy foster my re-constitution?*

The elements of critical democracy act as interventions that alter my positionality. I shift from being an embodiment of a lack of critical consciousness to being an active citizen. Each time I experience how knowledge production, collectivism, and activism can contribute to shifts in power relations in favor of those who have been disenfranchised, I become more deeply embedded in a stance for critical democratic public education.

The UFC slate attends the school advisory board meeting as an activist group and accomplishes more speaking time for the NTU president and a halt to a vote that would have allowed class sizes to reach thirty or more students. NEW Caucus's contract analysis produces knowledge through a critical analysis of the neoliberal-inspired contract put in front of us by the union leadership. Though the rank-and-file still vote for the contract, nearly winning the union election the following spring demonstrates the impact of our social justice unionism leadership. Organizing with other education workers contributes to my re-constitution.

However, portraying the "struggle" as collective in nature can sometimes leave localized concerns unaddressed, inadvertently perpetuating the myth of teachers' work as isolated acts. I never speak about my classroom struggles at Central to the caucus because I make at least two assumptions: that none of the others are struggling with their teaching and that there is no space within NEW to address "individual" problems. Having such an intent focus on class and structural analyses, we don't see the trees for the forest.

I wonder what oppressive systems might have been informing my thinking. Gude (2014) describes neoliberal working conditions for teachers as "the industrial classroom" (p. 21), one driven by lean production private sector practices of "increased workloads for decreased pay" (Johnson, 2014, p. 12). In the second episode, I fault myself for not being able to keep up with the workload and produce academic gains for my students within these working conditions, and subsequently quit teaching at Central. Later, when I learn details about the working conditions of the childcare center workers, the idea that structural forces can have an impact at the classroom level is reinscribed. This uncovers a tension existing between my leadership in the caucus and my continued internalization of TFA ideology

that mythologizes the teacher as the most important factor in public education. Taking a critical democratic disposition provides a lens to see how continuing to hold neoliberal values plays a role in my abandonment of teaching as a social justice project.

Conducting 1-to-1 organizing conversations with childcare center workers serves as an intervention to neoliberal democracy. The collectivist approach the Better Beginnings campaign takes is to organize around the material working conditions of the childcare workers as well as the needs of working parents. Leading for critical democratic public education now means to me taking the issues of the individual and raising them to the collective level.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is built on several propositions, including: (1) racism is embedded in American society, (2) the use of storytelling adds “necessary contextual contours,” (3) the liberal approach to changing society must be challenged, and (4) civil rights legislation actually benefits Whites more than any other racial group (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rosiek, 2016). For Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT “speak[s] to innovative theoretical ways for framing discussions about social justice and democracy and the role of education in reproducing or interrupting current practices” (p. 9). A co-reading of critical race theory with the episodes asks: *How does racism inform my re-constitution?*

Re-examining the resignations of certain caucus members illuminates the organizing power of racism (Rosiek, 2016). Jose’s resignation letter prompts the caucus to call a meeting to discuss our internal functioning. I share that the group has been functioning as though our vision for a critical democratic society is our reality, particularly when it comes to the point about combating oppression; however, I have no solution to

offer, just the observation. Another concern brought up is that although we had agreed to use consensus to make decisions, most of the women of color in the group complain about not being listened to. I wonder how equity can be safeguarded, particularly for women and people of color, and how women of color, specifically, come into leadership positions if the idea of leadership is male and White oriented.

When individuals with different standpoints come together for a common interest, space for interest convergence is created, which tends to allow those who represent the dominant ideology to reap the most benefits (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Matthew shows this to be the case when he runs with the incumbent slate, using his NEW membership as evidence of his social justice orientation, and is elected to the NTU secretary-treasurer position. He does not submit an official resignation to the caucus, and it is not clear exactly when he becomes joined to the union leadership. I question how I could have trusted him (and at one point even defended him against Jose!).

A critical race analysis moves me out of the space of individual ego to the structures of White privilege and supremacy. One night at dinner, Jose tells me stories from his political activist history of attempts at cooptation by White liberals. His stories become “necessary contextual contours” for me, offering insights our study groups do not provide. Where other social justice educator caucuses have been able to struggle with and through internal racism (Asselin, 2019), NEW Caucus fails to address racial inequalities in a way that might lead to systemic change. Our practices are not in alignment with our theory. What I think I know about racism is not enough to interrupt it, let alone dismantle it. Being a leader for critical democratic public education means putting into action explicit anti-oppressive social practices.

Black Feminist Thought

“Is that Leah?” I peer across the street and make out the woman sitting on a wall. “Ms. Graves?” I’m canvassing for my school board re-election campaign. We talk for a few minutes. I explain how I am not on the slate supported by the mayor this time but am part of a team that is running a grassroots campaign. She shares insights about Newark politics, sometimes shaking the campaign literature to emphasize a point. I listen intently, knowing her wisdom from lived experiences is part of the collective social thought I seek from other Black women (Collins, 2000). A co-reading of the episodes with Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) asks: *How does centering Black women’s group standpoint have an impact on my re-constitution?*

It makes a difference that Carole Graves, a Black woman, led the NTU during the strikes in the 70s; and it wasn’t just in face because as she tells us at the study session, “My parents were socialists, so I understood who I was.” It makes a difference because this tells me I, too, can be a leader. In 2010, Karen Lewis, a Black woman, was elected president of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). She headed a slate of candidates that came from CORE, the social justice caucus within the CTU (Uetricht, 2014). Lewis, like Graves, is not an anomaly but part of a legacy of Black female educators who led unions and their communities (Johnson, 2004). Coupling gender with race, I come to “understand who I am” because I locate myself in an empowering tradition of leadership. The expressions of doubt I feel because I am not White, male, or a history teacher fade. Working with the childcare center workers has a similar impact. The third episode explains how the union organizing committees at both La Casa and UVSO are 100% women of color. Any question

of our capability to lead as women of color is eliminated, and if others attempt to co-opt our leadership legacy, I am better poised to protect it.

Implications for Teacher Preparation

This autoethnographic inquiry adds to the body of literature in teacher education that theorizes how teachers envision and then attempt to enact a just, antiracist, democratic reality of public education (Mayorga & Picower, 2018), while also revitalizing their unions (Weiner, 2012). As both workers and scholars, rank-and-file teachers are studying and writing about their activist experiences (Jacobin & CORE Caucus, 2014) in addition to conducting systematic research about social justice unionism (Asselin, 2019; Maton, 2016). This growing body of scholarship provides material for preservice teachers to consider in an ongoing process of becoming social justice educators.

The U.S. public education system has long been marked by standardized tests and a narrow curriculum, and functioned to produce apolitical citizens in a stratified society. The students entering higher education today have had their educational lives shaped by the dominant ideology of neoliberalism. In describing the history of the field of Social Foundations of Education (SFE), Tozer (2018) states, “The founding architects...were aware that they were constructing a counter-narrative to the ideology of unrestricted free-market capitalism” (p. 89). As a tension exists between SFE programs and the institutions of higher education in which they are housed (Lincoln, 2018), deliberate efforts have to be made by teacher educators to deconstruct neoliberalism (Schneider, 2015). However, these efforts cannot be limited to the social foundations classroom; they must be incorporated throughout teacher preparation programs if we are to foster the development of social justice educators.

If we want preservice teachers to develop professional communities and teacher leadership, teacher preparation programs must create spaces to cultivate practices aligned with these goals. In an explicit education for political activism, teachers learn how their leadership has implications beyond their classrooms. Teacher preparation programs employing a critical democratic framework encourage students to ask what it takes to confront the system effectively (Norton, 2008, as cited in Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2013); how we build solidarity across race, gender, and class; and how we disagree while maintaining democratic solidarity. Encouraging future teachers to grapple with these ideas before entering the classroom improves the chance they will take an activist stance for critical democratic public education.

Chapter 4. Manuscript 3: Becoming BlackWomanTeacher: Tensions and Possibilities in Cultivating Social Justice Dispositions in Teacher Leaders

Abstract: Social foundations of education is committed to the analysis of contemporary social, political, and economic contexts as they pertain to transforming education toward a democratic ideal. Within this analysis are the lived experiences of those who struggle to bring this change. Through critical autoethnography and the analytical practice of co-reading using critical social theories, the author invites you to discover with her how an “apolitical” teacher is re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education. This article illuminates some of what may be missing in teacher education, namely how infusing a womanist pedagogical approach can cultivate social justice educators.

NJ Transit. NJ Transit. Where’s the sign? I wander the halls of Penn Station until I find the waiting area of the commuter train line. I wish I had left from Poughkeepsie earlier. I am missing the morning sessions of the conference. I disembark from the train at Newark Penn Station.

Once outside, I use the street signs to orient myself and walk the six blocks to University Avenue. I pass a stretch of clothing and sneaker stores, and sidewalk vendors. This reminds me of school clothes shopping in the city. The mid-June weather makes me sweat, but I soon arrive on the Rutgers campus. I pick up a conference program for the National Hip Hop Political Convention and scan the session titles. I make my way to the session on education. The lecture hall is nowhere near full, maybe forty or fifty people. I take a seat and tune into the presenter. Another look at the program tells me his name is Ras Baraka.

In a couple of weeks, I will begin Teach for America’s Summer Institute. I make this trip to Newark so I can visit the city before any orientation activities. I want to see Newark on my own and I want to participate in the convention. As a 22-year-old Black

woman, hip hop as a music genre is a significant part of my life. I am intrigued by how it also can be connected to politics.

The public school system in Newark, NJ, like other urban districts, has a tumultuous history of education reform (Karp, 2010). In a series of cases known as *Abbott v. Burke*, the Supreme Court of New Jersey recognized the need to intervene on behalf of property poor urban school districts in order to meet the constitutional standard of providing a “thorough and efficient” education (Yaffe, 2007). Newark Public Schools (NPS) and thirty other school districts were designated “Abbott districts,” and the twelve decisions rendered between July 1985 and June 2004 provided these districts with new facilities; funding in near-parity with their suburban counterparts; and supplemental funding to pay for full-day kindergarten, high-quality pre-kindergarten for all three- and four-year olds, whole school reform, and supplemental educational programs such as summer school, added security, and school-based health and social service programs (Education Law Center, n.d.).

Shortly after this litigation began, New Jersey enacted its state takeover law in 1987 and, in 1989, became the first state to takeover a school district, namely Jersey City Public Schools (Institute on Education Law and Policy, 2002). NPS became a state-operated school district in July 1995 following a comprehensive investigation that uncovered financial mismanagement, widespread nepotism, and low academic achievement (Anyon, 1997; New Jersey State Department of Education, 1994). Under this governance structure, the local school board remained elected, but only in an advisory capacity as the ultimate decision-making power lay in the hands of the state education commissioner and the state-appointed superintendent.

As an academic field, social foundations of education is committed to the analysis of contemporary social, political, and economic contexts as they pertain to the future of education and to the transformation of education toward a democratic ideal (Tozer & Butts, 2011; Tutweiler, 2013). Teacher education programs that adopt this approach to teacher preparation have a goal of cultivating social justice dispositions in preservice teachers (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Khalil & Brown, 2015; Picower, 2011a; Picower, 2011b), while alternative preparation programs, such as Teach for America, tend to focus on the technical aspects of teaching—what teachers need to do and can do within the domain of their classrooms (Wetzler, 2010). What does being a social justice educator look like? And how can students learn how to be participatory citizens if their teachers are not prepared to teach them toward this end? The inquiry presented in this article seeks to explore these questions and others like them, as well as illuminate some of what may be missing in teacher education.

Autoethnographic Inquiry

I invite you to discover with me how an “apolitical” teacher is re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education. I answer Packer’s (2018) call to focus qualitative inquiry on how we re-constitute ourselves for emancipatory interests. The discoveries reported in this article come from a critical autoethnographic (Holman Jones, 2016) study of teacher political activism. Storytelling and counternarratives are integral parts of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and Black feminist theory (Dillard, 2014). Recounting moments that mark individuals’ commitment to social justice (marbley et al., 2015) creates a racial/cultural memory with the power to transform (Dillard, 2009).

This article focuses on shifts in teacher dispositions that occur within me from 2004 to 2018 as I am re-constituted into a social justice educator (Bondy et al., 2017). Specifically, this includes being a Teach for America corps member, high school English teacher, teacher educator, and college writing instructor. Due to space constraints, each vignette is written as a string of select moments of my development as a politically active educator. These experiences have been co-created with fellow-participants; therefore, I employ member-checking in the research process (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Specific names are included when the public record coincides or permission has been granted; otherwise, names are pseudonyms. First, I share my thoughts as experienced at the time. Then, I map the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership using the analytical practice of co-reading (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017) with critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), critical democratic theory (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000).

I grow up as a Black girl in a working-class family in upstate NY. Much different from Newark, the community is majority White and lower middle-class. There, always already seeing race is normalized for me at a young age; however, it isn't until my college years at an elite university that I perceive limitations have been put around me and these limitations have to do with my race. I'm intelligent, but I'm unprepared, ending up on academic probation after my first semester. I hold a number of part-time jobs to pay college costs. Working with elementary school students as a tutor and in afterschool programs inspires me to become a teacher.

I am accepted into the Teach for America (TFA) Newark 2004 corps and placed at Barringer High School to teach English. In the 2004-2005 school year, NPS enrolls 42,032

students; the two largest racial and ethnic categories are Black and Hispanic at 59.5% and 31.6%, respectively; and 70.7% of NPS students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (New Jersey Department of Education, 2019).

Vignette #1: The Un-Collaborative

I spot a “Kennedy High” sign. I take a window seat toward the back of the bus and allow my thoughts to consume me during the long ride. This has developed into my normal in the first week of Institute.

What have you gotten yourself into, Leah? I am surrounded by White people, something I got used to at Duke...but not really something I got used to. I have no one to sit next to and bemoan the early hour of our departure from the campus of Fordham University to our summer school teaching site. I was excited to be accepted into TFA, but now that I’m here, looking around, this doesn’t seem to be what I imagined it to be. Is this the face of educational change? The buses pull around to the back of the school, one after the other, and let us out.

The next morning, I linger in the top bunk. I listen to my roommates move around the dorm room. I decide to skip the bus and drive to Kennedy. Some of the weight lifts off me. I arrive earlier than the buses and park in a spot in the small parking lot at the front of the school. The security guard is surprised to see me come through this entrance and I learn the front side of the building.

After a couple of days, the school director approaches me to ask if I have been driving to the school. She is a young, White woman, just a few years older than I am. I reply that I have, and she tells me, in a suggestive tone, that I should be taking the bus with everyone else. I acknowledge her concern.

The next day I drive to Kennedy.

I meet Paula at Institute at the first event organized for the 2004 Newark corps. One reason I am drawn to her is because she is as tall as I am. I consider her a twin tower even though she displays every bit of her Irish heritage—fair skin, strawberry blonde hair, and blue eyes—while I am brown-skinned, brown-eyed and rocking my black hair natural. Fairly quickly, our initial conversation turns to observations about race here at Institute, and Paula refers to some work she did with Ntozake Shange—a playwright, poet, and Black feminist—in Gainesville, Florida (where Paula is from). I nod and smile. I don't know who that is.

I enter my dorm room where my two roommates are already busy at work grading the final exams they had administered earlier that morning. I drape myself comfortably across my bed and begin reading a book. There is a knock at the door, and Jennifer says that it is for me. Audrey, one of the four other TFA corps members in my teaching collaborative, stands on the other side of the threshold with a stack of papers in hand. She must have drawn the short stick.

“Since you didn't help to make the tests, you have to grade them all.” She thrusts the papers in my direction.

All I am thinking is that this girl must be insane! After all that these four put me through this summer, they have the nerve to decide this is the way to solve the problem? I want to cuss this White chick out so bad. Don't, Leah. Don't. It's not worth it. Don't become the “angry Black woman.” As I stare at Audrey, determining how to respond, the entire summer plays out in my mind.

Everything began so well. I was gung-ho about teaching; it seemed nothing could bring me down. Here I was, a part of something huge—Teach for *America*. However, in working with my collaborative, I often felt ignored. They talked without me, over me, and around me. Tension blistered inside of me as each hot day passed. I resolved to speak up, to let them know how their actions were making me feel. Just a couple of days before our collaborative was to create a final exam for the students we had been teaching all summer, I tried, but the attempt failed. I reverted to silence. I did not help to create the final exam. They did not seem to notice or care.

Just like each corps before us, we have been enlisted with the responsibility of closing the achievement gap and giving every child in this country the opportunity to attain an excellent education (Kopp, 2001). But, if my “colleagues” are not willing to listen to my perspective, if they do not think my experience is valid, how will they be able to accomplish this with the students in their future classrooms who will be mostly, if not entirely, students of color? Will my “colleagues” treat their students the same insensitive way they are treating me?

I decide not to hold back. This is an opportunity to get her to see what she is doing is wrong, and that she must change the way she is thinking. “I’m not grading anything. You guys made them, so you all grade them.” All the while, I keep direct eye contact.

“You’re acting inhumane—”

“Inhumane? Inhumane?! Are you serious? Did you just call me inhumane? The way y’all are treating me? I tried to get across to you how you were making me feel ‘less than’ with tears rolling down my face and everything. But no response. No kind of remorse. And you’re telling me *I’m* inhumane? Get outta here with that.” I laugh out loud.

She has a flabbergasted look on her face. It contorts as she searches for the words to say. An apology will do, but she says nothing.

“Anything else?”

She remains silent. I close the door, then look out the peephole. She walks away with the papers in her hand.

Identifying as an apolitical teacher stems from a minimal amount of civics education throughout K-16 and is fostered by my five-week training from TFA. The organization applies neoliberal concepts to teacher preparation (Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017), emphasizing management (Scott, Trujillo, & Rivera, 2016) over pedagogy. Being an effective teacher is measured by what they term the Teaching as Leadership approach, which consists of setting big goals, getting students and their influencers invested in these goals, planning purposefully, executing effectively, continually increasing effectiveness, and working relentlessly (Wetzler, 2010). We’re expected to be the driving factor in ensuring our students make significant academic growth, two or three years worth in one year, thereby closing the achievement gap (Wetzler, 2010); however, this “hyper-teacher-accountability” can lead to disillusionment and burnout (Brewer, 2014).

