

PART ONE: THE NEED TO SEE

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Beginnings

Just months after completing my undergraduate degree in elementary education in 1984, I met Maria Charro, a quiet ten year old girl from El Salvador. Maria and her younger brother, Carlos, had recently been adopted by a single woman from Prince George's County, Maryland. The children arrived from El Salvador with their new mother just weeks before the school year began. Maria was to be enrolled in the fifth grade, and I was to be her teacher.

I'm sure that Maria's transition into the fifth grade that year, as well as her move into a new home, in a new country, with a new parent, was anything but easy. In almost every sense, Maria was "different" from most of the students in our classroom. While many of the children came from middle class, two-income families, Maria was being raised by a single, adoptive parent. Although our class was racially mixed to some degree, with fifteen black children and thirteen white children, Maria was the only student of Hispanic background. Maria was also very unlike "typical" American school children in her demeanor. She was quiet and compliant. She rarely looked up, unless spoken to, and seemed to be self conscious. Maria followed English well enough to answer questions and follow directions, but struggled when speaking. Finally, Maria was physically more mature than the vast majority of the fifth grade girls.

I was genuinely concerned about Maria and wanted to help her. Yet from the beginning I felt that my work with Maria seemed to "miss her" in some sense. I altered her classwork to make it more manageable, and I helped her mother set up tutorial assistance for her, given Maria's difficulties with the English language. I made a point to be as kind and as welcoming to Maria as I knew how to be. When she finished fifth grade, I was aware that her English had improved and that she had survived academically to the degree that she was being promoted to the next grade level. Yet at no point during the school year had Maria seemed like "one of" the class group. She always remained on the fringes, and she still seemed to have little confidence in herself. To my knowledge,

Maria had not related closely to anyone among us. I felt that I had never really connected with Maria as I would have liked.

To this day, I'm not sure what happened to Maria Charro. I moved to the midwest soon after that year and lost touch with Maria's mother. My own teaching experiences progressed, including upper elementary classroom teaching, as well as a year in the Chapter One program, working with both primary and upper level students who had been identified by the school as "below average" readers, based upon standardized test scores and classroom performance. Into these experiences, I brought my personal beliefs about teaching and learning. I began with solid knowledge of my subject matter, then proceeded to present this content in creative, interesting ways. I sought to "motivate" my students - varying my teaching methods, creating "fun" games for reinforcing what had been learned, and planning field trips, special projects and unique class events to immerse the students in. For classroom management, I constructed behavior modification type systems through which students could earn points or tokens for good behavior which, accumulated over time, would result in the acquisition of rewards or privileges. If students chose not to follow class policies which I had established, I followed pre-established procedures for applying consequences, in a fashion similar to that recommended by the assertive discipline model developed by Lee and Marilyn Canter (1976).

Throughout my experiences in the elementary classroom, I sought to be organized and fair, creative and fun. Did the children learn? I think that most did, at least to the point that many could successfully identify the parts of speech within a sentence, calculate perimeter, and list the state capitols. As far as content learning went, I felt that I had "done my job" as a teacher when I left those classrooms, although some students were more successful than others in demonstrating this content. But, at the same time, I felt that many of the children I worked with had needs that went far beyond the academic. What about Maria? And what about so many other children who seemed like "outliers" amongst their schoolmates? What about Crystal, whose slight frame protruded from thin jackets and shorts even in cold weather and whose family was subject to relocate each month when the rent was due? What about Afiba, whose strong will got him into trouble

almost daily, and who undoubtedly saw himself as a class troublemaker? What about J.J., who was caught in the middle of his parents' divorce, and who rarely spoke at all? As I finished each school year, I sensed a nagging realization that there must have been some way in which I could have "drawn out" these children - some way in which I could have helped them to feel better about themselves. Generally, these children tended to be the least successful academically as well. I knew that I had missed them, and I wanted to "fix" this, but had no idea how to do so. So I went on.

By the time I entered my doctoral studies program in Fall 1993, I had five years of teaching behind me, as well as a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, with an emphasis in literacy and language. At the time I had just begun teaching in the Education department at a private, four year, liberal arts college. I was instructing my college courses in the same fashion as I had my elementary classes - providing for students what I perceived to be varied, creative teaching methods and opportunities for interesting projects and assignments. In addition, I was responsible for supervising a number of interns and student teachers during their educational field experiences, and my department chairperson assigned me to the field based sites located in the local city school system. The classrooms that I went into in Valley City Schools were quite racially mixed and served students from a wide range of socioeconomic levels. As I observed my students and talked with their supervising teachers in these schools, I became aware of the very real needs of many of the children within their classrooms. I recognized that my experiences with Maria, Crystal, Afiba and J.J. were not all that far removed from the realities experienced by these children in Valley City. Reflecting on my own sense that I had "missed" my former elementary students, despite my efforts to help them, I wondered how I could possibly impact my college students in ways that would encourage them to both connect with the children in these classrooms, and also to support their successes. I looked to my doctoral work as an opportunity to consider in new ways what it meant to more equitably teach all children. I hoped that what I learned might impact my own teaching practices amongst college students who wanted to become teachers.

My first year as a doctoral student was thought provoking. I was introduced to the work of scholars such as Ira Shor, Paulo Freire, Shirley Brice Heath and Maxine Greene,

among others. Included in Greene's (1988) work, The Dialectic of Freedom, is one idea of several that became the foundation for many of my reflections from that point on. Greene describes, "the need to grant audibility to numerous voices seldom heard before . . . of penetrating the so-called 'cultures of silence' in order to discover what (ordinary but culturally different people) think and have thought" (p. 127). Over time, as I processed this idea, I thought of Maria Charro, who embodied, for me, a "culture of silence." I began to realize that my work with Maria, and in fact my teaching as a whole, had never proceeded from her experiences and realities. I had tried to "help" Maria, but I had never asked her about her background, her experiences, what she thought or what she knew about. In the long run, I probably made her feel more like a candidate for charitable help than someone who had personal value to offer. The same had held for Crystal, J.J., Afiba and all of my students. They had entered "my culture" when they became members of my class, and my perception of them had been based upon how well they did or did not "fit" this teacher-constructed world. I had not sought to penetrate what they were thinking or what they had thought. Instead, I had sought to bring them to a point of "success," or at least survival, within my pre-established environment, which required their acquiescence to its terms. Their personal realities, if not related to the classroom setting (at least not related in my perception at that time), had been basically ignored. I had, in a sense, "missed" who they were.

As a new doctoral student, I spent a good deal of time reflecting upon my former elementary teaching. Over time, I sensed that not only had I "missed" those whose differences were more apparent than others, but that I had undoubtedly subjected all of my students to an essentially teacher-directed classroom culture. I wondered whether or not this was inherently good or bad, and contemplated what type of teaching would have provided my students with better opportunities to share "what they think and have thought" as we grappled together with learning.

In evaluating myself, I assessed that I had been teaching my students in the same way that I had been taught from childhood on. As I delved further into my graduate readings, I realized that I had predominantly followed what Freire (1973) refers to as a "banking education" model. McCaleb explains that within such a model, students receive

"deposits" of information, which they maintain in learning "accounts" (p. 12). Even though these "deposits" were packaged in creative, interesting ways, they were ultimately teacher-directed. I had generally been pleased with my "good" students, who quietly learned and were readily able to reiterate for me the content we had covered. In studying the work of Ira Shor (1992), I read that students such as these have often, in effect, become "domesticated" into school culture. They had likely learned that "good students keep quiet and agree with the teacher," (p. 93), and they patterned their school behaviors accordingly. Shor further defines domestication as "making students passive receptacles for official knowledge" (p. 99). For domesticated students, their personal experiences, interests and realities became of secondary importance, while their compliance with school culture and knowledge acquisition was primary.

As I framed considerations of my teaching within the ideas presented by Greene, Freire and Shor that I had newly considered, I sensed the need to reflect further. It was apparent that my teaching practices had missed the needs, whether personal or academic, of those children who had cultural experiences largely different than my own. And what about those "good students" who had learned to please me? Had their "successful" school enculturation been the best way to teach and to learn? Based upon questions such as these, I looked further into the literature to find ideas that I could grapple with as I sought to arrive at my own conclusions.

The Emergence of Critical Pedagogy

Through study, I learned that the relatively recent works of Greene, Freire and Shor had emerged within the context of a movement that many scholars refer to as critical pedagogy (Wink, 1997). Although the contemporary wave of thought representative of this movement has become widely considered generally across the past two decades, my readings revealed that this recent work continued a long critical tradition in U.S. education which dated back to the 19th century (Shannon, 1990). The historical movements from which "critical pedagogy" drew its ideals included the "progressive education" of the late 19th and early 20th century, the work of "social reconstructionists" in the post World War I and Depression era, and ideas presented in the "production" and

"reproduction" theories of the 1960s and 70s. Across all of these movements, consideration was given to what it means to equitably educate all children within a democracy.

The Quincy Schools: The Beginning of "Progressive" Education. Francis Wayland Parker was once referred to by John Dewey (1930) as "the father of progressive education," an educational movement which generated a broad range of both child-centered and socially-oriented beliefs about teaching and learning. Indeed, Parker's work as Superintendent of Schools in Quincy, Massachusetts, Boston, and later the Cook County Normal School outside of Chicago was noted by many to be both progressive and revolutionary for its time. Of Parker's work in Quincy, Washburne (1883) wrote, "The set program was first dropped, then the spellers, the readers, the grammar, and the copybooks . . . Teachers and pupils had to learn first of all to think and observe, then by and by they put these powers to work on required subjects" (p. 13). Shannon (1990) adds that Parker's philosophy of teaching, which was radically different from the customary practices of the time, brought the concern of some Quincy parents and many traditional educators. He writes, "The renewal of Parker's superintendency was challenged in each of the first four years of his employment, and he narrowly escaped dismissal each year" (p. 20).