Vignette #2: Awakening

I fix my collar and tug at the bottom of my gray suit jacket. Students file into the classroom and take a seat. The instructions on the overhead projector direct them to write down the answers to as many brain teasers as they can. As the class fills up, I notice there are quite a few White students. Did the booklet about Newark TFA gave us say anything about the White population? Did the presenter on our bus tour leave this out?

“Dame un bolígrafo,” a student says to another. Wow, that Black student knows Spanish?

Barringer High School (BHS) is located in Newark’s North Ward, where the residents are predominantly Latinx; the school population reflects this part of the city. The New Jersey Department of Education (2019) reports the enrollment as 1,918 students in the 2004-2005 school year; 1,303 of these students are categorized as Hispanic and 577 are categorized as Black.

I use Mad Libs, a game I always liked, as a fun strategy to review parts of speech. I put the plastic on the overhead projector mirror. I ask for a noun, a verb, a preposition. Most students remain quiet; a few call out answers. I pause the lesson to do a quick check for understanding.

“What parts of speech do you know? . . . You know, the *eight* parts of speech?”
Noun, someone gets.

“Good, what is a verb?”

“Isn’t that an action word?” another asks in response.

“Not always, but yes...” This is eleventh grade English?

I recall learning about accommodations at Institute. It is my legal duty to modify my lessons as needed by students. I generate a list of students who I think may be classified, about twenty, and submit it to the child study team. A week later, I visit the office to check on the progress of my request. A case manager hands me back my list and says, “None of these students are classified. We can evaluate them if you want us to.” I politely tell her thank you and walk out in horror. Here I am, a first year teacher, and she’s confident I know when a student should be evaluated. If I initiate evaluations, I could be contributing

to the over-classification of students of color. Even worse, thinking my students are special needs when they're not is an act of disparagement. But, they're in the eleventh grade! Why hasn't anyone done anything about their lack of education?

Once a week, I attend an alternate route course at Seton Hall University along with the other corps members in my cohort. Successful completion of this year-long course coupled with attending sessions called Learning Teams one Saturday a month will allow us to receive a NJ standard teaching certificate. The professor, an NPS district-level administrator, gave us all a planner at the beginning of the year. I write weekly reflections in the spaces provided, including this one about the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), one of NJ's standardized tests:

Week of October 4th: Proctoring is a job from hell, but I'm happy I got to see the HSPA so I'm more comfortable with teaching HSPA skills.

Though the HSPA is administered in March of a student's junior year of high school, at Barringer instruction is interrupted for an entire week in October as well due to the low passing rate; almost all of the seniors have to re-take both the language arts and math sections of the exam.

In a class profile assignment, I write that the mission of my school is to "get students to pass the HSPA exam." I describe the general instructional levels represented by the students in my classes as "below grade level" since they "do not know conventions of writing, spelling, sentence structure, parts of speech, or much background knowledge" and they have a "limited vocabulary." I write that my students' special needs (behavioral and academic) are not met in my class because "they do not come to class." I also note that "I share my room with another teacher. I do not have enough chairs for all of the students on

my rosters. There is not enough physical room in my classroom for all of the students on my roster.”

At the October Learning Team session, I attend a workshop entitled, “Working Effectively with Administration and Staff” and take a note (along with my response) about a point shared by one of the other corps members:

TFAer: I’m concerned about the 10% of the population that is not African American because the principal is Afrocentric. He will tell you that he is a Black Panther. The school is not about diversity.

Me: Wow! Now think about the schools that are predominantly White who get “no cultural diversity.” [This is coming from the] same teacher who had a realization during Institute that she never thought about the fact that she is White. She was never put in a group and stripped of her individuality.

In November, I write this reflection about my students’ midterm exam results:

Week of November 22nd: I am disappointed and maybe even a little discouraged. Maybe about 75% of my students earned an F. Earned an F. They do no homework or any other outside work. How can you expect to pass my class? Am I being unfair? Am I too hard on them? Or am I holding them accountable? It seems like there’s a fine line.

By winter break, I’m seriously contemplating leaving at the end of the school year. I’m tired and overwhelmed. If my planning is up-to-date, then my grading is not—or vice versa. I research grad schools with education policy programs but also charter schools where I might want to teach.

Joshua and I become quick friends. He is a White man from a working-class family in Ohio. His TFA placement is at Malcolm X Shabazz High School in the South Ward, which has a predominantly Black population. Joshua tells me about a teaching resource he has discovered called, *Hip-Hop Poetry and the Classics* (Sitomer & Cirelli, 2004). We plan

a poetry unit together for our freshmen classrooms. At Barringer, Nina and I are both in our first year of teaching, but she is not TFA. She is a White woman who went through a graduate program to gain her teaching certification. In one of our first English department meetings, she asks me if I want to co-write a grant with her. Her idea is that we both teach an inquiry unit entitled, “What Is Struggle?” in our sophomore classrooms, and the culminating activity will be a field trip to see *Rent* on Broadway. We receive the grant from the district. Both of these relationships sustain me as a teacher and influence my decision to stay for a second year of teaching.

Nina and I continue to work together into the next school year. We submit another grant application to the district, this time for a year-long inquiry with juniors so that we can continue to build on the literacy skills we taught to the students when they were sophomores last year. Our main goal is to prepare the juniors for the HSPA. With the support of the principal, we create a before and after-school program called, “Change Today, Change Tomorrow (CT²)/HSPA Academy” that is mandatory for all juniors to attend. CT², a literacy curriculum largely based on techniques Nina uses in her classroom, is a three-week long workshop that allows students to choose when they will attend between October 2005 and February 2006.

Francesco, a fellow TFA corps members who immigrated to the U.S. from Italy as a teenager, tells me about the Abbott Leadership Institute (ALI), an organization housed at Rutgers-Newark. The director, Junius Williams, is an attorney and civil rights activist with a history of making change in the city; he founded ALI to create a space where parents, in particular, would build their advocacy and leadership skills through their participation in school reform (Williams, 2014). I am in the middle of my second year of teaching when I

first attend one of the Saturday morning classes. The title page of a slideshow is projected on a pop-up screen that stands at one side of the room: “Chicago’s Renaissance 2010.” My eyes widen as I learn Ren2010 is a plan to privatize Chicago’s public schools in four years, by 2010 (Lipman, 2011).

In 1995, the same year NPS was taken over by the state, New Jersey’s charter school law was enacted, establishing a new type of governance for the public schools. Groups of individuals, whether they be parents, educators, other citizens, or some combination thereof, were given the power to submit a charter application to be approved by the New Jersey Department of Education. The local school district was given no control over a charter school opening within the municipality. Additionally, the law allowed for charters to receive public funding at a rate of 90% of what traditional school districts received. In the 2005-2006 school year, ten charter schools operate in the city of Newark, enrolling 7% of public school students (New Jersey Department of Education, 2019).

Learning about Ren2010 gives me more to consider about charters than what TFA has shown me, particularly what it means to be “public.” Though I am not committed to TFA, I am committed to mastering TFA’s concept of a good teacher (Wetzler, 2010); however, factors beyond the school walls are beginning to creep into my analysis of what is occurring within the school walls.

The moment has arrived—the end of my second year of teaching and thus my “teaching commitment.” I will no longer be a TFA corps member, just an employee of NPS. Thanks to teaching collaborations, my teaching has improved. I have reimagined the textbook-centered district curriculum. English II becomes “Around the World in 90 Days!,” a focus on multicultural literature, and Eng III/American Literature becomes

“Americans Making Change Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.” My TFA program manager asks me to become a Learning Team Leader (LTL). Though I no longer want to be a part of TFA, I realize this is a tremendous opportunity to stay connected so that I can influence corps members coming behind me. I may even find more like-minded teachers, like Paula, Joshua, and Francesco. I become an LTL in the 2006-07 school year.

“Let’s go! Move to class!”

I walk up and down the hallway on auto-repeat as I often do between classes after the bell has rung. I approach a young Black man who shows no sign of budging. I address him directly and he responds by cursing at me. I am shocked but not by his language alone. He is wearing what I thought was a religious head garment, I don’t know the name, but if he’s religious he couldn’t be using such foul language. I guess I’m wrong and it’s just a hat anyone would wear.

My tone gets aggressive. “Who are you talking to? Come into this office right here.” I gesture toward the door of the English Department chair. I am in my third year at BHS and this is Mr. Quincy’s second. A Black man in his late thirties, he has developed good relationships with students, and I want to leverage this quality to impose some discipline on this student. The young man drops into one of the chairs as I proceed to tell Mr. Quincy why I have brought the student into his office.

“And take off your hat.”

“This ain’t no hat! It’s a kufi. Ain’t you Black?”

I freeze, not knowing how to respond. How can he even question that? Of course I’m Black, and proud of it. I purposefully teach Black writers. The New Jersey Amistad Commission, created by law in 2002 to ensure African American history is infused into the

curriculum in schools across the state (nj.gov/education/amistad/), held its first summer institute this past summer, and I attended. I want to protect my authority by remarking in contempt, “It can’t be by the way you’re acting,” but the fact is I am wrong. It is a religious garment, and I have just insulted this young man.

Mr. Quincy breaks the silence, playing his administrator role. This is my cue to leave the office and I take it.

Vignette #3: Teach for Newark

In the fall of 2007, I begin graduate school at Rutgers-Newark. I am one of four participants in an inaugural fellowship that creates an educational leadership pipeline into NPS for TFA alum. The fellowship is sponsored by Prudential, the insurance company headquartered in Newark, which gives millions of dollars every year to nonprofits through its foundation (Prudential, 2019). I have two classes this semester, Foundations of Urban Administration and Supervision and Urban Educational Policy and School Improvement. Both build on what I am learning at ALI Saturday classes about Newark’s education system and the Abbott court cases, as well as locate Newark in the national context of education policy and school reform.

I have built a healthy confidence in my teaching. I have a solid scaffold of readings, assignments, and instructional strategies. A shift has occurred in the caliber of professional development (PD) I participate in; whereas the PD in my first two years of teaching focused on the HSPA, in my third, and now fourth, year I attend workshops presented by the Rutgers Scholars program and National Writing Project. For the second summer in a row, I attend a teacher institute. This past summer, Nina and I attended the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center Institute, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, where

we learned about slavery and emancipation in New England. She and I also worked together with a third English teacher to vertically align the honors English program from tenth to twelfth grade.

I work with teachers outside of the English department as well. BHS is being treated with a number of school reforms, but the one at the center is career-based academies. One academy is aerospace. Some students actually graduate with a pilot's license. I learn through my master's degree internship with the scheduling vice principal that the reform is not being carried out with fidelity. There are four 80-minute blocks in our school day; each semester a teacher has one of these blocks off as a prep period. Teachers assigned to the same academy are supposed to have the same prep period so they can meet and plan, but this rarely happens. I see an opportunity to organize teachers into a professional learning community (PLC) (DuFour, 2004) based on solutions-oriented policies for the school, and I invite all teachers who have second block as a prep period. After a couple of meetings, we decide to propose a tardy policy for students. We seek the advice of the building union rep. He is unsupportive and tells us nothing will change. Still, we move forward and the principal accepts our process for documenting and providing consequences to students who arrive late to school.

Sue is another English teacher at BHS who started the same year I did, though Sue has prior teaching experience in a private school. She and I talk about the lack of English electives. BHS offers Creative Writing and Women's Lit. We are both scheduled to teach Creative Writing in the spring semester; however, considering our student population, we believe both African American and Latino Literature courses should be offered. This not only would be relevant to the students' lives but also ours as teachers (Sue is Puerto Rican

and Chilean). I have created a poetry unit in my “Americans Making Change Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” course called “The 51st State,” which features Puerto Rican writers and culture, but this is not enough.

In November, we bring our request to Mr. Quincy who inquires with the district administrators. We receive a response that BHS already offers African American History as a course. Mr. Quincy continues to follow up with district administrators. The next response comes via email from the district’s director of language arts, “Just a heads up—I’ve been informed that the new Amistad legislation calls for a cessation of discrete courses such as African Am lit—so we need to talk.” It’s mid-January and we still have not been given a concrete decision from the district; however, the BHS administration gives us permission to develop a curriculum for each course and teach them under the guise of Creative Writing. We survey the students who are scheduled for Creative Writing so that they can choose either African American Literature (with me) or Latino Literature (with Sue). I propose a Black History Month assembly and organize a planning committee of teachers. The Black History Cultural Extravaganza is held on February 29, 2008 and features performances by students in the African American Literature course.

Throughout my fourth year of teaching, I am a faithful attendee of ALI. In addition, I participate in ALI advocacy projects such as conducting surveys on parent engagement and advising on how we can develop a “Grow Your Own Teachers” program. At the May 2008 ALI graduation luncheon, I receive the “Abbott Leadership Advocacy In Teaching Award” which reads: “In Recognition of your advocacy work for Newark’s children, above and beyond the call of duty.” Most in the lounge are parents and their children. I scan the room and wonder, where are the teachers?

A month later, I launch Teachers as Leaders in Newark (TaLiN) with the following vision statement: TaLiN seeks justice and equality for all students through empowering Newark educators to be catalysts in the creation of social and educational alliances. The idea grows out of my participation in ALI and from the literature on educational leadership I am reading in my master's program. The book *Learning Power: Organizing for Education and Justice* (2006) inspires me to engage practices "that challenge cultural norms and seek to alter power relationships" (p. 17). I read narratives of participatory social inquiry projects predicated on the democratic traditions of John Dewey, Ella Baker, and *Brown v. Board* (Oakes & Rogers, 2006). I want to organize teachers around the politics of education and see TaLiN as the vehicle. An organizational meeting in July produces a membership of six teachers. We plan two inquiry projects: (1) How do you carry out a successful book bag drive? and (2) How can TaLiN become an effective organization for the city of Newark?

By the end of August, very few supplies are collected for the book bag drive and the membership dissolves. I have one more year of graduate school, immediately followed by serving as a school director at one of the regional TFA summer institutes and then starting a new position as a vice principal in the district. I foresee myself getting burned out and my tenure as a school administrator starting off poorly as a result. I request a leave of absence for the 2008-2009 school year. The new BHS principal denies my request. Reluctantly, I resign; however, being a full-time graduate student gives me the flexibility to plan and develop TaLiN.

I identify three symptoms of why so few Newark teachers are able to enact a pedagogy that lends itself to preparing students to be citizens in a democracy: inadequate

working conditions, insufficient professional development, and lack of understanding of the political economic context of urban areas. In the fall of 2008, I create “Think Tank” sessions around policies such as teacher evaluation and standardized testing. I present TaLiN to a progressive principal, Ras Baraka, the same man I encountered four years earlier at the education session of the National Hip Hop Political Convention. He allows me to hold the sessions at the school, Central High. A new, smaller group of teachers become members.

Now that I am not teaching during the day, I am available to participate in more education organizing activities. I attend a school funding rally and press conference organized by the Statewide Education Organizing Committee (SEOC) at the state courthouse. I feel empowered through this first-ever direct action experience. SEOC is parent-led with a mission of building collective power to change education policy for all schools. Branches exist in Newark, Paterson, Asbury Park, and Jersey City. SEOC is a member of a statewide education collaborative along with ALI. I learn about all of this at one of the ALI Saturday classes.

I join with a few of the members of the Newark branch of SEOC to propose changes to NPS’s school-based governance (Whitty & Power, 2000/2007, p. 223) structure. Currently, we have school leadership councils (SLCs); however, SLCs are unevenly implemented across the district. An ALI parent CC’s me on an email to the BHS SLC members. She expresses outrage that she and other parents were not informed of SLC training as the chair, a social studies teacher at BHS, promised to do. I forward the parent’s email to the entire BHS staff, thinking it will spark action on their part as they are disillusioned from the myth that urban parents have no desire to be involved in their

children's education. The new governance structure we propose will be more like local school councils, a model used in Chicago where the membership is elected and a majority of the positions are held by parents and community representatives (Ryan et al., 1997). We see this as more democratic and more likely to eliminate the hold school staff tend to have over the SLCs.

Built into my TFA fellowship is participation in a leadership course organized for Prudential employees. It is called "From Managing to Leading Others" and takes place in May 2009. I wonder how learning about leadership in a corporate context will enhance my educational leadership skills. To prepare for the three-day course, we submit various inventories that assess our leadership skill strengths and development needs as well as personality preferences. In discussing conflict modes, I reflect on the SLC situation. The parent gained a meeting with the SLC chair, the principal of the main campus, and the assistant superintendent, and the SLC began functioning in a more inclusive way; however, I detected some staff felt resentment toward me for the way I was pushing them to be responsive to parents and probably for how I was allowed to remain active in the school even though I was no longer a teacher there. For one of the conflict analysis questions, I respond: "My position is that I have valuable insight to the workings of the school and I would like to remain a part of it."

The last component of the fellowship, working as a school director at a TFA summer institute, falls through and so does the job as a district vice principal. Instead, I am given a research assistantship in the Rutgers-Newark Urban Systems doctoral program. Over the summer of 2009, five of us deliberate the vision statement, organizational structure, and choice for a first campaign for TaLiN. We choose a voter registration

campaign and plan a voter registration drive for the November report card night. We also partner with the teen center of a local nonprofit to provide workshops on critical literacy to the students. This latter action is not my idea of revolutionary change. I want to attack structures, policy. “Just” teaching is not enough. What kind of impact can we have with only fifteen students in the program?