The ideas which Parker brought into his work were clearly grounded in a European educational tradition. Parker borrowed from the ideals of John Amos Comenius, who argued during the 1600's that education should be provided for all children, no matter their gender or class position, utilizing methods that naturally aligned with the way children perceive their world. Parker also built upon ideals presented by Jean Jacques Rousseau, who authored Emile (1762, translated in 1972), a work which asserts that children should come to learn about their worlds through discovery rather than passive receipt of information. Rousseau wrote, "You have not got to teach him truths so much as to show him how to set about discovering them for himself" (p. 168). In addition, Parker worked from premises outlined by Johan Pestalozzi in the early 1800's, a schoolmaster who attempted to teach the poor and wrote about his work. Shannon writes that Pestalozzi emphasized that education promoted an unequal

distribution amongst socioeconomic classes and believed that information taught in school should be useful in preparing students as economically and politically productive citizens (pp. 27 and 29). Parker also borrowed from ideals asserted by Friedrich Froebel, who served as an intern under Pestalozzi. Of Froebel's contributions, Parker (1883) stated, "Summing up the wisdom of those who preceded him, and emphasizing it in one grand principle, Froebel surmised the true end and aim of all our work - the harmonious growth of the whole being. This is the central point. Every act, thought, plan, method and question should lead to this" (p. 18).

Upon arrival to his position at the Quincy Schools, Parker drew from these traditions as he conveyed to his teaching staff what he believed about teaching and learning. Shannon (1990) describes the earliest activities that Parker engaged in when he began his tenure:

"On April 20, 1875, Parker was hired under the conditions that he was to devote full time to examination and improvement of Quincy schools, and that he would move slowly. On April 21, Parker met with Quincy teachers to explain his views of schooling and to organize the forty-two teachers into a faculty for the study of scientific education. Early the following week, he began demonstrating lessons in classrooms during and after school. He invited teachers to rethink education and to reconsider how children learn. Toward that end, he offered reading assignments from Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel; he reduced the number of school subjects; and he shortened the school year. In a very short time, by all accounts, Quincy teachers began to make the changes alluded to. These early efforts became the celebrated, 'Quincy Method.'" (pp. 38-39).

Of this Quincy Method, Merle Curti (1935) wrote that there were four basic underlying tenets: the child's right to be him or herself, the child's natural or "self-construction" of knowledge, "cautious experimentation to find that delicate balance amongst teacher intervention, student initiative, and environmental impact," and a concern for democratic justice. While Parker's beliefs and the teaching practices which he applauded were celebrated by some at various points across his three superintendencies, his work was also subject to a great deal of resistance. Ultimately, Parker was dismissed from his position as Director of the Cook County Normal Schools. He spent the latter years of his career at the University of Chicago, where he worked with

John Dewey, whose theories concerning the place of education within a democracy were also seen as "progressive" and revolutionary for their time, as they continue to be seen in the present.

John Dewey and the Social Reconstructionists: Progressive Beliefs About Education within a Democracy. Several writers point to a culturally transmitted message that arose during the early years of the twentieth century at a point in time when the United States was emerging as a world power. The message "advertised" the public school system as an avenue of vast opportunity for all students; a system through which any child with natural ability and commitment to work hard could succeed. At face value, this assertion seems to support ideas presented by scholars such as Parker and Dewey, who held that all children could learn and succeed, and that they should be treated as such. In reality, however, the promise of equal opportunity fell short for many impoverished or immigrant children, while the "myth" of its successes yet prevailed.

Jean Lave (1988) asserts that when culturally transmitted messages, such as this one, are ingrained to the point that members of society consider them part of everyday thinking - obviousnesses, so to speak - they become part of a set of basic social assumptions "whose analysis is clearly not the goal of investigation" (pp. 7 and 77). In this sense, the United States public school system was perceived as a benevolent meritocracy during the early years of this century. While such a message led many poor immigrant parents to believe that free education could provide a better life for their children, ironically, the school system within which they enrolled their children was established, in part, to "provide the necessary moral guidance for unruly, poor and immigrant children, whose home life was seen as the source of many problems for them and society at large" (Beyer, 1996, p. 3). Inevitably, children of the poor were exposed to a conception of their home cultures not only as different from the school culture, but also as deficient (McCaleb, 1994).

For example, the Smith Hughes Act of 1918 called for the employment of tracking and ability grouping within schools, for the purpose of bringing about greater "social efficiency" (Smith, 1993). The ramifications of this "efficiency" became apparent as grouping practices became irrevocably linked with the intelligence testing movement.

In a 1924 report, the Chicago Federation of Labor issued a scathing statement on the connection between testing and tracking, pointing out that such a practice ultimately solidified economic class and furthered the status quo. Tyack (1974) writes of their report:

"Ever since the psychologists had discovered correlations between IQ scores and occupations in the army tests, experts like Terman had repeatedly suggested that data on 'intelligence' be used not only for classifying students into homogenous groups but also for channeling them into curricula, for occupations could be ranked by the intelligence needed, from professional business on down to unskilled labor. The Federation has reacted bitterly to this, noting that 'the so-called mental level ascertained by the intelligence tests corresponds in an astounding exactness with the social and economic status of the family. Has a new natural law been discovered which binds each individual to a place in society and against which struggle is hopeless?'" (pp. 214-215)

Despite, and probably in response to, the masked injustices of their time, there were voices in the field of education that arose, proposing a fundamentally different philosophy for guiding school children towards building a better world. John Dewey was a front runner within this group. Garrison (1986) writes that, as Dewey saw it, "only democracy was best able to fully cope with the challenges of a socially dynamic world" (p. 266). Dewey's conception of democracy was a particular one, which stemmed from his view of philosophy, which he perceived to be made out of social and emotional experience. Shannon (1990) writes, "Since he set philosophy as the attempt to understand the meaning of everyday events, Dewey made all aspects of human life subject to philosophical scrutiny and scientific evaluation" (p. 60). Given this primary assumption, Dewey examined the social events of his time, such as immigration, industrialization and urbanization, as well as the reactions of Americans across those events. Through his analyses, he determined that the upper classes within the country were using democracy as a means of bettering their own circumstances. He wrote, "In the name of democracy and individual freedom, the few as a result of superior possessions and powers had in fact made it impossible for the masses of men to realize personal capacities and to count in the social order" (Dewey and Tufts, 1908, p. 443).

Dewey posited that the so-called "democracy" of his time meant little more to the masses than a form of government. He argued that the ideology of democracy must extend beyond this limited conception, stating that democracy was "more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoined communicated experience" (Shor, 1992, p. 136). Shor adds that Dewey viewed democracy as "a process of open communication and mutual governance in a community of shared power, where all members have a chance to express ideas, to frame purposes and to act on intentions" (p. 136).

Dewey held that education of the young was of central importance in his conception of a societal shift towards the ideology of democracy. He stated, "Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is the midwife" (1916, p. 83). Dewey envisioned schooling as an opportunity for students to participate in a miniature democratic community, reflective of the larger society within which each student would one day be an active citizen. He stated, "When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious (1900, p. 49). Dewey believed that children, whose understandings of their world were in formative processes, could transcend the prevalent social injustices of their time by experiencing what it meant to both act and perceive themselves as valued contributors within the "communities" of their school classrooms. He stated, "Children are not as yet subject to the full impact of established customs," therefore, "the chief means of continuous . . . social rectification lies in utilizing the opportunities of educating the young to modify prevailing types of thought and desire" (1922, pp. 127-128).

Dewey's descriptions of democracy within education align closely with what Pateman (1970) refers to as "participatory democracy" (p. 20). Dewey's hope was that children might experience democracy as an active, participatory way of living within their school communities. Benjamin Barber's (1984) distinction between what he refers to as "protectionist/weak democracy vs. strong/participatory democracy" is useful in noting the distinctiveness of Dewey's conception. Barber defines weak democracy as the practice of

turning over our decision-making power to the supposed "voted in" officials who will protect our interests, while he argues that strong democracy is characterized by broad-based participation of all members on matters that effect the common welfare. Carole Edelsky (1994) supports this interpretation of democracy with her definition which asserts that "democracy is a system in which people participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives" (p. 252). Clearly, Dewey's depiction of democracy within education aligns with the strong, participatory democracy noted by these writers.

Shannon (1990) writes that, "Dewey's vision of schools as democratic institutions was not widely accepted or practiced among public school teachers" (p. 79). Yet strands of his perspectives were taken up by those who proposed educational environments that were more centered upon meaningful learning for all students and less focused upon the interests of those in power. During the 1920's and 30's, "progressive" educators were split into two camps - those who promoted child-centered schooling and those who advocated social reconstructionist or community-centered schooling. Child-centered educators sought to develop school environments and practices that would enable each individual to realize his or her "creative essence" (Shannon, 1990, p. 83). Toward this purpose, children were allowed to pursue their specific interests and develop their unique talents. Critics argue that this approach falls short of Dewey's ideals, however, in the sense that it promotes a self-centered form of education to the neglect of consideration of how to better society as a whole, for the common good of all citizens.

Carrying this line of thought further, George S. Counts spoke before the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Progressive Education Association in Baltimore, on the topic, "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?" In his speech, Counts (1932) outlined his beliefs about preparing students for the future, noting both the social inadequacies of the child-centered school movement and the need for educators to consider the social injustices of capitalism. Shannon (1990) writes, "Counts believed that freedom could be achieved only through the negotiation of an equitable social contract in which an informed citizenry could participate actively in the debates concerning how society would be run. To prepare all students as citizens in a democracy, teachers were to pose student interests as problems within their social context" (p. 95). It was clear that Counts hoped

that children might be able to use learning as a tool towards their social betterment. Ideals purported by Counts, as well as others within the social reconstructionist movement, reflected the neediness of our country. Amidst the heart of the Great Depression, these educational theorists were acutely aware of social injustices and capitalism-gone-bad.

Weiler and Mitchell (1992) denote the social reconstructionist movement as a distinct forerunner of critical pedagogy, of which they state, "Critical pedagogy links education with an analysis of politics and economics, and takes as central the belief that schools are places where social analysis and the empowerment of students can take place" (p. 2). They add that social philosophers such as John Dewey and George Counts were instrumental in moving educational thought in this direction, asserting that they, "presented a vision of education as a means for individual growth and social change" (p. 2).