In the spring of 2010, a TaLiN member suggests we co-sponsor a protest as part of the national March 4th Day of Action to Defend Public Education. Republican Chris Christie was elected governor last November, and it is anticipated that he will cut the state education budget. Underfunding public education is a predominant practice of neoliberalism, which drives contemporary U.S. education policy (Russom, 2012). With a handful of other organizations, we turn out about a hundred people—students, teachers, parents, and veteran activists. Student-made signs call out the budget cuts but also carry messages such as “We need jobs and education NOT war and militarization.” Two weeks later, at his first budget address, Governor Christie proposes a slew of budget cuts, the most damaging being to education (Statehouse Bureau Staff, 2010). Thousands of students from high schools around the state, including Newark, walk out of school in protest of these proposed funding cuts (Hu, 2010).

This spring is also my fourth year as an LTL. The TFA program director asks me to propose a session on any topic. The corps members will be allowed to attend a session of interest to them rather than meet in their grade levels or content areas as usual. Ending Learning Teams for the academic year with this choice in session is something that was started last year. At that time, I was approved to present a session entitled, “Teachers as Leaders in Newark: Being Active in Newark’s Community,” where I introduced the

organization but also led a broader discussion about the effect community activism can have on the classroom. This year, I propose to facilitate a session on the impact of the budget cuts on current corps members. The program director responds, “I think that might not be a good idea right now. A lot of the corps members are anxious about losing their jobs. How about unit planning?”

At the end of June, the state budget is passed with the education cuts. The majority of the positions cut from the district are civil service, not non-tenured classroom teachers (Galante, 2010). TFA maintains its contract with NPS to supply novice teachers (Brewer, Kretchmar, Sondel, Ishmael, & Manfra, 2016). In September, I receive an email from the program director explaining how Learning Teams have been reorganized and inviting me to reapply for a new All Corps Leader position. The day before I had announced TaLiN’s first professional development series entitled, “A Critical Education: Application and Praxis for the Classroom.” I consider how different my approach to teacher leadership is compared to TFA’s. The first session of the TaLiN series is “All About Unions,” yet TFA would not permit me to present on education funding. Unlike some other TFA alumni who have embraced management, entrepreneurship, and accountability as practices for achieving educational equality (Trujillo, Scott, & Rivera, 2017), I embark on a search for explanations of and solutions to educational inequality that are grounded in critical social theory (Anyon, 2009). I don’t apply for the position.

Vignette #4: Teacher Educator

I co-teach a course entitled, 21st Century Urban Educator, in spring 2011. It is new to the curriculum of the Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP) at Rutgers-Newark. The description reads in part: “...this course will analyze the complexities of teaching and

learning in urban schools, as well as examine how urban schools...can be structurally and pedagogically *transformed*...” Another graduate student and I lead two different sections; however, we plan together along with ALI director, Junius Williams. One of the weekly topics is Teachers as Agents of Change, and I invite two guest speakers to my section: Toni Baskerville-Richardson and Branden Rippey.

Toni is a former teaching colleague from BHS who has recently retired after serving thirty years in the district. Born and raised in Newark, she is a Black woman who grew up in a politically active household. I am volunteering for her Newark Advisory School Board campaign. She and two others make up The Children First Team, an all-Black team endorsed by several Newark Black elected officials and community leaders, most notably Ras Baraka who became the South Ward Councilman in 2010. I frame Toni’s presentation to my class with the sixth letter from *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* by Paulo Freire (2005), where he writes about the relationship between the educator and the learners and how an educator’s testimony is “the best way to call learners’ attention to the validity that is proposed for the attainment of what is valued” (p. 97). I ask Toni to give some of her testimony (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012).

In December, I was invited to a meeting with an agenda to organize a slate to run against the Newark Teachers Union (NTU) president, Joe Del Grosso, who has held the position since 1995. The other attendees were three veteran NPS history teachers. Branden, a White man, is one of these history teachers. We met and began organizing together during the budget cut protests earlier in the year. Branden serves as the union rep at the magnet high school where he teaches. It occurs to me that he embodies a different kind of union rep than the one I experienced at BHS in that he envisions the union as a vehicle for

educational change and empowerment for teachers. Branden talks with my students about the history of unions (Murphy, 1990) and explains how there is a difference between business style unionism—having a collaborative relationship with management and focus on serving union members as customers (Hagopian & Green, 2012)—and social justice unionism—when members mobilize to build “the broad political and social resistance needed to reverse the tidal wave destroying public education” (Weiner, 2012, p. 36).

According to the syllabus, students are required to complete a field experience, specifically to conduct a school walk, classroom observation, and teacher interview. However, I see an opportunity to provide a critical democratic experience. Last fall, a group of public education advocates, activists, and organizers formed the Coalition for Effective Newark Public Schools in response to the \$100 million donation to Newark public schools from Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg (Russakoff, 2015). The first million was spent to create PENewark, a nonprofit tasked to develop and administer a survey about education in Newark and then provide a report in three months. \$500,000 was spent on advertising and \$500,000 was spent on salaries for staff and canvassers (Giambusso & Calefati, 2010). In contrast, the Coalition is constituted by citizens volunteering their time, and the school survey we administer seeks to identify the needs of the schools as opposed to attitudes about education. The question at the top of the Coalition survey reads: “Does Your Child’s School Prepare Your Child to Be a Civic-Minded Person, Living a Good Life in a Productive Society?” Several students choose this field experience and interview a principal for the Coalition.

Toni and one of her teammates win the school board election in April 2011. The NTU election is held in May by mail-in ballot. Del Grosso runs for re-election to the

presidency. A third slate runs as well. Both challengers are crushed; Del Grosso gets three times as many votes as our candidate on the United For Change (UFC) slate and nearly ten times as many votes as the third slate candidate. Only about a third of the membership vote.

Although the NTU election is lost, it's not a loss to me. We have built a foundation for the movement I had imagined TaLiN to be: a diverse group of teachers fighting collectively for social justice. Also, volunteering on Toni's campaign moves me into a new space of electoral politics. For many years, a North Ward power broker dominated the school board elections, so the victory of The Children First Team contributes to a possible power shift. We create an organization—NewArk Political Action Committee—with the purpose of building an infrastructure of Black leadership to set policy. In my doctoral studies, I have been purposefully reading texts written about the Black radical tradition (Carruthers, 2018). Amiri Baraka—poet, political activist, and Ras's father—is at the center of this tradition in Newark. His leadership in the arts, politics, and community building helped to shift power relations in the 60s and 70s in favor of the local Black and Puerto Rican populations and position Newark on the national Black Power stage (Woodard, 1999). We aspire to build a new iteration of this tradition, and I am honored to be a part of this.

During both campaigns, a committee of local leaders appointed by Mayor Booker and Governor Christie was interviewing candidates to be the next state-appointed superintendent. Cami Anderson, a White woman, is chosen for the job. Anderson is a transplant from New York City, a TFA alum, and a graduate of the Broad Academy, a program that trains individuals (often with no teaching experience) to become superintendents of large school districts over the course of several weekends. It was

established by billionaire Eli Broad and reflects his support of corporate education reform (Parents Across America, 2011).

In the fall of 2011, I teach UTEP's Social Foundations of Urban Education course. I shadowed the regular professor, Carolyne, a White woman, in the spring in preparation for her to go on sabbatical. I was particularly struck by the way Carolyne wove the personal in with the political and made the pedagogical orientations of the course explicit, which included feminist, critical, democratic, anti-racist, experiential, and liberatory. Carolyne explained on the first day of class, "This course has the purpose of giving access to perspectives that will interrupt the perspectives we get about education 24/7," as well as how the students should think critically about the always already political nature of educational policies and procedures as they construct their philosophy of education. She also highlighted how our power is connected to our integrity and how our integrity is about keeping our word; she asked the students to sign contracts that say they will be in communication to restore their integrity if they don't honor the course expectations. I adopt these same practices in the fall semester.

I continue to tie UTEP coursework to political activity occurring in Newark regarding public education. Over the summer, TaLiN and UFC co-hosted a reading group on teachers and the labor movement. Branden and I take the lead on organizing another set of sessions on union history for the fall. I advertise these sessions to my students as an opportunity to fulfill field experience hours. People's Organization for Progress, a "grassroots,...politically progressive association of citizens working for racial, social and economic justice" (njpop.org), is holding a daily demonstration called "The 'Daily People's Campaign' for Jobs, Peace, Equality and Justice" at a location near campus. The

time coincides with our class time, so I announce to the students we will be taking a field trip. One student asks in earnest, “Will we get arrested?”

I teach 21st Century Urban Educator again in Spring 2012. Reflecting on how last spring’s course was delivered, I organize my section so there is less overlap with Social Foundations (urban context) and possibly the methods courses (teaching and learning theory). I interpret the purpose of this course as developing the identity of a teacher in terms of the practices she or he adopts, so I arrange my syllabus as a series of inquiries and group the students into PLCs. How can we discuss being a 21st Century Urban Educator without talking about unions? Since nothing exists in UTEP’s curriculum, I create one of the PLC discussion topics to be “Teacher as Worker” with the coinciding inquiry, “What is the role of the teachers union?” To spark the discussions, I assign the reading, *Hopes on the Line: Newark Teachers Strikes* (2002), which serves a dual purpose of describing teachers union struggles and providing historical and political context of urban schools. When I submit my syllabus, the director suggests I remove the union piece, but I include it anyway.

Vignette #5: Back in the Classroom

Working part-time as an adjunct while I pursue graduate studies is not sustainable for me financially. I want to teach again, but who will hire such a troublemaker? I ask Ras Baraka. Coincidentally, an English teacher just resigned. I start teaching at Central High School (CHS) right away in April 2012. Since the UFC slate has been reorganized into the Newark Education Workers (NEW) Caucus, a caucus within the Newark Teachers Union (see Manuscript 2), I suspend TaLiN. I do not want a duplication in efforts to organize social justice educators. Officially an NPS teacher again, I am elected the first chair of the caucus.

CHS has been undergoing a school reform effort that started in 2009 called the Global Village School Zone. The Global Village, which consists of CHS and six feeder elementary schools, is part of the Broader, Bolder Approach, a national initiative that seeks “to develop a comprehensive school-reform strategy that will address issues and challenges arising out of the distressed social contexts in which families and public schools are situated through a variety of school-based interventions” (Noguera & Wells, 2011, p. 12-13). Some of the interventions include an extended school day, a health clinic located within the building, and a college-prep curriculum. It is a reform effort from the ground up and supported widely by the community.

In 2010, the NJDOE had identified CHS as “persistently lowest achieving,” making it eligible for the federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. SIG is created through funding from the No Child Left Behind Act and offers up to \$6 million over a three-year period per school. The schools that apply are required to select from four models: Turnaround, Restart, School Closure, or Transformation. CHS is awarded the full \$6 million to enhance the Global Village through the Transformation model.

Standardized test results released in the summer of 2011 showed the number of CHS students passing the language arts section almost doubled compared to 2010 and more than doubled for the math section (Mooney, 2011). The Global Village reform is making a positive difference for this school where 89.8% of the students are identified as Black in the 2011-2012 school year, and 88.6% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (New Jersey Department of Education, 2019).

After finishing the last few months of the 2011-2012 school year at CHS, I am invited to write curriculum over the summer for a writing intensive course. As the name

suggests, the course only teaches writing skills and will last for one report cycle; over the course of the year, I will teach it to all freshmen. When I receive my schedule at the end of August, my department chair tells me I am not going to be able to teach the writing intensive course because we're short on teachers and we need the core English courses staffed first. I have two groups of freshmen girls (CHS has single-sex classes on the freshmen level) and the one section of honors freshmen English. CHS is on a forty-minute period schedule, but literacy is taught as a block for freshmen by scheduling the core English class next to a Nonfiction Reading and Writing course; the honors class is scheduled as a double period without the Nonfiction course. This means I end up teaching six periods within the school day, beyond the contractual five. I agree to this because I know I will receive one-fifth of my salary for the additional period, money I can save so I won't have to work next summer.

I receive a supplemental pay form in my mailbox with a note to fill it out for the extra period I teach, the extra forty minutes. I figure it is a mistake and ignore it. I receive the form again, so this time I go to the clerk in the main office and explain I do not teach during extended day, which is time beyond the regular length of the school day. My extra period is within the contractual hours. She shrugs her shoulders in confusion and announces she is just following orders. It turns out if I want any extra pay, it will have to be at the contractual hourly wage. I do the math and see that I will receive only about half of the pay I would receive if the contract were followed.

"Wait, that can't be right," I step off the scale, allow it to reset, and then stand on it again. "I lost seven pounds in a week?"

“That puts your team ahead in the weight loss challenge,” the school nutritionist says as she makes the note on her chart. “What have you been doing?”

I know that I have been putting in a lot of hours planning, teaching, and grading these first couple of months of the school year, but losing so much weight so quickly probably isn’t a good thing. Even so, I account this to being part of the team. One of the core values at CHS is, “All hands on deck everyday: we all sweat, we all win.”

A clear structure has been put in place for developing the pedagogy of teachers. In addition to the district-scheduled staff development days, we have departmental and grade level PLCs, and a monthly session called Big Tuesdays. The last Tuesday of the month, the bell schedule is adjusted to give an hour block at the beginning of the day; students attend an assembly while teachers participate in working sessions on the identified focus practices of differentiating instruction, checking for understanding, providing student-centered instruction, and implementing Common Core shifts.

This is a world of a difference from four years ago when I left BHS. The English curriculum is still textbook-centered, but the textbook is a precursor to college prep courses. It is also consumable so that students can annotate the pages, though I’m told to print any pages I want the students to write on from the PDF file so we can use the books again next year. This seems counterintuitive, and possibly more expensive as there is a limited amount of printing paper and once the ink from classroom printers expires we, teachers, are responsible for buying new toner cartridges. I am also bothered by the use of corporate education reform accountability measures, including spreadsheets to be filled in with student assessment data and regular classroom walkthroughs by groups of administrators with checklists in hand. Even so, at the October staff development day, I am

recognized as the “Star” of the second CHS administrators walkthrough. I trust the school leadership and follow all directives because the results speak for themselves—the students are getting higher scores on the test.

By Thanksgiving, I feel I am being stretched to my limit (Johnson, 2014). The monthly CRTs (criterion-referenced tests) we are required to administer are teacher-created and reflect the current standards being taught, but they’re not authentic or meaningful, and are only relevant to state standardized testing. I did not expect it to be this way at *Central*. Is this how they have been getting improved test results? It is November’s Big Tuesday and Principal Baraka is giving a speech on how we all have to be on board with the same practices; if only two teachers are giving homework, these two teachers become the “problem teachers” students complain about. I write in my notebook that his talk brings me solace. I have been struggling with classroom management, something I didn’t experience at BHS. I know I hold my students to high expectations, but my CHS students, my girls, are not complying. I have to change something, so I ask for help. The academic vice principal visits my class upon my request. In our debrief, she offers me the suggestion of incorporating an affirmation to improve the classroom culture. Between the two groups of non-honors English, I have fifty-one female students. Three are Latina; the rest are Black, from the U.S., the Caribbean, and Africa. I teach them an affirmation I say to myself every morning. I set it up as a call-and-response for when I need to gain the whole class’s attention. I call out, “My face is beautiful.” They respond, “My eyes are very pretty. My skin is a wonderful shade of brown. I deserve love and respect. I love myself!”

I return from winter break hopeful, but it doesn’t last long. I remain conflicted about the frequency of assessments we give the students. I receive memos reprimanding me for

not turning in required documentation. A handful of students continue to be a disruption to learning, but any consequences doled out are not changing the behaviors. All year, an administrator has been lining the freshmen boys up in the hallway, right outside my door, toward the end of the day, usually to yell at them. I learn to treat it as white noise, though one day I hear him use a derogatory term and my stomach curls. I guess it must be working. I'm so stressed out, I'm willing to try just about anything at this point—so I start lining the girls up. “Toes on the line! You're going to stand there until you're quiet. It's up to you.”

It's the end of February. I am so sick. I write poetry to decompress. The last line of one poem about CHS reads: “...my hands are chained to the deck” (<https://blackwomanteacher.wordpress.com/2013/02/21/all-hands-on-deck/>). On Big Tuesday, Principal Baraka touches upon student behavior in his speech. He points out that the students allow us to line them up because they could rebel and cuss us out, but they don't. Normally, his words would inspire me to push through, find another way, but I don't feel right about my teaching. On Friday morning, I sob uncontrollably in the shower, figuring I should get it all out now; there's no point in taking the day off. I make it through my second-third period block, barely, but I cannot hold out for my fifth-sixth block. I cry in front of the class and have to leave the room.

I do not go to work on Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday or Friday. My primary care physician writes me a “prescription” to stay home for a month contingent upon seeing a therapist. I follow her orders. While I'm on leave, I continue to write poetry about the tensions I'm feeling (<https://blackwomanteacher.wordpress.com/2013/03/20/deliberate/>). I come back in April. I write the girls a letter and read it to them:

Dear Students,

I love you. You are beautiful, funny, intelligent. I would be proud to have any of you as my little cousin, as my little sister, or even as my daughter...

Who I am and who I am as a teacher, which is really the same, wasn't matching up with my actions. I couldn't teach 6 periods and 3 different preps and fulfill all my other teaching duties and obligations. Something had to give and unfortunately it was you, a sense of community in this classroom.

I ask the students to write their own reflection letters which they can address to me, the class, or their own self. I finish out the school year. I never fully recover, but I want to stay at CHS. I know I can do better next year.

I arrive at the first August staff development day ready for the 2013-2014 school year. I get my schedule. My request to teach upperclassmen has been granted, but I have too many classes. Knowing I will not receive the contractual pay, I decline teaching the extra class. Early the next morning, I shoot up out of bed screaming. I had a nightmare I was teaching freshmen again. Is this intuition? I don't have freshmen, but I do have the same problems concerning practice. I'm teaching three different courses, all for the first time and with minimal preparation since my schedule was only set at the end of August. This year I'm sharing a classroom with someone who teaches another subject. Finding space for each of our teaching materials is extremely difficult. One of my classes is overenrolled, and the desks are so close it's difficult to walk between them when the chairs are occupied. I cannot bear these conditions. I feel I'm being set up for failure.