Reproduction and Production Theories: Building Blocks of Critical Pedagogy. During the years that followed the work of the social reconstructionists in the 1930s, shifts in educational trends that supported, neglected or stifled democratic ideals generally mirrored the political climates of the times. Of specific interest was the back and forth nature of this shifting across the latter half of the century. Following the second world war, progressive efforts were stifled during the McCarthy era, reflective of perceived needs to foster high academic opportunities for "gifted" students, particularly in the maths and sciences. This trend heightened following Russia's launch of Sputnik in 1957, and academic tracking was entrenched within public schools across the country, widening educational disparity between those considered to be gifted elite and those who fell short of this standard, which generally included children of lower socioeconomic status. David Tyack (1974) describes the predominant national mood and its implications for education during this time period:

"One reason for the overshadowing of the claims of the poor and the victimized minorities in the cities was preoccupation with the cold war during the late 1940s and 1950s. During one year of World War II the United States spent more for military purposes than it had expended on public education during the entire history of the nation. In 1955, a 'peacetime' year, the federal government spent over \$40 billion, almost four times the total expenditures for public education. But the cold war influenced the schools in many ways other than financial: under the

influence of McCarthyism many liberal and radical teachers were fired or silenced; pressures for ideological conformity became intense for students as well; little children in elementary schools learned passive fear as they huddled under their desks in mock atomic attacks; and competition with Soviet expertise became a leitmotiv of education policy (recall that increased federal aid to education entered in the National *Defense* Act of 1958). Opinion makers in education focused public attention on the need for cultivating talent as a weapon in the contest with communism" (pp. 275-276).

During the 1960s and 1970s, democratic educational ideals began to reemerge, particularly following the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Although this act provided women and citizens of minority races with a legal commitment toward equal educational opportunity, disparity and oppression persisted. Students were physically bused across cities in order to "desegregate" school environments and balance the racial distribution of children across schools. Yet within these racially mixed environments, rigid ethnic, racial and gender roles and stereotypes remained and tracking limited social contact across groups (Wheelock, 1992).

In the late 1960s, educational critics emerged, grounding their analysis of education in social problems of the time period. Weiler and Mitchell (1992) assert that their critical tradition was deeply influenced by the development of critical social analysis across various aspects of U. S. society. They write:

"Legal and institutional racism was challenged by the African-American-led civil rights movement; patriarchal practices and sexism were critiqued by the women's liberation movement; the role of the United States in a world system of imperialism and neo-colonialism was called into question by the movement against the Vietnam war and by the introduction of political and social criticism from Latin America, Asia and Africa; the inequities of the class divisions within the United States were analyzed by a number of neo-Marxist theorists" (p. 2).

By the late 1960s, the impact of this broad ranging critical analysis was influencing not only educational theorists, but also classroom teachers towards examining education and schools. A series of books written during this time period by classroom teachers described first-person accounts of the institutional problems within American public schools. Works such as Teaching the Unteachable (Kohl, 1967), Death at an Early

Age (Kozol, 1967), and The Way It's Spoized to Be (Herndon, 1969), painted a picture of the systematic dulling of students' abilities and creativity within urban public schools.

In correspondence with these accounts, many educational theorists of the time period argued that American schools were serving to "reproduce" oppression and inequity across generations of children who were less privileged than the middle-upper class ranks who ultimately made decisions concerning school curricula and policy. This theoretical perspective, referred to as reproduction theory, dominated critical studies of education across the 1970s. Studies such as Bowles and Gintis's Schooling in Capitalist America (1976) were produced during this time period. Shor (1992) writes that Bowles and Gintis identified a "correspondence principle," which implied that schools supported existing power and divisions in society by sorting students into a small elite destined for the top and a large mass destined for the middle and the bottom (p. 19), ultimately reproducing existing class structures. In this sense, schools were seen to teach what has been referred to as a "hidden curriculum" of social control. Althusser (1971) referred to schools as "ideological state apparatuses" which functioned to reproduce the status quo. Weiler (1988) writes that Althusser conceived the schools as the source of instructional and social relationships through which students would learn a way of being in the world and a view of social reality (p. 7).

Late in the 1970s and into the decades to follow, critical theory began to shift once again. Weiler (1988) describes this movement, "While theories of social and cultural reproduction contributed a great deal to critical educational theory, they came under increasing attack for their failure to address the complexity of individual experience and the absence of any consideration of resistance, agency or change in their depiction of schools" (p. 11). Thus, although reproduction theories shed light on the problems associated with furthering the status quo through public education, these theories failed to focus on ways in which individuals or groups of people might actively resist this disparate reproduction. Weiler (1988) then goes on to describe a new wave of thought that emerged in response to reproduction theory, which she refers to loosely as "theories of production." Theories of production, as described by Weiler (1988), Goodman (1992), Shor (1992), and Wink (1997), were primarily concerned with the ways in which both

individuals and classes of people opposed varied forces of social, political and educational domination.

The idea of hegemony was of issue within theories of production. Boggs (1976) described hegemony as "an 'organizing principle or world view that is diffused by agencies of ideological control and socialization into every area of daily life" (p. 39). Gramsci (1971) also spoke of this concept, agreeing that individuals were shaped through hegemonic ideas, but arguing that individuals maintain power to contest hegemonic control. Wink (1997) writes that Gramsci "felt it was important for educators to recognize and acknowledge the existing oppressive structure inherent in schools" (p. 68). Gramsci focused on the importance of bringing to attention subtle hegemonic influences that were prevalent within public school settings, rather than passively ignoring or accepting them.

Giroux (1988) furthered these ideas, building from the "correspondence principle" of the reproductionists. Wink (1997) writes that he suggested, "even though our roots are in the theory of reproduction . . . it is time to move to the *possible* that lies within each of us" (p. 92). Clearly, Giroux was interested in not only critiquing dominant structures, but also in studying ways in which teachers and students might become empowered to act against these structures. The work of Gramsci, Giroux and other production theorists set the stage for the ideas of educational scholars of the 1980s and 90s who sought to define the radical practices that might empower students and teachers to act upon their beliefs.

Critical Pedagogy: Seeking Empowerment Towards Individual Agency and Social Transformation. Weiler and Mitchell (1992) write, "By the late 1980s, the term critical pedagogy came to be applied to the work of a number of theorists in the United States . . . who worked to inspire teachers and students to seek ways of teaching for social transformation and liberation" (p. 3). They add that although the term "critical pedagogy" implies a bounded category, in actuality "a wide range of perspectives has come to be included under its rubric, but all of the work described as critical pedagogy shares a stance of critique and interpretation of pedagogy in its wider sense as including curriculum, social relationships in the classroom, and the ways in which the classroom reflects the larger social context" (p. 3). Scholars in the realm of critical pedagogy, such

as Freire, Shor and McLaren, go beyond theorizing to consider what the empowerment of individuals, coupled with the idea of social transformation, "looks like" in lived practice. Bigelow, Christensen, Karp, Miner and Peterson (1994) write, "Brazilian educator Paulo Freire writes that teachers should attempt to 'live part of their dreams within their educational spaces.' Classrooms can be places of hope, where students and teachers gain glimpses of the kind of society we could live in and where students learn the academic and critical skills needed to make it a reality" (p. 4).

During the 1960s, Paulo Freire conducted a national literacy campaign in Brazil for which he was eventually jailed and exiled from his own country. The reason - because he not only taught peasants how to read, but he also encouraged them to understand the reasons for their oppressed condition. Freire coined the phrases "reading the word" and "reading the world" in connection to this experience. Wink (1997) explains, "Freire was not jailed and exiled because he taught peasants to 'read the word,' but because he taught the subordinate class to critically read the world. Freire taught the peasants to use their knowledge and their literacy to examine and reexamine the surrounding power structures of the dominant society" (p. 65).

As Weiler (1988) writes, "Freire is committed to a belief in the power of individuals to come to a critical consciousness of their own being in the world. Central to his pedagogical work is the understanding that both teachers and students are agents" (p. 17). In considering students to be co-agents within the classroom, Freire emphasized the need for teachers to respect their students' consciousnesses and culture, and to create situations within which students could express their understandings of the world. This emphasis involved moving away from what he referred to as a "banking" model, in which teachers simply transmitted knowledge to passively receptive students, towards a more participatory model, in which students actively talked through and grappled with knowledge, considering issues through the lens of their personal ideas and experiences.

Freire's impact upon education in the United States grew as educators such as Ira Shor embraced it and began to write about its implications for schooling in this country. In Shor's 1992 publication, Empowering Education, he discusses Freire's emphasis upon the impact of a "banking education" model in classrooms, noting that this model is

"antidemocratic." Shor explains that:

"Freire shared Dewey's impatience with passive lecturing and his insistence that learning required participation and inquiry. He developed Dewey's critique of schooling by emphasizing how the banking or pouring-in method is authoritarian politics, because it deposits information uncritically into students . . . denying students' indigenous culture and their potential for critical thought, subordinating them to the knowledge, values and language of the status quo" (p. 33).

Shor (1992) later writes that imposing a banking education model upon students serves to "domesticate" them, a practice which he describes as "making students passive recipients for official knowledge," and thus, not developing a thinking citizenry (p. 99). Freire held that "domesticated" students were no threat to inequality or oppression, but rather that they tolerated the status quo. He hoped, instead, to empower each student to become a "subject," which Shor (1992) describes as a person who "takes her or his place in the world as a thinking citizen, a co-developer of her or his education, and a re-maker of society who questions the unequal order of things" (p. 99). The pedagogy which Freire proposed followed a liberatory, rather than a banking model for grappling with knowledge.

Other scholars of critical pedagogy have also built upon Freire's ideas concerning banking vs. liberatory teaching practices. In 1980, A. D. Edwards called for a "dialectic" rather than a didactic pedagogical practice, and in 1986, Wells referred to the need for "transaction" rather than "transmission" within the classroom. In 1992, Kreisberg argued for a teacher's "power with" rather than "power over" students, and Ira Shor's (1992) work emphasized the need for a participatory learning environment, asserting that, "participation sends a hopeful message to students about their present and future; it encourages their achievement by encouraging their aspirations" (p. 21).

In the growing body of work concerning critical pedagogy, it is apparent that several aspects are essential for moving students towards the possibility of social transformation. One aspect involves nurturing a participatory form of education which could, hopefully, empower students to envision themselves as subjects or agents with much to contribute within the classroom. Another aspect involves conveying to students that each individual is one part of a community of learners, and that each member of the

group is responsible for respecting and supporting their counterparts, acting towards the common good of the collective group. Goodman, in his 1992 work, Elementary Schooling for Critical Democracy, summarizes the need for both of these elements in educational settings, "As Dewey (1927) notes in his view of the 'Great Community,' democratic empowerment also involves a corresponding transformation of human practices and modes of consciousness . . . A dialectical tension exists within a critical democracy between the values of individuality and community" (p. 8). Goodman goes on to explain that while, "on the one hand, individuals within a critical democracy must be not only free but also actively supported in their efforts to 'self-actualize,'" (p. 9) he believes it is important to understand that support within a classroom comes not only from the teacher, but also from other members of that community. He adds, "The value of individuality must be equally balanced by an ethos of community . . . Each individual's self-actualization can be fully realized only within a just and caring society. Individual goals must be balanced by deep and sincere attitudes of altruism, compassion, cooperation, and civic responsibility and the social structures that support them" (p. 9).