At the end of September, I write a letter to Principal Baraka explaining how I am mentally, emotionally, and spiritually drained. He meets with me to talk further and offer some solutions, but it is of no use. A couple weeks later, I use a Home Depot cart to move my belongings from my classroom to my car as the rest of the faculty engages in a staff

development session in the library. Only a year and a half back into teaching, I quit. I am heartbroken. And I feel like a phony. Last school year, NEW Caucus was successful in shifting more education workers' to act against neoliberal assaults. We ran another slate for the NTU leadership, losing the presidency by eight votes. Even so, I cannot figure out how to be both an effective teacher for urban students and an organizer for social justice unionism (Weiner, 2012). Defending public education is exhausting. How can I be the critical educator I want to be if I have to exist in the reality of neoliberal education reform while fighting against it?

Later in the fall of 2013, Superintendent Anderson announces "One Newark," a universal enrollment system to provide families with one application for both district and charter schools. Most of the city's charter schools opt-in. In the 2013-2014 school year, twenty charter schools operate in the city of Newark, enrolling 25% of public school students (New Jersey Department of Education, 2019). The Global Village is dismantled by Anderson; it is not part of One Newark.

I am hired as a community organizer with New Jersey Communities United (NJCU). My work at NJCU focuses upon improving the quality of and access to early childhood education and care by organizing working parents and unionizing childcare center workers. At weekly staff meetings, I join with my co-organizers in debriefing the work of our campaigns which include housing justice, immigration justice, bank worker organizing, in-home childcare provider organizing, and education. I am immersed in a world of social justice beyond the education struggle. Sociopolitical theories and history of the urban context I learned in graduate study play out in front of me.

The education organizing efforts of the community are re-named to the Alliance for Newark Public Schools. The Alliance takes up the charge of increasing the number of community schools in Newark, publishing a plan for Newark schools which aligns with the theory of the Broader, Bolder Approach and Global Village, and foregrounds the return to local control as the way to achieve this plan (Take Back Newark Schools, 2014). Ras Baraka is elected mayor in May 2014 and follows through on his campaign promise to support the expansion of community schools.

NJCU has a partnership with the Newark Students Union (NSU) to assist the students with strategic planning, meeting space, and other needed resources. I am inspired by these students who stage a four-day sit-in at the Board of Education in February 2015. They take over the superintendent's office with four demands: Cami Anderson's immediate resignation; local control over NPS; NPS be fairly and fully funded; and all schools remain open (stop closing schools). Anderson resigns at the end of the school year.

Governor Christie appoints Chris Cerf, former NJ Commissioner of Education and another Broad Academy graduate, as the new superintendent. He is sent to finish what Anderson started. In a presentation at his first advisory board meeting in September 2015, Cerf declares that his primary goal is to return Newark to local control. During the meeting, I am approached by Mayor Baraka's Chief Education Officer about running for a seat on the school board. A few months pass before a sit down conversation occurs. Even with Cerf seemingly wanting to return Newark to local control, I know now more than ever we need board members who are committed to ensure this process is a critical democratic one and who will hold those in power accountable. I know I am capable.

I am asked to run for the school board on a slate with two other candidates known to support the proliferation of charter schools. This is an attempt to bring unity between public school and charter school advocates in Newark. This also entails various Newark power brokers working together rather than in competition. The growth of the charter sector has won them a seat at the table, so they choose a candidate; the North Ward political machine chooses a candidate; and I will be considered “the Mayor’s candidate.” I am conflicted about how I will be perceived as supporting two people who are charter school advocates. I determine I am strong enough to hold my position. I am no longer the heartbroken teacher who left CHS with her head hung low.

In April 2016, all Unity Slate members win in the school board election. Appointed as chair of the Program and Instruction Committee, I immediately put the status of the district’s implementation of the Amistad legislation on the agenda. When parents from CHS complain about overcrowded classrooms, I launch an inquiry into class sizes across the district as a strategy to make plain this inequity that is often brought up in Newark but never shown concretely. In addition to improving the quality of education students are receiving, my goal as a board member who is a progressive educator is to disrupt neoliberal logic (Freire, 2005) and transform the conversation to one that is framed by a critical democracy (Mirra & Morrell, 2011).

After three years with NJCU, I am ready to return to my graduate studies and teaching. The last semester I was enrolled was spring 2012, when I started teaching at CHS. At the same time I am granted conditional readmission to my doctoral program, I receive an email from the Rutgers Graduate School of Education on the New Brunswick campus offering me a class to teach for fall 2016. I accept and put in my 30-day notice to NJCU.

At first, I am not excited to be teaching the one-credit Classroom Organization-Secondary course, but I change my mind when I receive the syllabus; an early required reading discusses culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) and how “CRCM is a frame of mind, more than a set of strategies or practices, that guides the management decisions that teachers make” (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004, p. 27). This approach is aligned with my beliefs as an educator and I’m eager to learn more along with the preservice teachers enrolled in the course.

The next semester, spring 2017, I teach developmental reading at Essex County College (ECC). The main textbook covers ten reading skills and the syllabus requires the students to read two texts: an anthology of short stories and poems, and *The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass*. I realize for the average student none of these texts will be appealing. Particularly Frederick Douglass’s autobiography as it may occur to the students as irrelevant or uninteresting, or even inaccessible because it was written so long ago. On the first day of class, I assign a news article about DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). I am aware of the diversity of the student population. Of the 8,700 students enrolled at ECC, 88% of them are identified as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino (Essex County College, 2017), but this doesn’t begin to capture the various nationalities and ethnicities of these students, or citizenship status. Given the recent presidential election of Donald Trump and his perspective on immigration reform, I imagine the students have thoughts to express or questions to ask. And they do; one student shares that he is a Dreamer. I lecture about critical reader response theory, teaching my students that they are a source of knowledge for understanding the text. By the end of the semester, when we read *Frederick Douglass*, the student-led discussions go beyond comprehension to include

insights about modern day slavery in the forms of human trafficking and economic inequality.

In the fall of 2017, I am assigned to teach a developmental writing course. Again, there's a main textbook, plus another one for grammar. The syllabus requires four essays in addition to the midterm and final exam essays, but no other guidelines are provided regarding the topics or types of essays. My students are experts about their own lives, so I choose essay topics that they will easily be able to generate content for so we can focus on mastering writing strategies. The first essay topic is "My Major," where the students think about why they have chosen to attend ECC. The next topic is "My Culture," and I prompt students to identify a culture with which they identify. We spend time defining culture until it's clear that students can write about more than food or a holiday tradition. They are also assigned a literary analysis essay and a documented essay where I ask them to write a counterargument. The purpose of the counterargument essay is to have them place themselves in an opposing position so they may discover a different perspective. In between these major assignments, I give them low-stakes single paragraphs to write so I can provide them with targeted feedback and multiple opportunities to be successful. Over the next year, I continue to teach in this manner. I am renewed through my teaching.

Thinking with Theory

A thinking with theory approach to analysis asks "what?" and "how?" as opposed to "why?" questions. As Jackson and Mazzei (2017) explain, "We use theory...to open up previously *unthought* approaches to thinking about what is happening in our research sites and encounters" (p. 720, emphasis in original). I invite you to think with me about my reconstitution into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education.

Though social justice, and therefore social justice educator, remain contested terms (Bondy et al., 2017), “how teachers think about their work and interpret what is going on in school and classrooms; how they understand competing agendas, pose questions, and make decisions; how they form relationships with students; and how they work with colleagues, families, communities, and social groups” (Cochran-Smith, 2010 as cited in Bondy et al., 2017, p. 4-5) function to create an environment that furthers justice (or not). In short, “the dispositions of teachers and teacher educators matter in social justice teaching and learning” (Bondy et al., 2017, p. 5). While considering the shifts in dispositions that occur within me, we will plug critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998), critical democracy (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) into assemblages with the above vignettes. Though I take each one at a time in thinking about a critical democratic public education in the current neoliberal era, I acknowledge these constructs are in fact entangled.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is built on several propositions, including: (1) racism is embedded in American society, (2) the use of storytelling adds “necessary contextual contours,” (3) the liberal approach to changing society must be challenged, and (4) civil rights legislation actually benefits Whites more than any other racial group (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rosiek, 2016). For Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT “speak[s] to innovative theoretical ways for framing discussions about social justice and democracy and the role of education in reproducing or interrupting current practices” (p. 9). Studying the racist ordering of public education is a strategy for reconceptualizing this system so it centers the humanity of students, teachers, and parents (Rosiek, 2016). A co-reading of critical race

theory with the vignettes asks: *How does locating the humanity of the racially minoritized inform my re-constitution?*

My experience at TFA Institute is oppressive, but it also affords me a space to be differently. Certainly, I had experienced racism before Institute, but I seldom took a stand against it. Racism, to me, was about a set of individual acts, like when a person of color is followed around a store by a manager or is denied an opportunity for which she is qualified. Talking with Paula, who presents as an anti-racist White person, I realize I have much to learn theoretically about racism; however, I do know I am an expert in my lived experience. When I share how I've been marginalized by my teaching collaborative, I choose to do so with the entire group of English teachers rather than with my teaching collaborative alone. A possibility occurs to me that my testimony may have an impact on others; I am not the only one who is moved to tears. When Audrey, one of my co-teachers, calls me "inhuman" about a week later, I feel outrage, but I also know I *am* human and I can choose to internalize her words or not.

Even though I engage in a practice that locates my own humanity as a racially minoritized person, i.e., sharing my lived experience, and I recognize how it empowers me, I don't fully embody this disposition. In my practice as a teacher, I treat students of color in inhumane ways. For example, at BHS I readily embrace a deficit mindset that my students must be special needs, and at CHS I line up the girls in the hallway. These actions implicate me in systems of oppression as a perpetrator of oppression. So, why, even after all of my studying, activism, and organizing, after my proclaimed commitment to social justice, do I engage in oppressive acts?

At least two possibilities come to mind. First, being pro-Black does not equal being anti-racist. Early in my teaching tenure, I encounter this tension when the young Black man at BHS challenges my Blackness after I call his kufi a hat. I invoke the authority of the state, and in turn the dominant ideology (Tozer, 1985) of anti-Blackness (Ransby, 2018), to disparage his culture. His question disconcerts me and makes me wonder what it means to be Black. It is a question that lingers in the back of my mind as I am learning about the historical and sociopolitical context of Newark through ALI and graduate studies. As my framing of educational failure shifts from individuals not caring to institutional racism, I realize it is not enough to identify as Black when delivering a social justice education because the racially minoritized can also be actors in the perpetuation of the structure of White supremacy.

Second, symbolic violence helps me think about the racist dispositions I hold. Anderson (2013) explains Bourdieu's concept:

“[W]hen dominated groups and classes begin to evaluate the world in terms of the systems of meaning that have been imposed upon them, without recognizing this change in perspective, they perceive the social order as just. In so doing, they perpetuate the structures of inequality that serve the interests of dominant groups, and, thus, consent to their own subordination.” (p. 691)

When I come to teach at CHS, my expectation is that a radical education is being delivered at the school, but what I find are competing interests—an attempt to marry the vision of a progressive educational leadership with instructional practices, when taken as a whole, that reflect those being championed by neoliberal education reform leaders (Lemov, 2010). I find the working conditions mirror those of charter schools—minimal pay for maximum

work concealed by slogans meant to induce a feeling of shared expectations. Teaching at CHS, then, becomes an act of symbolic violence. Anderson (2013) argues TFA enacts symbolic violence on its corps members and the students they teach in that it does not consider in a critical way how its mission perpetuates systems of inequality. I revert back to this way of thinking I once held as a corps member, internalizing my failure as a teacher rather than questioning how the practices and structures in place are misaligned with my teaching philosophy, or how my silence about my challenges contributes to the very collective oppression I seek to interrupt. This questioning opens up a space for possibilities for how to proceed, how to re-align with a disposition of locating the humanity of the racially minoritized at the center of educational practices. This act must be practiced continually until it becomes normalized for me.

Critical Democratic Theory

Contemporary political scholars theorize an inclusive, participatory democracy (Mirra & Morrell, 2011; Oakes & Rogers, 2006). They argue for a “shift from criticizing the presumed deficits of individual schools and specific racial groups to analyzing the problematic assumptions in curriculum, pedagogy, and policy that structure success and failure” (Mirra & Morrell, 2011, p. 411). Mirra and Morrell (2011) identify “elements of the democratic tradition that provide us with the ideological tools to name and challenge systemic inequality”—namely collectivism, production, and activism—in order “to create a framework for a critical democratic theory” (p. 411). A co-reading of critical democratic theory with the vignettes asks: *How does enacting elements of critical democracy affect my re-constitution?*

Choosing not to apply for the All Corps Leader position is a turning point that marks my commitment to social justice in a critical democratic tradition. TFA sees itself as “build[ing] a true democracy” (Wetzler, 2010, p. 25) through the people it selects and trains to become effective teachers. This kind of democracy, however, aligns conceptually with a neoliberal democracy in that TFA espouses values of individualism, consumerism, and passivity (Mirra & Morrell, 2011). The first time I propose to present TaLiN at a Learning Team session, it’s accepted because I’m able to draw the connection to the principle on TFA’s Teaching As Leadership rubric to “Invest students and those who influence them in working hard to achieve the Big Goals.” As long as the dialogue is relegated to a corps member’s individual classroom, TFA is comfortable, but talk of structural change is deemed inappropriate, something from which corps members must be shielded. I find denying me to present about the tentative state budget cuts anti-democratic. I can’t influence the narrative if I have no right to speak, and this is not the kind of environment in which I want to work.

As neoliberalism is the dominant political ideology of this time (Brown, 2015; Lipman, 2011), it influences the nature of democracy as practiced. It takes a concerted effort to practice critical democracy. In the community, I work collectively with others to take action against injustices. As a teacher leader in the school, I collaborate with my colleagues to provide culturally relevant curriculum and create policies to support students’ academic success. I struggle, however, with the idea of a critical democratic classroom. I present texts that reflect aspects of students’ cultures and assign writing tasks that provide students choice in topics, yet explicitly creating a space for students to deliberate over social issues eludes me. This is due in part to the priority placed on standardized testing

and in part to feeling insecure about my own political knowledge. I also don't want to pass on my beliefs to my students as some form of indoctrination.

Embracing the production element of critical democracy is key to my reconstitution. At ECC, I make a commitment to structure discussions so that I talk very little, usually only to ask a student to clarify a point or to add a follow-up question to a student's statement. When I do participate beyond the role of facilitator, I deliberately acknowledge my positionality and how the thoughts I share stem from this space. Not only do my students learn from each other in our class discussions but I learn from them as well, and together we create new meanings of our worlds from the texts we read. Writing assignments like the counterargument essay serve the same purpose in that they model for my students how to consider other perspectives and how to incorporate new knowledge into their present ways of thinking and being.

When I forward the ALI parent's email to the BHS staff, I truly believe people will be outraged and want to do something, but knowledge alone doesn't always move people to action. Plus, it can be consumed uncritically. Knowledge production, on the other hand, requires active dialogue among individuals to create meaning in which they then have an investment. Working as a community organizer, I receive plenty of practice in knowledge production via the many one-on-one conversations and union organizing committee meetings. Before we can take action, we have to develop common understandings. I see implications for my teaching. As a teacher educator, I adopt practices that allow me to frame a syllabus that privileges the critical while acknowledging bias so space can be created for many perspectives to be heard. By the time I return to the writing classroom, I am well equipped to engage students in strategies for thinking critically about the world

around them. At ECC, the assignments and discussions create spaces for students to express their knowledge and expertise, so they can talk, be authentic, tell the truth as they understand it, and learn to listen to multiple truths (Dillard, 2014).

Black Feminist Thought: An Epilogue

After serving a term of three years on the Newark school board, I run for re-election in April 2019. I spend election day driving around the city from poll to poll with my mother and one of my ECC students, a Black woman barely in her twenties who answered my call for volunteers. (I lose the election.) The discussions we hold in the car rival a college seminar, covering the everyday themes of our lives as Black women (Collins, 2000). According to Collins (2000), an ethic of personal accountability, an ethic of caring, use of dialogue, and lived experience form the contours of a Black feminist epistemology; these, in turn, inform Black women's activism, a way of being in the world, also referred to as womanism (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). Social justice from a womanist approach to teaching means a commitment to naming injustices, resisting complicity, and having a deep-seated belief in social change (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). A co-reading of the vignettes with Black feminist thought asks: *How does womanist teaching influence my re-constitution?*

"Deliberate"

Beautiful Black girl
Funny
Complex
Smart
Who caused your self-hate?
Not being able to relate
to no one but the same?

Too busy teaching
Couldn't imagine your hurt,
lack of self-worth

Leading by example
must be conscious
must be deliberate
Shouldn't be left up to chance,
a lottery we can't afford to enter.

I write this poem while I am on leave from CHS. I am speaking to/about myself as much as I am speaking to/about the girls. I'm "[t]oo busy teaching" and so my actions aren't matching my beliefs, causing internal conflict. I reflect here on how stances I (and other Black women teachers committed to social justice) hold have an impact on my teaching, namely "the salience of female role models, ...caring as a critical form of activism, and...the self as continuously developing" Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005, p. 440). First, inviting Toni as a speaker for the 21st Century Urban Educator course is a deliberate act on my part to encourage the prospective teachers to think about ways in which they can adopt a womanist approach to teaching. Toni is only one of my role models, included in the likes of Ella Baker, Septima Clark, and bell hooks. I choose the affirmation to incorporate into my classroom management because I know it will boost the girls' self-esteem and foster a positive relationship between us. I explain what an affirmation is and share that what I am about to teach them is the affirmation I recite every morning. Demonstrating care is as much a part of my teaching as grammar and vocabulary lessons. Finally, I acknowledge I am an unfinished being. I strive to implement teaching practices of an engaged pedagogy elucidated by bell hooks (1994), where I provide conditions for the intellectual and spiritual growth of my students while being vulnerable and taking risks

as an educator. The transformation that takes place over the fifteen years documented in this article is onto-epistemological in nature and traces my commitment to the social justice project from my group standpoint, referred to as womanist teaching (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005).

Implications for Teacher Preparation

Where do preservice teachers learn about (in)equity, critical democracy, and the relationship between the two? What are practical ways to teach preservice teachers about the ordering power of racism and how to locate themselves in systems of inequity? Who determines if any of this is needed in a teacher preparation curriculum? Because education is political, teachers must be considered as political beings in policy debates, not just as content experts or deliverers of instruction. Naming how we, teachers, are oriented has implications for the pedagogies we adopt and how we envision the future of education.

Black feminist thought acknowledges the relationship of Black feminism to other social justice projects is a humanist one (Collins, 2000); we are all in this together and can learn from one another. However, spaces to build alliances and work collectively do not manifest on their own. Developing teachers who view education through an equity lens takes, in part, teacher educators who have done the work of critically examining their own dispositions and social justice praxis so that they can model these practices for preservice teachers (Bondy et al., 2017).

A womanist approach to pedagogy—that is, centering Black women’s legacy to overcome struggles and move their communities forward—has been posited as the most viable way to producing the social justice educators we need (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Hill-Brisbane & Dingus, 2007). Teachers prepared in this tradition will demonstrate a

commitment to naming injustices, resisting complicity, and having a deep-seated belief in social change (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). This suggests the types of field experiences required of prospective teachers include ones in which they analyze and reflect on inequities in the education system in addition to proposing viable solutions and taking action.

Required coursework also would have to be considered. Social justice is not one course in a sequence that leads to teacher certification; to effectively develop dispositions that lend themselves to critical democratic possibilities, social justice must be weaved throughout a teacher preparation program and practiced by all. To practice a critical democracy is to employ a radical openness (Bondy et al., 2017), producing knowledge by being in dialogue, by being open to hearing others' perspectives and then allowing these different perspectives to fuel our rethinking of our own positions.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

“I remain less preoccupied with coming to voice
because I know how quickly voice can be taken away.

My concern now lies in finding effective ways
to use the voice that I have claimed while I have it.”

-Patricia Hill Collins, 2000, p. xiii

5.1 Constitution/Onto-epistemology: Synthesis of Findings

Onto-epistemology refers to the entangled relationship between ways of knowing and ways of being, between the nature of truth and existence. Qualitative research has been dominated by epistemology (Packer, 2018), but recently ontology is being pushed to the forefront by post qualitative theorists (St. Pierre, 2017, 2019). When engaging post qualitative inquiry, St. Pierre (2015) “recommend[s] putting the concepts and theories of experimental ontology to work using the conceptual practices that are appropriate for a particular study” (p. 92). For instance, taking collective action to eradicate injustices would be a conceptual practice drawn from participatory action research. Furthermore on ontology, Packer (2018) argues that “We desperately need a program of inquiry that can ask questions whose answers would empower us to transform our forms of life, our moral paradigms, and our discursive practices for the better” (p. 7). In other words, this is a call to re-focus qualitative inquiry on how to *be* as opposed to how to *know*, on how we are constituted and how we can be re-constituted toward emancipatory interests.

It is toward this end of emancipation that I engaged in this experimental inquiry to illuminate how teachers are politically active and how teachers in urban spaces are prepared

to be leaders of critical democratic public education. Specifically, I asked how an apolitical teacher is re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education, and employed critical autoethnography (Holman Jones, 2016) to explore the intersections of democracy and racism with urban education reform and the practices of teacher leadership. I was not looking to propose *the* answer, and the narrative of this inquiry has not lent itself to a direct, singular answer in any case. Mapping one person's encounters with activism has implications for the greater movement, so what have been revealed are insights for both teacher leadership and teacher education.

This concluding chapter begins with a synthesis of the findings of the study, integrating the content of all the manuscripts by taking into account the unifying theme of preparing politically active teacher leaders. Each manuscript highlighted a different aspect of my political activist re-orientation through my work as a teacher leader: being an education organizer, co-creating a social justice union caucus, and centering social foundations of education in my teaching philosophy and practices. This dissertation distilled the practices that were incorporated into my thinking and acting during a specific time and in a specific place, highlighting my embrace of a womanist pedagogy (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Hill-Brisbane & Dingus, 2007) along with social justice dispositions aligned with this theory and practice of teaching.

5.1.1 Being BlackWomanTeacher

BlackWomanTeacher runs together like Boylorn's (2016a) blackgirl (no space) because there is no separation of the race, gender/sex, and class experiences. Taking an intersectional approach in this inquiry provided me with multiple ways to understand the development of my teacher leadership within the context of urban education reform in the

neoliberal era. The position in which I am located at the beginning of the narrative documented here in this dissertation is illuminated by hooks (2000) when she writes: “simply being the victim of an exploitative or oppressive system and even resisting it does not mean we understand why it’s in place or how to change it” (p. 21). Boylorn (2016b) also contributes to an understanding of my re-constitution when she suggests Black feminism serves as the soundtrack for our, blackgirls’, lives, even when we may not fully understand the intellectual implications. Once I became conscious of being situated within the positionality of BlackWomanTeacher, and placed it at the center of my political orientation, I could name its strengths. These strengths include seeking wholeness through self-reflection, (re)membering as an act of resistance while engaging in self-love, and naming and voicing as acts of power so that we may self-define (Dillard, 2014). Adopting a feminist stance and feminist practices encouraged me to bring my whole self to teaching and political activism.

5.1.2 Developing Social Justice Dispositions

To commit to critical democratic public education is to commit to social justice. As this commitment is a protracted struggle, teachers must develop dispositions that take into account a temporal aspect. While what I have found about social justice dispositions from this autoethnographic inquiry aligns with what other teacher education scholars have written, including the presence of a commitment to deliver an equitable education to all learners (Villegas, 2007), the findings I underscore here, as extensions of others’ ideas (Bondy et al., 2017), are two dispositions that speak to (re)constitution and sustainability.

Bondy et al. (2017) describe how enacting mental dispositions of radical openness, humility, and self-vigilance not only support the development of the individual as a social

justice educator but also work to create an environment where social justice praxis can be cultivated. All three of these dispositions intersect with another—being open to learning and unlearning. In the depths of organizing for critical democratic public education, I found “old ways of thinking challenged by the processes of struggle” (Ransby, 2018, p. 106). As the narrative unfolded in each of the articles, we saw how different agents—ideas, people, experiences—transformed my thinking and my actions. As one example, my identity of being Black was challenged because it was caught up in a colonizer/colonized dialectic. I unlearned taking for granted that a Black identity equates to a critical consciousness, and I learned it takes a conscious effort to decolonize my Black identity (Carruthers, 2018). In my commitment to a critical stance, I became open to other ways of knowing and being as well as recognized the onto-epistemological nature of social justice.

Embracing a disposition that acknowledges we are unfinished beings will do a lot to sustain an educator committed to social justice. Each time that I “failed” to reach a goal, I became more accepting of failure because of who I became after the failure. Sometimes the acceptance took weeks or months (such as in losing the Newark Teachers Union elections); other times it took years (after quitting Central High School). Rather than conclude I was not enough, I learned to question and then change my practices, and to see myself and my teaching philosophy in relation to inequitable structures. Putting my teaching and political activism in perspective helped to keep me going even when a feeling of wanting to give up appeared.

5.1.3 Acknowledging Place and Time

Newark, NJ is ripe with opportunities to learn about urban history because within the boundaries of the city are landmarks, street signs, events, and walking, talking history

makers—it's a cultural, social, and political center. While running in the school board election, I often stated at candidate forums, "I'm not from Newark, but I'm *of* Newark." I was an experiencing subject in the objective reality of neoliberal education reform at a peak. I participated in community forums, school board meetings, the union, and protests with the purpose of building common understandings about the impact of neoliberalism on public education, using as examples the education system of Newark and my lived experiences as a teacher leader. Though we may be much less likely to find sites of protest and resistance in non-urban locales, the preparation of teachers for these places must also include political activism. Developing place-based teaching practices includes learning how to analyze the political landscape, participating in the community's democratic processes, and building relationships with people and entities outside of the classroom to support student learning.

5.2 Implications and Future Research

5.2.1 Methodological Considerations

"Writing autoethnography made me brave and utterly open.

It felt dangerous, but necessary. It cost me the luxury of anonymity.

It made me at home with myself." -Robin M. Boylorn, 2016a, p. 48

Critical social theories call for an ethical dimension to scientific inquiry that seeks to acknowledge and rectify the oppressive foundations of society; that being so, they are explicitly oriented toward social justice and, depending on the particular theories put into practice, point to suitable research strategies for carrying out an emancipatory purpose (Anyon, 2009). Critical autoethnography, one such strategy, fulfills the goal of "examining

the ideas and actions of...excluded groups in a way that views them as subjects” and “reveals a world in which behavior is a statement of philosophy and in which a vibrant, both/and, scholar/activist tradition remains intact” (Collins, 2000, p. 17). This is a valid strategy for studying racism and the politics of education because “the act of writing a critical autoethnography is a step toward uncovering how oppressive systems inform what we think of as ‘common sense’” (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 70).

Even so, the research strategy can be viewed as a limitation of this dissertation, particularly when it comes to controlling for bias. Additional critiques of autoethnography center validity, representation, and legitimation (Holt, 2003). These are concerns that span the field of qualitative research and that qualitative researchers have attempted to resolve through the use of the methodological tool reflexivity, whereby they acknowledge the biases they bring to the empirical material and the research questions rather than pretending these biases do not exist, that somehow ignoring them will mitigate, or even remove, the impact. Pillow (2003) argues that qualitative researchers need to practice an uncomfortable reflexivity, which is a questioning of their research practices, for the kind of reflexivity that seeks the familiar simply serves to reify what is already known and/or to justify the privilege of the researcher. This uncomfortable reflexivity aligns with critical autoethnography in that the researcher-self faces dilemmas of representation. For example, a dilemma exists when weighing which details to include next to the protection of political and personal relationships, or when weighing reliving moments of hurt and fear next to the level of vulnerability shared with the reader. Further, the critical autoethnographer demonstrates a willingness to put the researcher-self in a space to be questioned by others.

Kirshner, Pozzoboni, and Jones (2011) contend bias can assist in research by using the resources of one's positioning to make meaning of empirical material, so the goal should not be to do away with subjectivity but rather to attend to it by identifying and articulating prior assumptions throughout the process of inquiry. The onto-epistemological nature of the methodology used in this dissertation centered the practice of articulating assumptions. Attending to bias can also be conducted by working collaboratively with others on research (Kirshner et al., 2011). Certainly, organizing a research team that works together from the beginning to the end of the process for a particular inquiry is a manifestation of this practice, but in the case of critical autoethnography, a different approach must be taken. The research practice of member checking serves well in this instance. It opens space for fellow-participants who are directly mentioned or even simply implicated to shape the inquiry in ways that may or may not be aligned with the researcher's vision of himself.

I invited upwards of twenty people to member check different vignettes, but only a small number accepted. Most of the feedback I received from member checking did not include suggestions for significant revisions to the vignettes. At most, I was informed of small yet important details, such as the name of an organization or an additional outcome of a court case. One reader expressed surprise that I ever thought or behaved differently than the way they had come to know me.

When qualitative researchers use critical social theory, more stories are added to what is viewed as legitimate academic scholarship. When they put into practice a reflexivity of discomfort, this "not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides

insight on how this knowledge is produced” (Pillow, 2003, p. 178), and I add by whom it is produced. I argue that it is very important for those who historically have been marginalized to tell their stories from their situatedness. A methodology such as critical autoethnography provides an opportunity for these stories to be heard and to disrupt dominant ideologies that uphold racism, sexism, economic exploitation, and oppression. Approaches to analysis like thinking with theory demonstrate an opening up (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2017), that there is always more to be said about any story. Holman Jones (2016) asserts that if we set our purpose to be “about creating stable, coherent, finished, and identifiable *knowledges*” (p. 231, emphasis in original), we foreclose alternative possibilities of being, thereby suggesting there is only one truth. This dissertation has demonstrated that placing critical social theory at the center of a research methodology has implications of transformation and possibility.

5.2.2 Three Article Dissertation

The three article dissertation is a relatively new approach to completing a dissertation where the doctoral candidate writes and submits for publication three related scholarly articles rather than the traditional chapter-based dissertation. Ideally, early publication will provide experience with the publication process and enhance the marketability of the doctoral candidate upon graduation. For these reasons, I recommend choosing this format, but some challenges may surface when writing a critical autoethnography so I offer some considerations.

First, candidates should take into account if word limits will constrain their writing. The expectation for a critical reflexive narrative inquiry is to both show and tell (Boylorn, 2016a), which means space is needed to provide both details and explanation. The

guidelines for word limits vary by scholarly journal, so an investigation is warranted beforehand to give candidates an idea of whether or not their stories can be told in the space allotted. Second, while being a potentially intriguing multiperspective approach to narration, splitting one larger story into three separate narratives by foregrounding and backgrounding different events has challenges. The author must ensure the introductory material differs across the three articles as well as write three different abstracts. The challenge here lies in the fact that all three articles stem from the same main narrative and same methodology, so it can be difficult to state basic information in three different ways. Also, the author needs to take care that there is no considerable repetition of details in the narratives of the three articles.

5.2.3 Implications for Teacher Education and Political Activism

Teacher preparation programs come in several forms. There are the programs that are traditionally organized by postsecondary institutions consisting of a set of coursework that culminates in a year of student teaching. There are alternate route programs that seek to transition adults from other careers into teaching. There are programs such as Teach for America, dubbed as innovative based on its mission to close achievement gaps by placing the best and brightest college graduates into underserved schools with the theory that their energy and intelligence will lead them to the mastery of teaching. There are also grow-your-own teacher preparation programs that seek to develop the skills of and provide a support system for local, culturally-competent adults who might not otherwise be able to successfully navigate the process of achieving teacher certification. Discussing the merits and drawbacks of these differing programs is beyond the scope of this section, but I acknowledge them because no matter the pathway, each can commit to placing social

foundations at the center of its mission. This would shape prospective teachers' coursework and field experiences in the program in ways that provide spaces for critical interrogation of teaching and learning, and for strategies to build community in the locales where the teachers will serve. For example, programs could secure partnerships with community-based organizations so that preservice teachers have a place to meet local families, or with the local teachers union so that preservice teachers can learn the value of active membership.

Creating a philosophy of education is an age-old assignment in teacher preparation programs. The goal of this text is to represent a preservice teacher's developing belief system about teaching and learning. In a program that seeks to cultivate social justice educators, preservice teachers should be required to create a critical autoethnography. Producing a personal narrative and then analyzing it with critical social theory will steer them to assess unexamined values and beliefs (a practice that cannot be ignored in this day and age of both increased diversity in PK-12 settings and the hegemony of neoliberalism) as well as situate themselves in the greater social justice project. Even in seemingly homogenous communities, explanations of segregation, if left unexamined, will only serve to perpetuate segregation. For those who commit to critical democratic public education, some will have to unlearn the ways they operate within systems of oppression. A critical autoethnography will help them ask and answer, what is the "set of conditions and circumstances that set the stage" (Ransby, 2018, p. 11) for my re-constitution?

Declaring a commitment to social justice does not guarantee one will have the political will to take action beyond the classroom. While it is absolutely necessary to cultivate the beliefs that all children can learn and that teachers have a moral and ethical

responsibility to make sure learning is happening (Villegas, 2007), the teaching profession could transform public education if we held true that “the ethical dimension of teaching within a diverse and economically stratified society” (Villegas, 2007, p. 378) requires that we transform society toward a critical democratic ideal. That’s accomplished not only by teaching students how to change the world by thinking about it critically but also with teachers being politically active and leading the transformation of public education.

To this end, I am arguing that all prospective teachers need to become radicals, to be social justice educator who are willing to take a stand for what and how students are being taught. To be radical is to get to the root of the problem. We must get to the root of oppressive structures in order to transform public education and thus society. Our work must go beyond the classroom to the political realms of the union, electoral politics, policy, and organizing. Thus, field experiences should include political activism in addition to classroom observation. One kind of political activism preservice teachers could be engaged in is participatory social inquiry, a critical democratic practice where citizens take part in “a process of knowledge construction that aligns research-based knowledge, newly acquired knowledge, and lived experiences” (Oakes & Rogers, 2006, p. 18). Learning directly with local residents, parents, and students, preservice teachers could contribute to the community by conducting research and posing solutions to dilemmas germane to that community, thereby establishing their presence as leaders in the community.

5.2.4 Future Teacher Education Research

Teacher education associations and accrediting bodies as well as education research associations have published theory, goals, and statements pertaining to the practices of teacher education and cultivating teaching dispositions that will support a democratic ideal.

However, systematic research on the ways in which these practices manifest is limited. More teacher education scholars must write about what they are doing in their programs and university classrooms, and how they are structuring their departments so that we can assess the impact these practices have on cultivating the social justice educators we desperately need in PK-12 classrooms today. We've deemed it important to know how many preservice teachers complete their programs, if they're employed upon graduation, and how satisfied their employers are with them. What about how these now full-time teachers are taking on leadership roles in the school and/or community? Or what impact they are having on bringing about or sustaining a just climate and culture within the school? Future research must continue to consist of telling these stories, both the failures and triumphs and everything in between.

Coda

This Coda is written following the defense of my dissertation and is a product of critically reflecting about concerns raised by my dissertation committee. I hear the concerns as contributions to improving my work, not only this project but my ongoing work as a scholar-activist, and to provide clarity for the committee and for readers of my dissertation. This chapter is a deconstruction, a critical review of the project, for critique and deconstruction are “practices of freedom” when we use these tools to displace one set of assumptions with another in the pursuit of transformation (St. Pierre, 2014).

I also frame the Coda with this moment in time--amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest as a result of more police killings of Black bodies--to provide a context to rethink my findings with far more specificity. I look to provide “on the court practices” while further wondering about the importance of teachers being political activists. What ways of being are needed from teacher leaders now and how may these be cultivated in a teacher education program?