Scholars of critical pedagogy across the 1980s and 1990s have persistently written of the need to balance the tension between both self-actualization or agency and responsibility to a collective whole. In the realm of self-actualization, writers have generally focused upon an individual's need to recognize their self-worth, unique personal qualities, and ability to "act" towards personal and community growth, rather than simply being "acted upon" by others. Maxine Greene (1988) refers to nurturing within students a "consciousness of possibility." She recognizes that, in moving students towards this consciousness, teachers need to affirm them as "subjects of decision" (p. 8). Oyler (1996) writes that Greene's work also suggests that students can be nurtured as decision makers when they "act on their own initiatives" (p. 31). The work of Shirley Brice Heath (1983) adds to this consideration, in that she supports the need for classroom environments in which students are treated as smart and capable of making decisions that will benefit themselves and others. Heath recommends that teachers start from a position of asking students to "let us know what they do have, not to tell us what they lack" (p. 314). Greene (1992) adds further to the concept of student agency by stating, "That, really, is

the point . . . to awaken persons to a sense of presentness" (p. 213). Across all of these writings is the notion that students have valuable knowledge and experiences to offer, and that the classroom can be a place where they become cognizant of this sense of themselves and experience what it means to contribute within the classroom community.

In other writings, the idea of responsibility to the good of the classroom community as a whole is emphasized. In The Good Common School, First and Gray (1991) write that schools need to model not only democracy and a celebration of diversity, but also "empathy, altruism, trust, cooperation, fairness, justice and compassion" (p. 205). They add that the aims within these classrooms should be "the quality of communal caring and the sense of community conscience" (p. 205). Apple and Beane (1995), in their edited work, Democratic Schools, develop this idea further when they state that:

"Democracy is not simply a theory of self-interest that gives people license to pursue their own goals at the expense of others; the common good is a central feature of democracy. For this reason, the communities of learners in democratic schools are marked by an emphasis on cooperation and collaboration rather than competition. People see their stake in others, and arrangements are created that encourage young people to improve the life of the community by helping others" (pp. 10-11).

Boyer (1995) cites the need for developing a sense of community conscience by contrasting its development with what columnist William Raspberry, "chillingly describes as a 'consciencelessness' among many children" (p. 174). Boyer purports that each school should affirm its own "commitment to character, by seeking to define through community-wide consultation, those virtues most appropriate" for the good of the collective whole (p. 183). He recommends promoting core virtues such as honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance and giving which he believes will "touch students' deeper selves and help them become more knowledgeable, responsible human beings" (pp. 183-185). These writers hold in common the idea that students can and should develop a deep sense of conscience towards others, through which they can act from their own growing sense of agency towards justly and respectfully supporting the growing agency of others within their community.

Many recent writers in education have connected the elements of developing

personal agency and fostering a sense of community conscience with the idea of democracy. Jaddaoui (1996), a classroom teacher, expresses of the sense of democracy which she desires to foster amongst her students, "I want to think of democracy in a participatory sense, in which all citizens take part, actively, in discussions and actions concerning issues and events that inevitably affect their lives (Barber, 1984). My vision of democracy also encourages individuals to work together toward a 'common good' rather than individually toward private interests and personal gain (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985)" (p. 74). Alfie Kohn (1993) writes that the "discovery of democracy" amongst children "goes well beyond voting: it involves talking and listening, looking for alternatives and trying to reach consensus, solving problems together and making meaningful choices," (pp. 249-250). Shor (1992) writes that "democracy means that ordinary human beings and subordinated groups have the power to act on their interests and to participate equally in developing the policies governing the life of the nation," (p. 168) going on to connect this conception with the sphere of the classroom as an arena in which students can begin to embrace their power to act. Apple and Beane (1995) state their position when they write, "We admit to having what Dewey and others have called the 'democratic faith,' the fundamental belief that democracy has a powerful meaning, that it can work, and that it is necessary if we are to maintain freedom and human dignity in our social affairs" (p. 6). They then list what they refer to as "foundations of the democratic way of life," emphasizing that "it is these conditions and their extensions through education that are the central concerns of democratic schools" (p. 6). The conditions they list are:

1. The open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible.
2. Faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems.
3. The use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies.
4. Concern for the welfare of others and 'the common good.'
5. Concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities.
6. An understanding that democracy is not so much an 'ideal' to be pursued as an 'idealized' set of values that we must live and that must guide our life as a people.
7. The organization of social institutions to promote and extend the

democratic way of life. (pp. 6-7)