As a gatekeeping event, a dissertation usually is not a place to experiment, but I did so anyway. During my defense, my committee recognized the courageous, ambitious, cutting-edge work I have done and the boldness of the project. This Coda is a chance to return to the courage of the dissertation and explode a radical imagination. This is what I now see about what it takes to focus on the onto-epistemological, the benefits and limitations of adopting thinking with theory, the writing of a critical autoethnography, as well as how publicly engaged scholarship may provide a frame for thinking about the problem at hand.

Benefits and Limitations of Research Project

Methodology

Post qualitative inquiry is future research for me and all of us, which is what makes this project experimental. My inquiry is stuck between research paradigms as we do not get to make a clean break from one paradigm and leap squarely into the next. I fully acknowledge I have much more I need to learn and think about and, in particular, to read (St. Pierre, 2014, 2017, 2019). St. Pierre (2017) urges us to read theory because post qualitative inquiry is about doing philosophy, not social science. She elucidates:

How, then, are philosophical concepts useful for social scientists? I believe they are useful not in “application” but in reorienting thought and in inspiring and sustaining the long preparation of reading and studying the history and politics of ontology and empiricism and philosophy that can denaturalize the dogmatic image of thought that traps us. (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 695)

I did not set out to do philosophy, and I can see the limitations in my analyses as a result. I provide some further analysis in the next section of this Coda.

Although there is extensive literature on ontology and the onto-epistemological that I have yet to read, exploring ways of being throughout the writing of my dissertation has had a reorienting effect on me and has deepened my commitment to learning more about (post) qualitative inquiry. As I write and attempt to honor the onto-epistemological focus, I realize I need to be more thorough in questioning throughout how practice is related to theory. Rather than asking “what does this mean?,” I need to focus on “what does this do?,” “what shows up?,” and “what else could be at play?” Take our current public health crisis. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit New Jersey mid-March, public school teaching switched to distance learning. Some social justice Newark educators I know received

different communication about teaching expectations depending on grade level and which part of the city their schools were located. Some of these competent teachers felt incompetent as a result of having had little to no training or experience with virtual teaching tools. Even so, theories of justice and equity informed their practices during this time. They made calls to families, taught parents right alongside their children on Zoom calls, and designed assignments that gave students spaces to express how they were feeling.

Another shift in paradigms that I now see is my insertion of method. My goal was to adopt the analytical practice of thinking with theory as described by Jackson and Mazzei (2017), but by following the same process and structure for all three articles, my use of thinking with theory is method-like. Post qualitative inquiry eschews methods as the goal is to allow the new to be unearthed. As St. Pierre (2017) remarks upon reflection of her own dissertation, “ontological difference—the absolutely new and singular—is everywhere before we normalize it” (p. 686-687). A procedure delimits an inquiry because one is forced into a box by the steps that have to be followed; this takes away the ability to be imaginative and courageous.

Furthermore, post qualitative inquiry thinks of theory as “a language for thinking with and through, asking questions about, and acting on--the experiences and happenings in our stories” (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 229). In the first chapter of my dissertation, I write that “I come to this research after ‘it is done,’” but I now want to clarify that I am standing in the midst of something. Our training as social scientists tells us to wrap up the research, making us think it has to be all done. This project is still not done and will never be done as it is an ongoing inquiry, not a discrete study. I have learned to say, “This is where I am in this moment,” and I continue to (re)think past and present encounters as I discover new

challenges and dilemmas. So, a benefit of adopting a thinking with theory approach is that it helps the experiencing “subject” see how her social location and/or practices can change, or be further entrenched, after new encounters.

Writing a Critical Autoethnography

Critical autoethnography worked by giving me freedom to write in a way that was authentic and inquisitive. It brought me back to places I seemed to have forgotten, inviting me to (re)member much of what had occurred in the span of time the inquiry documents (2004-2018). I learned that writing a critical autoethnography can be powerful in helping one to map out the sociopolitical landscape as well as locate oneself with the material world at different points in time. Taking an ontological turn, I looked to the impact of different intra-actions on my re-constitution, including with the city of Newark and the political players, the union, community organizing, running for office, serving on the school board, and my reading of scholarly literature.

I also discovered that this can be difficult work emotionally and psychologically. When a buried encounter is resurfaced, it is not as simple as just putting it down on paper. There are hesitations and second guesses about what to write and how much to write, what to reveal and what to leave covered or veiled. Some memories of traumatic encounters were (re)lived as I (re)membered them with the aid of artifacts. At times I cried. I felt shame and sadness. I wondered what my readers would think of me with my vulnerability displayed so neatly on the page. This form of writing is neither for those who pass on critical self-reflection nor for those who want to create and maintain an image of themselves as finished.

As for structure, I find having located the analysis after the narrative effective in that presenting the narrative without my analysis opens up space for readers to wonder along as the story unravels. However, this posed concerns for my committee. I wrote in the conclusion chapter that I felt the three-article dissertation format was constraining. Some of the committee members agreed, feeling it constricted the interplay and discussion of class, gender, and race. Some committee members wanted to know more details of the narrative and for me to have conducted deeper analyses. I, too, wanted these things, but the word limit requirements of scholarly journals prohibited that as I had to prioritize what to include and what to omit. Possibly, it could have been easier to write the articles if I had first written a typical dissertation where I laid out the full narrative, conducted interpretation and analysis, and then focused each article on a different theory, selecting and including the parts of the narrative that were best illuminated by each theory.

Further Developing the Analyses and Implications of the Dissertation

Deeper Analyses

A few suggestions were made by committee members to further develop the analyses and implications of the dissertation. One suggestion for deepening the analyses was to include an interrogation of my use of “apolitical” by unpacking the embedded political assumptions that were masked by the term. As a reminder, the research question is, “How is an apolitical teacher re-constituted into a teacher leader committed to critical democratic public education?”. I do not believe one can be apolitical. But for a lack of a better term, and probably more not wanting an extraordinarily long question, I use apolitical to represent my lack of consciousness at a particular time as opposed to a lack of being influenced by the political nature of education. As an example of this unpacking,

deciding to come into teaching through Teach For America (TFA) was a political decision based on at least two assumptions: (1) traditional teacher preparation programs do not produce more effective teachers compared to any other route to becoming a teacher and (2) being Black and from a working-class background automatically qualifies me to teach students of color.

Had TFA not advertised on my college campus, I would have completed a post-baccalaureate teaching program. After I graduated from Duke University, I started such a program at North Carolina Central University (NCCU), a historically Black university located in the same city. As a public institution, NCCU's tuition was much lower than Duke's. Also, NCCU had established itself as a university for teacher preparation. Even so, TFA was my primary plan for getting into teaching because it presented a quicker, easier route, as well as a national network of opportunities to advance my career in education. As an organization, it had validated its own success; competition to be selected was steep. My desire to be accepted into the program was based on the assumption that it was a credible organization making a difference in the achievement gap by helping smart people like myself become teachers. What could be wrong about that? It appeared that whatever I needed to be a successful teacher, TFA would provide it for me. What I didn't realize at the time was the political damage to public education unfolding as a result of TFA's goal to dismantle any meaningful preparation for teachers concerning the sociopolitical aspects of education. Success with this goal would preclude the realization of radical democracy.

I turned to teaching as a career because I saw it as a way to have a direct positive impact on young people, and I chose to teach in an urban environment because I knew

there was less opportunity for students to succeed academically, which would turn into less economic opportunity and chances at social mobility. I believed I would be able to relate to the students, and they to me, because most urban public school students are of color and live in low-income families. I shared this socioeconomic background yet was able to succeed academically. A factor I did not consider at the time was that my elementary and middle schools did not have a concentration of students living in poverty, and they also were majority White. Though my high school was majority Black and had a much higher level of students living in poverty, a strong academic foundation had been set in my previous school environments. So, what seemed similar between myself and my future students on the surface was much different once unpacked.

An additional suggestion was that I could have unpacked the traditions in the African American community of people becoming teachers and how education was viewed as a path to freedom and individual mobility otherwise blocked by society. Jones (2012) traces “the heroic efforts of successive generations of Black parents and students to educate themselves” (p. 42) from the time of U.S. slavery through to the presidency of Barack Obama. It is important to note that during this ongoing struggle, Black colleges were established during Radical Reconstruction primarily to create teachers (Jones, 2012). Later, we see higher education continuing to be a vital site for advancing the quality of life for Blacks when a slew of cases argued by the NAACP to challenge segregation in professional and graduate schools set the foundation for a victory in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Ware, 2001).

While my dissertation acknowledges the intersectional presence of race, class, and gender, there are individual differences related to collective identities and shared

experiences that can also push us to think critically. I was asked at my defense to grapple with these individual differences in analyzing the relationship among the chapters. It is not my goal here to elucidate all the ways the chapters are related, but I will provide some of what occurred to me after thinking about this suggestion. In the first article's analysis, I noted how at first I thought only of my racial identity as I actively engaged in political consciousness development. Shared history, cultural norms and practices, as well as daily living experiences provided a collective lens to view the impact anti-Blackness has had on U.S. and global development (ross, 2020). Since the Black population of Newark and of the country largely were not wealthy, class did not appear to be an ordering factor because seemingly we were all in the same class. A conscious encounter with a class lens occurred for me when I started organizing with other teachers to transform the union (second article). This perspective illuminated the unjust relationship between the bosses or management and the workers. It argued for ownership of the means of production to belong to the workers; in our case as teachers, this largely meant the curriculum. A gendered perspective helps us to recognize the nature of teaching as feminized work. It is understandable then how, in the third article, I came to privilege feminist practices in my pedagogy.

Last, it was suggested that I conduct a more systematic rendition of moving from a first year teacher to a person who had a certain command over relationships and process of affirmation, as well as someone whose material and creativity developed. Possibly, I shortchanged the end of my teaching career, devaluing my own experience as a classroom teacher at the end of my analysis by equating it with neoliberalism and TFA, as those are big assumptions. Rather, or maybe additionally, I could have discussed how my students changed as I changed, including more details about the curriculum and assessments I

created as well as analysis of student work which would have brought a much needed perspective to my research project. In teacher education research, we must acknowledge that we need to do the work to get the evidence to show to what extent the way teachers act in the classroom has an impact on student outcomes in measures beyond standardized testing. There is a difference between evidence about changes in perceptions and evidence that changes in perceptions have led to changes in actions. For this project, I had artifacts of my curriculum over time but not student work over time and thus could not draw conclusions about academic achievement. One practice I employ now is to collect as much students' work electronically as I can so that I can reflect upon their progress and my teaching practices anytime after the course has finished.

Interventions for Teacher Preparation Programs

To improve K-12 student academic outcomes, progress must occur in four key areas in teacher education according to leading scholars: knowing your students, content and pedagogy, data and assessment literacy, and field-based experience (Floden et al., 2020). While I agree with this logic, significant attention must also be paid to “ways to prepare teachers to work with and for communities...and to see this work as connected to broader struggles to address poverty” (Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016, p. 430). Goals like these call for teachers to be courageous and creative. Certain components, then, need to become integral parts of teacher preparation programs: critical analysis of teaching practices, analyzing society and self within society, as well as acting in the world. The dispositions that are cultivated in my re-constitution—how I come to use my voice in new ways, revise and articulate my stand, be cause in the matter, be vulnerable—are pivotal for any teacher committed to transforming public education to be just, critical, and democratic. Below I

detail some interventions for teacher preparation programs that might evoke these ways of being with teacher candidates, not as concepts, not just reading about the experiences of others, but on the court in action with others. Interventions such as these support a commitment to the realization of radical democracy and active political participation.

Often, the first field-based experience preservice teachers are assigned to is classroom observation. When they are sent into the field to conduct observations, they need to be equipped with a framework for transformational teaching and learning if they are to observe critically and develop the capacity to have critical conversations with educators about their practice. Without this, it is easy for an observer to misinterpret a teacher's practice. An exemplar framework is historically responsive literacy, which draws on the Black excellence of 1800s Black literary societies to create "a practical model based on culturally relevant and responsive theories of education" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 11). Studying this model prior to (and during) field observations will encourage preservice teachers to look for how teachers' practices create a learning environment for: opportunities for students to shape their own ideas through acts of literacy; students to build confidence in reading, writing, and sharing their ideas; and the selection of texts that speak to students' multiple identities as opposed to just their reading identities alone (Muhammad, 2020).

Kretchmar and Zeichner (2016) assert traditional university-based teacher preparation programs do well in focusing on teaching praxis but fail to prepare teacher candidates for the policy reality that will have an impact on their work. I agree with their continued argument that a more effective way to prepare future teachers to address poverty and take a stand for educational equity is to situate learning in relation to the specific

context. To this end, teacher preparation programs should require candidates to conduct policy analysis. This could look like choosing a pertinent issue, e.g., charter schools, school desegregation, standardized testing, and tracing its development through federal, state, and local policymaking while asking who made these decisions, whose interests are being served, and what impact the policy has had on educational outcomes. Answering these questions will result in a form of community and power mapping exercises. These practices should be engaged in as a participatory social inquiry (Oakes & Rogers, 2006) so that the candidates are posing policy changes that will lead to transformation of the education system to one that is equitable. Candidates should take a stand on the issue by submitting their proposals to the appropriate people and venues so these suggestions are put on the public record as a contribution to the civic discourse.

To know your students and to connect with them authentically, you must first know yourself. To be a social justice educator, knowing yourself must include knowing your positionality while not losing sight of the implications your positionality has for society. In reverse, you also must recognize how society can constrain the way you see things. To see both and explore both is akin to what Sealey-Ruiz (2018) calls carrying out an archaeology of self, that is preservice teachers are “excavating their personal histories and activating their racial consciousness as a precursor to theorizing about pedagogy.” Critical autoethnography is one form that this work can take. A significant part of conducting a critical autoethnography is having teacher candidates read, decipher, and discuss scholarship on subjects such as white supremacy (DiAngelo, 2018), antiracism (Kendi, 2019), and abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019). When they look for where they fit in these structures, candidates may incur feelings of powerlessness, guilt, or shame. Teacher

educators must model how not to get lost in the individualistic and how to focus on the structural lens when examining social phenomena for the purpose of informing our pedagogy. Some of the skills and dispositions that need to be present and modeled include the willingness to be authentic, to share your lived experience with classmates, to be vulnerable, to avoid wanting to look good in the eyes of others, and to have a growth mindset. Performing a critical autoethnography should be done early in a teacher preparation program so the discoveries can have an impact on pedagogical choices while student teaching and can be related to clinical experiences that occur prior to student teaching.

As the previous paragraph suggests, texts from fields outside of teacher education can play a significant role in evoking critical democratic dispositions in teacher candidates. When we ask candidates to develop their philosophy of education, we should be having them read literature on onto-epistemology found in the field of qualitative inquiry. One of my committee members suggested—particularly since I make reference in my dissertation to Marshall Ganz and Ella Baker—that maybe a publicly engaged scholarship framework can help me think through the ideas presented and facilitate the reciprocity that is an essential condition for the work of social justice educators. One person's re-constitution will always be collective in nature as a result of intra-action. Publicly engaged scholarship (PES) provides an apt framing to this inquiry as its goal “involves reciprocal partnerships and addresses public purposes” (Eatman et al., 2018, p. 539). With PES, we are not just in the academy theorizing; we get out and do. Again, since one of the four identified focus areas in teacher education is field-based experience (Floden et al., 2020), candidates' study and enactment of PES could prove to transform both teacher education programs and public

education, along with community-based organizations that serve the families with children who attend public schools.

Changing the course of public education to center social justice pedagogy relies heavily on changing the way we prepare educators. In the conclusion of my dissertation, I argue that a womanist approach to pedagogy will make a profound difference toward transforming teacher education programs and developing a critical democratic public education. I reiterate here that social justice from a womanist approach to teaching means a commitment to naming injustices, resisting complicity, and having a deep-seated belief in social change (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). This approach aligns with what Kretchmar and Zeichner (2016) refer to as “teacher preparation 3.0,” which are programs that “develop educators who engage in the struggle for educational equity both inside and outside of the classroom” (p. 417). Committing to this approach looks like teacher educators modeling how to center those voices that have been marginalized. A womanist approach to pedagogy makes clear for teacher candidates the contributions of Black people, and women in particular, to education excellence, de-centering whiteness (Muhammad, 2020). This approach will help eliminate the anti-Blackness prevalent in our society, which is highlighted by the recent uprisings against police brutality and for Black lives (ross, 2020). In these times, oppression prevents teachers from being radical, and directs a focus on survival rather than possibility (Love, 2019). Those of us who do strive for educational equity and justice are often called “naive” or “unrealistic.” It takes shutting out these naysayers and turning up the volume on our freedom songs for a teacher, or any person for that matter, to be courageous and vulnerable and radical.

Teachers’ Work and Covid-19

"Far more high-tech than anything we have seen during previous disasters, the future that is being rushed into being as the bodies still pile up treats our past weeks of physical isolation not as a painful necessity to save lives, but as a living laboratory for a permanent--and highly profitable--no-touch future." -Naomi Klein, 2020

As I write, the Covid-19 pandemic has shuttered school doors and put educators at all levels in a precarious situation. My position as field coordinator for student teacher placements has allowed me an inside look into what several school districts are deciding and what teachers are doing in response to this public health emergency. I have observed teachers co-planning for remote learning during time carved out by districts just for this purpose, and digital tools such as Edpuzzle and Google Classroom become centerpieces of instruction. I also have observed an unevenness of directives across and within districts, and mandates for teachers to be online for the duration of their contractual hours. I have observed students in affluent communities continue to learn near seamlessly while other students receive packets of worksheets unrelated to the learning objectives being employed as the crisis hit. Developing digital content takes skill and time; it can't be assumed all teachers can do this easily. The pandemic has created a real dilemma for teachers where we want to do well so that the learning continues, but we don't want to do so well that when we come out of this and evaluate what has occurred, we decide this is how to move forward indefinitely.

Virtual learning, while beneficial in some senses, has its drawbacks. In this time of Covid-19, technology is both a help and a hindrance. It's allowing teachers to continue educating and students to continue learning—though to a different extent than face-to-face

instruction would provide—yet it's a hindrance because access is inequitable, hence disparities in experience using the technology exist. We can put the devices in students' hands, but the learning curve may still be steep. Students also have to be self-motivated. News reports from coast to coast cite as many as half the students in different districts are not logging in to their classes (Goldstein, Popescu, & Hannah-Jones, 2020). We also cannot take the digital tools that have now become prevalent in our lives for granted or as automatically safe. Privacy concerns abound; New York City Public Schools banned the use of Zoom not long after teachers began using it on a daily basis (Lieberman, 2020). We have to be cognizant of the way companies have acquired a heightened ability to order our lives as we are dependent upon them for many of the goods and services we need to reproduce some sort of shadow of the lives we had before Covid-19, and even to survive.

Sociopolitical analyses of this moment in time warn us against neoliberalism's stealth nature. Klein (2020) argues that we must take caution against the disaster capitalism approach that may come further down the line or after the public health crisis is over. She further asserts that tech companies will cast democracy as "inconvenient public engagement in the designing of critical institutions and public spaces." Education International, a global union representing organizations of teachers, has published guiding education principles for the Covid-19 pandemic that clearly state we need to safeguard against neoliberal education reform in a time of crisis (Singer, 2020). The implications of these analyses stem from an understanding that the development of U.S. public education mirrors that of the industrial age factory assembly line hence always having a function of stratifying society (Tyack, 1974; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). In today's age of neoliberalism, this continues but with an emphasis on privatizing and profiting from public education by

turning power over to companies that propose to provide education more efficiently. Both then and now, most public school students are trained to produce the right answer rather than produce new ideas or new ways of being. We have to take care now in the decisions we are making, how we are going about communicating with, directing, and professionally developing teachers for this virtual learning environment. As social justice unionism declares, teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions.

References

- Abbott v. Burke I, (100 N.J. 269 1985).
- Abbott v. Burke IV, (149 N.J. 145 1997).
- Abbott v. Burke V, (153 N.J. 480 1998).
- Abbott v. Burke XX, (199 N.J. 140 2009).
- Acosta, M. M. (2019). The paradox of pedagogical excellence among exemplary black women educators. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 70(1), 26-38.
- Aguilar, R. (2012). Focus on: Students, parents, and teachers nationwide protest gutting of public education. In J. Bale, & S. Knopp (Eds.), *Education and capitalism: Struggles for learning and liberation* (pp. 135-140). Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Alexander, M. (2010). *The new jim crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
- Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools. (2015). *Out of control: The systemic disenfranchisement of African American and Latino communities through school takeovers*. Retrieved from <http://www.reclaimourschools.org/sites/default/files/out-of-control-takeover-report.pdf>
- Anderson, A. (2013). Teach for America and symbolic violence: A Bourdieuan analysis of education's next quick-fix. *The Urban Review*, 45(5), 684-700.
- Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban educational reform*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Anyon, J. (2009). Introduction: Critical social theory, educational research, and

- intellectual agency. In J. Anyon (Ed.), *Theory and educational research: Toward critical social explanation* (pp. 1-23). New York: Routledge.
- Anyon, J. (2014). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Asselin, C. (2019). *Tensions, dilemmas, and radical possibility in democratizing teacher unions: Stories of two social justice caucuses in New York City and Philadelphia* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession No. 2309792181)
- Baber, C. R. (2003). From liberal teacher to liberated teacher educator: A reflection on my journey through the profession. In G. Ladson-Billings (Ed.), *Critical race theory perspectives on the social studies: The profession, policies, and curriculum* (pp. 45-68). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Baicker, K., Chandra, A., & Skinner, J. S. (2005). Geographic variation in health care and the problem of measuring racial disparities. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 48(1), S53.
- Bale, J., & Knopp Sarah (Eds.). (2012). *Education and capitalism: Struggles for learning and liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Ball, T., & Dagger, R. (2006). *Political ideologies and the democratic ideal* (6th ed.). New York: Pearson Longman.
- Banks, J. A. (2004). Remembering brown: Silence, loss, rage, and hope. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 6(4), 6-8.
- Barber, B. R. (2003). *Strong democracy: Participatory politics for a new age* (20th Anniversary ed.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (2005). Womanist lessons for reinventing teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 56(5), 436-445.
- Bondy, E., Beck, B., Curcio, R., & Schroeder, S. (2017). Dispositions for critical social justice teaching and learning. *Journal of Critical Thought and Practice*, 6(3), 1-16.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Boylorn, R. M. (2016a). On being at home with myself: Blackgirl autoethnography as research praxis. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 9(1), 44–58.
- Boylorn, R. M. (2016b). Killing me softly or on the miseducation of (love and) hip hop: A blackgirl autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(10), 785-789.
- Bradley-Levine, J. (2012). Developing critical consciousness through teacher leader preparation. *Journal of School Leadership*, 22(4), 751-770.
- Braun, R. J. (1972). *Teachers and power: The story of the American Federation of Teachers*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Breault, R. A. (1995). Preparing preservice teachers for culturally diverse classrooms. *The Educational Forum*, 59(3), 265-275.
- Brewer, T. J. (2014). Accelerated burnout: How Teach For America's Academic Impact Model and theoretical culture of accountability can foster disillusionment among its corps members. *Educational Studies*, 50(3), 246-263.
- Brewer, T. J., Kretchmar, K., Sondel, B., Ishmael, S., & Manfra, M. M. (2016). Teach for America's preferential treatment: School district contracts, hiring decisions, and employment practices. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24(16) Retrieved from <https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1923>

Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books.

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

Carpenter, B. W., & Diem, S. (2013). Talking race: Facilitating critical conversations in educational leadership preparation programs. *Journal of School Leadership*, 13, 4-33.

Carruthers, C. A. (2018). *Unapologetic: A black, queer, and feminist mandate for radical movements*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Cervetti, G., Pardales, M. J., & Damico, J. S. (2010). A tale of differences: Comparing the traditions, perspectives, and educational goals of critical reading and critical literacy. Retrieved from http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=cervetti

Chapman, T. (2011). Critical race theory and teacher education [Special issue]. *Myriad*, 8-17.

Chicago Teachers Union. (2012). *The schools Chicago's students deserve: Research-based proposals to strengthen elementary and secondary education in the Chicago Public Schools*. Chicago: Author.

Cochran-Smith, M. (1991). Learning to teach against the grain. *Harvard Educational Review*, 61(3), 279-310.

Coffey, H. (2010). Critical literacy. Retrieved from <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4437>

Collay, M. (2010). Retracing the roots of teacher activism in urban schools. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 5(3), 221-233.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics*

- of empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2009). *Another kind of public education: Race, schools, the media, and democratic possibilities*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as critical social theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Council for Higher Education in Newark. (1992). *A force for urban progress: The University Heights story*. Newark, NJ: Author.
- Cuban, L., & Usdan, M. (2003). *Powerful reforms with shallow roots: Improving America's urban schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dana, N. F., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2005). Becoming an early childhood teacher leader and an advocate for social justice: A phenomenological interview study. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 26, 191-206.
- Delgado, R. (1990). When a story is just a story: Does voice really matter? *Virginia Law Review*, 76(1), 95-111.
- Delgado Bernal, D., Burciaga, R., & Flores Carmona, J. (2012). Chicana/Latina Testimonios: Mapping the methodological, pedagogical, and political. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(3), 363–372.
- Dewey, J. (2005). *Democracy and education*. New York: Barnes & Noble Publishing, Inc. (Original work published 1916)
- DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Dillard, C. B. (2009). Racializing ethics and bearing witness to memory in research. In

- N. K. Denzin, & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry and social justice: Toward a politics of hope* (pp. 217-228). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Dillard, C. B. (2014). (Re)membering the grandmothers: Theorizing poetry to (re)think the purposes of black education and research. In N. K. Denzin, & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry outside the academy* (pp. 253-267). Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press.
- Dixson, A. D., Buras, K. L., & Jeffers, E. K. (2015). The color of reform: Race, education reform, and charter schools in post-Katrina New Orleans. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(3), 288–299.
- Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 7-27.
- Dottin, E. S. (2011). Social foundations and the professional preparation of teacher educators. In S. Tozer, B. P. Gallegos, A. M. Henry, M. B. Greiner & P. G. Price (Eds.), *Handbook of research in the social foundations of education* (pp. 399-413). New York: Routledge.
- Drago-Severson, E., & Blum-DeStefano, J. (2017). The self in social justice: A developmental lens on race, identity, and transformation. *Harvard Educational Review*, 87(4), 457-594.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R. (2005). Developing social justice educators. *Educational Leadership*, 62(6), 70-73.
- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a “professional learning community”? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6-11.
- Eatman, T. K., Ivory, G., Saltmarsh, J., Middleton, M., Wittman, A., & Dolgon, C.

- (2018). Co-constructing knowledge spheres in the academy: Developing frameworks and tools for advancing publicly engaged scholarship. *Urban Education*, 53(4), 532-561
- Education Law Center. (n.d.). Abbott decisions. Retrieved from <https://edlawcenter.org/litigation/abbott-v-burke/abbott-decisions.html>
- Essex County College. (2017). *Fact book and outcomes: Fall 2017*. Newark, NJ: Author.
- Fairclough, A. (2000). "Being in the field of education and also being a negro...seems...tragic": Black teachers in the Jim Crow south. *The Journal of American History*, 87(1), 65-91.
- Fairfax, C. N. (2014). A historical account of community mobilization in public education in early twentieth-century African America: Introducing Miss Virginia Estelle Randolph, master-teacher and community mobilizer. *Women's History Review*, 23(1), 1-17.
- Fiscella, K., & Williams, D. R. (2004). Health disparities based on socioeconomic inequities: Implications for urban health care. *Academic Medicine*, 79(12), 1139-1147.
- Floden, R.E., Richmond, G., & Salazar, M. (2020). A nation at risk or a nation in progress?: Naming the way forward through research in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 71(2), 169-171.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniversary ed.). New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach* (Revised ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- Galante, M. (2010, Jul 1). Newark Public Schools cuts 194 positions due to budget concerns. *The Star-Ledger*. Retrieved from https://www.nj.com/news/local/2010/06/newark_public_schools_cuts_194.html
- Galea, S., & Vlahov, D. (2005). Urban health: Evidence, challenges, and directions. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 26, 341-365.
- Gans, H. J. (1991). *People, plans, and policies: Essays on poverty, racism, and other national urban problems*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Giambusso, D. & Calefati, J. (2010, December 30). Academics say \$1 million Newark school reform survey was inconclusive. *The Star-Ledger*. Retrieved from <http://www.nj.com>
- Gillespie, A. (2012). *The new black politician: Cory Booker, Newark, and post-racial America*. New York: New York University Press.
- Gist, C. D., White, T., & Bianco, M. (2018). Pushed to teach: Pedagogies and policies for a black women educator pipeline. *Education & Urban Society*, 50(1), 56-86.
- Goldstein, D., Popescu, A., & Hannah-Jones, N. (2020, April 6). School moves online, many students stay logged out. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/us/coronavirus-schools-attendance-absent.html>
- Golin, S. (2002). *The Newark teacher strikes: Hopes on the line*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Grant, C. A., & Agosto, V. (Eds.). (2008). *Teacher capacity and social justice in teacher education* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Grimes, M. L. (2005). Re-constructing the leadership model of social justice for

- African-American women in education. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 19. Retrieved from http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/fall2005/19_7.html
- Gude, S. (2014). The industrial classroom. In Jacobin, & CORE Caucus (Eds.), *Class action: An activist teacher's handbook* (pp. 21-31). Bronx, NY: Jacobin Foundation.
- Gutmann, A. (1999). *Democratic education* (Revised ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hagopian, J., & Green, J. T. (2012). Teachers' unions and social justice. In J. Bale, & S. Knopp (Eds.), *Education and capitalism: Struggles for learning and liberation* (pp. 141-175). Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Hamilton, M. L., Smith, L., & Worthington, K. (2008). Fitting the methodology with the research: An exploration of narrative, self-study and auto-ethnography. *Studying Teacher Education*, 4(1), 17-28.
- Hill-Brisbane, D. A. (2005). Black women teacher educators, race uplift, and the academic other-mother identity. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 19. Retrieved from http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/fall2005/19_5.html
- Hill-Brisbane, D. A., & Dingus, J. E. (2007). Black women teacher educators: Creating enduring afriographies as leaders and change makers. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 22. Retrieved from <http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/winter2007/Hill.htm>
- Hines, M. T., & Reed, D. (2007). Educating for social justice: The life and times of Septima Clark in review. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 22. Retrieved from <http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/winter2007/Clark.htm>

- Holman Jones, S. (2016). Living bodies of thought: The “critical” in critical autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(4), 228-237.
- Holt, N. L. (2003). Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(1), 18-28.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Hu, W. (2010, Apr 27). In New Jersey, a civics lesson in the internet age. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/nyregion/28jersey.html>
- Hughes, S. A., & Pennington, J. L. (2017). *Autoethnography: Process, product, and possibility for critical social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Institute on Education Law and Policy. (2002). *Developing a plan for reestablishing local control in the state-operated school districts*. Newark, NJ: Author.
- Institute on Education Law and Policy. (2006). *New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC): 2006 pilot program evaluation*. Newark, NJ: Author.
- Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (2012). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: Viewing data across multiple perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (2017). Thinking with theory: A new analytic for qualitative inquiry. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 717-737). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Jacobin, & CORE Caucus (Eds.). (2014). *Class action: An activist teacher's handbook*.

Bronx, NY: Jacobin Foundation.

Jacobs, A. (2007, Dec 13). Cheers in Newark for a housing project's downfall. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/13/nyregion/13brick.html>

Jacobs, J. (2012). Teacher leaders and equity-centered pedagogy: Empowerment and development through action research. *Journal of Research in Education*, 22(2), 74-102.

Jacobsen, R., White, R., & Reckhow, S. (2016). Cultivating political powerhouses: TFA corps members experiences that shape local political engagement. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24(18), 1-38.

James, O. R. (2014). Opt-out education: School choice as racial subordination. *Iowa Law Review*, 99(3), 1083-1135.

Johnson, K. (2007). The educational leadership of Anna Julia Haywood Cooper. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 19. Retrieved from <http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/winter2007/annajcooper.htm>

Johnson, L. (2004). A generation of women activists: African American female educators in Harlem, 1930-1950. *The Journal of African American History*, 89(3), 223-240.

Johnson, M. (2017). Organizing for North Carolina: Social movement unionism in a southern state. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 92(1), 127-140.

Johnson, W. (2014). Lean production. In Jacobin, & CORE Caucus (Eds.), *Class action: An activist teacher's handbook* (pp. 11-18). Bronx, NY: Jacobin Foundation.

Jones, B. (2012). The struggle for black education. In J. Bale, & S. Knopp (Eds.),

Education and capitalism: Struggles for learning and liberation (pp. 41-69).
Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Jones, B. (2015). Keys to the schoolhouse: Black teachers, privatization, and the future of teacher unions. In B. Picower, & E. Mayorga (Eds.), *What's race got to do with it?: How current school reform policy maintains racial and economic inequality* (pp. 81-101). New York: Peter Lang.

Jones, L. C., Webb, P. T., & Neumann, M. (2008). Claiming the contentious: Literacy teachers as leaders of social justice principles and practices. *Issues in Teacher Education, 17*(1), 7-15.

Kaba, M., & Meiners, E. R. (2014). Arresting the carceral state. In Jacobin, & CORE Caucus (Eds.), *Class action: An activist teacher's handbook* (pp. 33-39). Bronx, NY: Jacobin Foundation.

Karp, S. (2010). Superhero school reform heading your way: Now playing in Newark, N.J. *Rethinking Schools, 25*(2), 12-17.

Katsarou, E., Picower, B., & Stovall, D. (2010). Acts of solidarity: Developing urban social justice educators in the struggle for quality public education. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 37*(3), 137-153.

Keesing-Styles, L. (2003). The relationship between critical pedagogy and assessment in teacher education. *Radical Pedagogy, 5*(1) Retrieved from http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue5_1/03_keesing-styles.html

Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. New York: One World.

Khalil, D., & Brown, E. (2015). Enacting a social justice leadership framework: The 3

- C's of urban teacher quality. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, 11, 77-90.
- King, D. S. (2000). *Making Americans: Immigration, race, and the origins of the diverse democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kirshner, B., Pozzoboni, K., & Jones, H. (2011). Learning how to manage bias: A case study of youth participatory action research. *Applied Developmental Science*, 15(3), 140-155.
- Klein, N. (2020, May 8). Screen new deal. *The Intercept*.
<https://theintercept.com/2020/05/08/andrew-cuomo-eric-schmidt-coronavirus-tech-shock-doctrine/>
- Kopp, W. (2001). *One day, all children: The unlikely triumph of Teach For America and what I learned along the way*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Kretchmar, K. & Zeichner, K. (2016). Teacher prep 3.0: A vision for teacher education to impact social transformation. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 42(4), 417-433.
- Kumashiro, K. K. (2008). Partial movements toward teacher quality ...and their potential for advancing social justice. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, D. J. McIntyre & K. E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions in changing contexts* (pp. 239-242). New York: Routledge.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2003). It's your world, I'm just trying to explain it: Understanding

our epistemological and methodological challenges. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(1), 5-12.

Lather, P. (2015). The work of thought and the politics of research. In N. K. Denzin, & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry and the politics of research* (pp. 97-117). Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press.

Lefebvre, E. E., & Thomas, M. A. M. (2017). “Shit shows” or “Like-minded schools”: Charter schools and the neoliberal logic of Teach for America. *Journal of Education Policy*, 32(3), 357-371.

Lemann, N. (1992). *Promised land: The great black migration and how it changed America*. New York: Vintage Books.

Lemov, D. (2010). *Teach like a champion: 49 techniques that put students on the path to college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lieberman, M. (2020, April 6). New York City schools ban Zoom as privacy concerns mount. *Education Week*.
https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2020/04/New_york_zoom_banned_privacy.html

Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). A dangerous accountability: Neoliberalism’s veer toward accountancy in higher education. In M. Spooner & J. McNinch (Eds.), *Dissident knowledge in higher education* (pp. 3-20). Regina, Canada: University of Regina Press.

Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. New York: Routledge.

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the*

- pursuit of educational freedom*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lowe, R. (1999). The Chicago Teachers' Federation and its legacy. In B. Peterson, & M. Charney (Eds.), *Transforming teacher unions: Fighting for better schools and social justice* (pp. 78-85). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- marbley, a. f., Bonner, F. A., II, Robinson, P. A., Stevens, H., Li, J., Phelan, K., & Huang, S. (2015). Voices from the field of social justice: Defining moments in our professional journeys. *Multicultural Education*, 23(1), 45-51.
- Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Maton, R. (2016). WE learn together: Philadelphia educators putting social justice unionism principles into practice. *Workplace*, 26, 5-19.
- Mayorga, E., & Picower, B. (2018). Active solidarity: Centering the demands and vision of the Black Lives Matter Movement in teacher education. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 212-230.
- McDaniel, C. A. (2006). *Critical literacy: A way of thinking, a way of life*. New York: Peter Lang.
- McLaren, P. (2007). Critical pedagogy and class struggle in the age of neoliberal Globalization: Notes from history's underside. In E. W. Ross, & R. Gibson (Eds.), *Neoliberalism and education reform* (pp. 257-289). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- Mirra, N., & Morrell, E. (2011). Teachers as civic agents: Toward a critical democratic theory of urban teacher development. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62(4), 408-420.

- Mohl, R. A. (2000). Planned destruction: The interstates and central city housing. In J. F. Bauman, R. Biles & K. M. Szyvlian (Eds.), *From tenements to the Taylor Homes: In search of an urban housing policy in twentieth-century America* (pp. 226-245). University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Monroe, L. (1997). *Nothing's impossible: Leadership lessons from inside and outside the classroom*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Moody, K. (1988). *An injury to all: The decline of American unionism*. London: Verso.
- Mooney, J. (2011a, Mar 7). Newark's angry parents. *NJ Spotlight*. Retrieved from <https://www.njspotlight.com/stories/11/0306/2237/>
- Mooney, J. (2011b, Jul 28). SIG grants go to nine of New Jersey's lowest-performing schools. *NJ Spotlight*. Retrieved from <https://www.njspotlight.com/stories/11/0727/2254/>
- Mooney, J. (2012, Nov 15). Newark teachers vote 'yes' on precedent-setting contract. *NJ Spotlight*. Retrieved from <https://www.njspotlight.com/stories/12/11/14/newark-teachers-vote-yes-on-precedent-setting-contract/>
- Morrell, E. (2008). *Critical literacy and urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation*. New York: Routledge.
- Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. New York: Scholastic.
- Muller, E. K. (1994). The Americanization of the city. In M. P. Conzen (Ed.), *The making of the American landscape* (pp. 269-292). New York: Routledge.
- Mumford, K. (2007). *Newark: A history of race, rights, and riots in America*. New York: New York University Press.

Murphy, M. (1990). *Blackboard unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Murphy, J. P., Strothers, A. S., & Lugg, C. A. (2017). Jersey-style neoliberalism: Governor Christopher Christie, crony capitalism, and the politics of K-12 education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 92(1), 115-126.

Murray, C. J. L., Kulkarni, S. C., Michaud, C., Tomijima, N., Bulzacchelli, M. T., Iandiorio, T. J., & Ezzati, M. (2006). Eight Americas: Investigating mortality disparities across races, counties, and race-counties in the United States. *PLoS Medicine*, 3(9), e260.

Narvaez, A. A. (1987, Nov 28). Newark rips down its projects. *New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/28/nyregion/newark-rips-down-its-projects.html>

Neckerman, K. M. (2007). *Schools betrayed: Roots of failure in inner-city education*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Network for Public Education. (2017). *Charters and consequences: An investigative series*. Retrieved from <https://networkforpubliceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NPE-Report-Charters-and-Consequences.pdf>

Neumann, M. D., Jones, L. C., & Webb, P. T. (2007). Developing teachers' leadership knowledge: Pillars for the "new reform." *Teaching Education*, 18(3), 233-244.

New Jersey Department of Education. (2018). 2017-2018 enrollment district reported data: Newark City. Retrieved from
<https://www.state.nj.us/education/data/enr/enr18/district.htm>

New Jersey Department of Education. (2019). Fall survey collections: enrollment.

Retrieved from <https://www.nj.gov/education/data/enr/>

New Jersey State Department of Education. (1994). *Comprehensive compliance investigation report: Newark school district*. Trenton, NJ: Author.

Newark Public Schools. (2017). Newark public schools FY17-18 budget [PDF document]. Retrieved from <http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/departments/sba/finance/budget/2017-2018-budget-information/>

Noguera, P. A. & Wells, L. (2011). The politics of school reform: A broader and bolder approach for Newark. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 2(1), 5-25.

Oakes, J., & Rogers, J. (2006). *Learning power: Organizing for education and justice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Packer, M. J. (2018). *The science of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Palmer, D., Rangel, V. S., Gonzales, R. M., & Morales, V. (2014). Activist teacher leadership: A case study of a programa CRIAR bilingual teacher cohort. *Journal of School Leadership*, 24(5), 949-978.

Parents Across America. (2011). A parent guide to the Broad Foundation's programs and policies. Retrieved from <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/a-guide-to-the-broad-foundations-training-programs-and-policies/>

Peterson, B., & Charney, M. (1999). Introduction. In B. Peterson, & M. Charney (Eds.), *Transforming teacher unions: Fighting for better schools and social justice* (pp. 5-7). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.

Picower, B. (2011a). Learning to teach and teaching to learn: Supporting the

- development of new social justice educators. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 38(4), 7-24.
- Picower, B. (2011b). Resisting compliance: Learning to teach for social justice in a neoliberal context. *Teachers College Record*, 113(5), 1105-1134.
- Picower, B., & Mayorga, E. (2015). Introduction. In B. Picower, & E. Mayorga (Eds.), *What's race got to do with it?: How current school reform policy maintains racial and economic inequality* (pp. 1-20). New York: Peter Lang.
- Pillow, W. S. (2003). Confession, catharsis or cure?: Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2), 175-196.
- Porambo, R. (2007). *No cause for indictment: An autopsy of Newark*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House.
- Prudential. (2019). Corporate responsibility. Retrieved from <https://www.prudential.com/links/about/corporate-social-responsibility>
- Ransby, B. (2018). *Making all Black lives matter: Reimagining freedom in the twenty-first century*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Reyes, G., Radina, R., & Aronson, B. A. (2018). Teaching against the grain as an act of love: Disrupting white Eurocentric masculinist frameworks within teacher education. *The Urban Review*, 50(5), 818-835.
- Rich, W. C. (1996). *Black mayors and school politics: The failure of reform in Detroit, Gary, and Newark*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Robertson, S. L. (2008). "Remaking the world": Neoliberalism and the transformation of

- education and teachers' labor. In M. Compton, & L. Weiner (Eds.), *The global assault on teaching, teachers, and their unions: Stories for resistance* (pp. 11-30). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Robinson, S. T., & Baber, C. R. (2013). "Putting herself on the line": African American female teacher leaders as exemplars of social justice leadership. *The New Educator*, 9(3), 210-225.
- Rosiek, J. (2016). Critical race theory, agential realism, and the evidence of experience: A methodological and theoretical preface. In J. Rosiek, & K. Kinslow (Eds.), *Resegregation as curriculum: The meaning of the new segregation in U.S. public schools* (pp. xlviii). New York: Routledge.
- Ross, E. W., & Gibson, R. (2007). Introduction. In E. W. Ross, & R. Gibson (Eds.), *Neoliberalism and education reform* (pp. 1-14). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.
- ross, k.m. (2020, June 4). Call it what it is: Anti-blackness. *New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/04/opinion/george-floyd-anti-blackness.html>
- Rousmaniere, K. (2005). *Citizen teacher: The life and leadership of Margaret Haley*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Russakoff, D. (2015). *The prize: Who's in charge of America's schools?* New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Russom, G. (2010). Obama's neoliberal agenda for education. *International Socialist Review*, 71 Retrieved
from <http://www.isreview.org/issues/71/featneoliberaleducation.shtml>
- Russom, G. (2012). Obama's neoliberal agenda for public education. In J. Bale, & S.

- Knopp (Eds.), *Education and capitalism: Struggles for learning and liberation* (pp. 109-134). Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Ryan, S., Bryk, A. S., Lopez, G., Williams, K. P., Hall, K., & Luppescu, S. (1997). *Charting reform: LSCs—Local leadership at work*. Retrieved from <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/charting-reform-lscs%E2%80%94local-leadership-work>
- San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, (411 U.S. 1 1973).
- Sawchuk, S. (2014, Jan 14). Teach For America spinoff helps alumni gain influence. *Education Week*, 33(17), 1, 10-12.
- Scheurich, J. J., & Williams, N. (2017). An urban school principal encounters a group of teachers who seek to address racism in their school. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 20(1), 64-79.
- Schildts, A. P. (2015). *Silencing the critics: A conceptual framework in teacher preparation for social justice* (Order No. 3741001). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection. (1752513478).
- Schneider, S. B. (2015). Teaching neoliberalism, in the context of corporate reform, in the undergraduate social foundations classroom. *Educational Studies*, 51(4), 284-299.
- Scott, J., Trujillo, T., & Rivera, M. D. (2016). Reframing Teach for America: A conceptual framework for the next generation of scholarship. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24(16) Retrieved from <https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/2419>
- Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2018, Nov 5). Yolanda Sealy-Ruiz: The archaeology of the self. *Future*

- for Learning*. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/299137829>
- Serrano v. Priest I, (5 Cal. 3d 584 1971).
- Shor, I. (1999). What is critical literacy? *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, & Practice*, 1(4). Retrieved from <http://www.lesley.edu/journals/jppp/4/shor.html>
- Singer, A. (2020, April 2). Guiding education principles for the COVID-19 pandemic. *Daily Kos*. <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2020/4/2/1933584/-Guiding-Education-Principles-for-the-COVID-19-Pandemic>
- Sitomer, A., & Cirelli, M. (2004). *Hip-hop poetry and the classics*. Beverly Hills, CA: Milk Mug Publishing.
- Sizemore, B. (2008). *Walking in circles: The black struggle for school reform*. Chicago: Third World Press.
- Slater, C., Gorosave, G. L., Cerdas, V., Rosabal, S., Torres, N., & Briceno, F. (2016). Teachers' perceptions of social justice and school leadership in Costa Rica and Mexico. *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*, 31(1/2), 151-164.
- Smylie, M. A., Conley, S., & Marks, H. M. (2011). Exploring new approaches to teacher leadership for school improvement. In E. B. Hilty (Ed.), *Teacher leadership: The new foundations of teacher education-A reader* (pp. 265-282). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2014). A brief and personal history of post qualitative research: Toward "post inquiry." *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 30(2), 2-19.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2015). Practices for the "new" in the new empiricisms, the new

materialisms, and post qualitative inquiry. In N. K. Denzin, & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry and the politics of research* (pp. 75-95). Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2017). Haccuity: Laying out a plane for post qualitative inquiry.

Qualitative Inquiry, 23(9), 686-698.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2019). Post qualitative inquiry in an ontology of immanence.

Qualitative Inquiry, 25(1), 3-16.

Star-Ledger Staff. (2010, Aug 31). Newark superintendent Clifford Janey's contract is

not renewed. *Star-Ledger*. Retrieved from

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2010/08/clifford_janey_is_ousted_as_ne.html

Statehouse Bureau Staff. (2010, Mar 15). Gov. Chris Christie plans to cut N.J. school aid

by \$800M. *The Star-Ledger*. Retrieved from

https://www.nj.com/news/2010/03/chris_christie_and_new_jersey.html

Storm, S. (2016). Teacher-researcher-leaders: Intellectuals for social justice. *Schools:*

Studies in Education, 13(1), 57-75.

Sustar, L. (2013). Teachers unions at the crossroads: Can the assault on teachers be

rebuffed? *New Labor Forum*, 22(2), 60-68.

Take Back Newark Schools. (2014). Envisioning the future of Newark Public Schools:

Excellent neighborhood public schools for all. Retrieved from

<http://www.takebacknewarkschools.com/storage/documents/EnvisioningFuture2pg.pdf>

Torres, M. N., & Mercado, M. (2004). Living the praxis of teacher education through

teacher research. *Scholar-Practitioner Quarterly*, 2(2), 59-73.

- Tozer, S. (1985). Dominant ideology and the teacher's authority. *Contemporary Education*, 56(3), 150-153.
- Tozer, S. (2018). Social foundations of education as an unwelcome counter-narrative and as educational praxis. *Education Studies*, 54(1), 89-98.
- Tozer, S., Senese, G., & Violas, P. (2013). *School and society: Historical and contemporary perspectives* (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Tozer, S. E., & Butts, R. F. (2011). The evolution of social foundations of education. In S. E. Tozer, B. P. Gallegos, A. M. Henry, M. B. Greiner & P. G. Price (Eds.), *Handbook of research in the social foundations of education* (pp. 4-14). New York: Routledge.
- Tractenberg, P., Orfield, G., & Flaxman, G. (2013). *New Jersey's apartheid and intensely segregated urban schools: Powerful evidence of an inefficient and unconstitutional state education system*. Newark, NJ: Institute on Education Law and Policy.
- Trethewey, L., & Whitehead, K. (2003). The city as a site of women teachers' post-suffrage political activism: Adelaide, South Australia. *Paedagogica Historica*, 39(1), 107-120.
- Troccoli, D., & Knopp, S. (2012). Focus on: The Madison protests. In J. Bale, & S. Knopp (Eds.), *Education and capitalism: Struggles for learning and liberation* (pp. 176-179). Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Trujillo, T., Scott, J., & Rivera, M. (2017). Follow the yellow brick road: Teach for America and the making of educational leaders. *American Journal of Education*, 123(3), 353-391.
- Ture, K., & Hamilton, C. V. (1992). *Black power: The politics of liberation in America*.

- New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1967)
- Tuttle, B. R. (2009). *How Newark became Newark: The rise, fall, and rebirth of an American city*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rivergate Books.
- Tutwiler, S. W., deMarrais, K., Gabbard, D., Hyde, A., Konkol, P., Li, H., . . . Swain, A. (2013). Standards for academic and professional instruction in foundations of education, educational studies, and educational policy studies third edition, 2012, draft presented to the educational community by the American Educational Studies Association's committee on academic standards and accreditation. *Educational Studies*, 49(2), 107-118.
- Tyack, D. B. (1974). *The one best system: A history of American urban education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- U. S. Census Bureau. (2016). American FactFinder: Newark City, New Jersey. Retrieved from <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). *Race and ethnicity*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Uetricht, M. (2014). *Strike for America: Chicago teachers against austerity*. New York: Verso.
- Vickery, A. E. (2015). It was never meant for us: Towards a black feminist construct of citizenship in social studies. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 39(3), 163-172.
- Villegas, A. M. (2007). Dispositions in teacher education: A look at social justice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(5), 370-380.
- Villegas, A. M. (2008). Diversity and teacher education. In M. Cochran-Smith, S.

- Feiman-Nemser, D. J. McIntyre & K. E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions in changing contexts*, (3rd ed., pp. 551-558). New York: Routledge.
- Ware, L. B. (2001). Setting the stage for Brown: The development and implementation of the NAACP's school desegregation campaign, 1930-1950. *Mercer Law Review*, 52(2), 631-673.
- Warren, K. E. (2017). *African American female secondary school educators: Their teacher-student relationships, and how their relationships with their students' parents, colleagues, and administrators affect the teacher-student relationships* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (Accession No. 10265254).
- Watson, A. (2007). A vision to serve: The experiences of five African American urban teacher leaders. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, 3, 175-196.
- Weiner, L. (2011). Neoliberalism's global reconstruction of schooling, teachers' work, and teacher education. In S. Tozer, B. P. Gallegos, A. M. Henry, M. B. Greiner & P. G. Price (Eds.), *Handbook of research in the social foundations of education* (pp. 308-318). New York: Routledge.
- Weiner, L. (2012). *The future of our schools: Teachers unions and social justice*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Weiner, L. (2018). Labor renaissance in the heartland. *Jacobin*, Retrieved from <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/04/red-state-teachers-strikes-walkouts-unions>
- Weinstein, C. S., Tomlinson-Clarke, S., & Curran, M. (2004). Toward a conception of

- culturally responsive classroom management. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(1), 25-38.
- Wenner, J. A., & Campbell, T. (2017). The theoretical and empirical basis of teacher leadership: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(1), 134-171.
- Wetzler, J. (2010). Developing teachers as leaders. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 42(6), 25-32.
- Whitty, G., & Power, S. (2007). Marketization and privatization in mass education systems. In A. R. Sadovnik (Ed.), *Sociology of education: A critical reader* (pp. 219-232). New York: Routledge. (Original work published 2000)
- Williams, D. R. (1997). Race and health: Basic questions, emerging directions. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 7(5), 322-333.
- Williams, H. A. (2005). *Self-taught: African American education in slavery and freedom*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Williams, J. (2014). *Unfinished agenda: Urban politics in the era of black power*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Wilson, W. J. (1996). *When work disappears: The world of the new urban poor*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Woodard, K. (1999). *A nation within a nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and black power politics*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wu, J., Eaton, P. W., Robinson-Morris, D. W., Wallace, M. F. G., & Han, S. (2018).

Perturbing possibilities in the postqualitative turn: lessons from Taoism and Ubuntu. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 31(6), 504-519.

Yaffe, D. (2007). *Other people's children: The battle for justice and equality in New Jersey's schools*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rivergate Books.

York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? findings from two decades of research. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(3), 255-316.