In that Apple and Beane identify these classroom characteristics as "foundations of the democratic way of life," it is apparent that they envision schooling as a social institution which can serve to prepare students to live in actively democratic ways as a adult citizens. McLaren (1989) writes of this purpose also, "Viewing schools as democratic public spheres means regarding schools as sites dedicated to forms of self and social empowerment, where students have the opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills necessary to live in an authentic democracy" (p. 238). McLaren also recognizes that, particularly for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds or from minority racial groups, pursuit of this way of life will not only be a dramatic shift from the oppressive subordination they have and will likely be faced with across their lives, but also an intensely difficult movement against the grain. Nonetheless, McLaren asserts that this movement is not only desirable, but also necessary. He states:

"The perilous and immense task ahead of us is to engage the real needs of the oppressed and to foster an unending commitment to their empowerment. We must work hard to reverse the current decline of moral passion and the socially induced depletion of the human spirit. The anger and sullen outrage that fills the gaps between need and fulfillment for many of our youth must be met in the classroom . . . Teachers must be agents of transformation and hope" (p. 242).

The vision that McLaren, Giroux, Goodman, Freire, Shor, Greene and others hold for education is directly related to social transformation. These scholars believe that, as Dewey (1900) wrote, "When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious" (p. 49). Almost a century later, Goodman (1992) affirmed Dewey's vision, writing that, "Our desire is to address practices of elementary education that will prepare children for a society in which citizens are intellectually aware of the world around them, are capable of taking an active role in promoting democracy in all spheres of social life, are encouraged to develop their unique individuality, and can exhibit a vital concern for not only their

own well-being, but also the well-being of all people who live on our planet" (p. 25). McLaren (1989) stated that schools must find better ways of making themselves "places where students can be empowered to gain a sense of control over their destinies rather than feel trapped by their social status" (p. 152). And Giroux (1992) expressed his belief that public schools are in a position where they can either remain static, and reproduce oppression and inequity, or radically act against this perpetuation. He asked, "Are schools to uncritically serve and reproduce the existing society or challenge the social order to develop and advance its democratic imperatives?" (p. 25). In response to his own question, Giroux answered, "Obviously, I opt for the latter. I believe schools are the major institutions for educating students for public life. More specifically, I believe that schools should function to provide students with the knowledge, character and moral vision that builds civic courage" (p. 25). Children learn by experience, and as Pateman (1970) writes, "We learn to participate by participating" (p. 105). The hope of a democratic form of education, as perceived by those irrevocably committed to the equitable education of all children, is that children might experience what it means to see themselves as agents and consciously act toward the good of themselves and their community in school settings, and that this way of seeing and acting might later characterize their future lives as adult citizens.

My "Need to See"

As a graduate student, my examination of critical pedagogy, its emphasis on personal agency and community conscience, and its consideration of social transformation, has been ongoing. I continued to be enamored by the ideals presented by authors such as Dewey, Greene, Shor, Goodman and McLaren. Yet I have also become acutely aware of my own difficulty in envisioning how I might implement these ideals in actual classroom practice. While these authors wrote of work with public school children, many of whom were not from privileged situations, I teach in a private, liberal arts college, within which most of my students are from white, middle or upper class backgrounds. Yet I am aware that many of my students, who are training to be teachers, may be working one day with children whose backgrounds are unlike their own. I have

wondered how I might convey to these students the passionate commitment to all children that I have read so much about. I have also recognized a need to examine my efforts to teach towards this purpose.

Connecting Theory with Instructional Practices at the College Level. Across the course of my graduate work, I embarked on several self-evaluative studies of my own teaching in college education courses. In so doing, I learned, as Simon (1988) stated, that, "The move from visionary rhetoric to classroom reality, from curricular critique to pedagogical possibility, is rarely straightforward" (p. 1). A representative self-evaluation occurred during the Spring of 1995, when I decided to analyze and critique my teaching across the course, "The Diagnostic Teaching of Reading," which I had taught for six consecutive semesters at that point. The course structure provided my students with the opportunity to work one-on-one with a child in the area of reading and to participate in a whole class discussions that framed their work with their child. My hope was that this course experience might help them to consider their child as a whole person, not just a "deficient reader," and to begin to gain access to the child's way of thinking and learning about their world as they got to know him or her - considering what caught their attention and aroused their interests, and essentially, connecting with who the child was and what he or she brought into their work together. My personal goal as a course instructor was to model this "connection," in a sense, by trying to consider each of my students as individuals, seeking to understand how they viewed teaching and their work with their child, trying to see their purposes and interests and allowing what I learned about them to guide me in directing the course.

In preparing to carry out this self-critique, I read the works of classroom teachers who had examined their own teaching and shared their lived experiences in writing. Those readings which impacted me most were books by William Ayers (To Teach, 1993), Sylvia Ashton-Warner (Teacher, 1963) and Mike Rose (Lives on the Boundary, 1989). I also surveyed "teacher as researcher" qualitative methods and decided to keep a personal journal, informally interview my students at various points across the semester, videotape and analyze class session, analyze class documents, and ask my students to write evaluative letters to me. At the close of the semester, I wrote a reflective paper which I

later presented at the National Reading Conference (Murrill, 1996). In it I reflected on my growing understandings of what it meant for me to try to nurture a course experience that focused upon the students as participants and contributors and upon the growth of our group as a collective, supportive whole.

In my paper I considered the fact that, although students' experiences and needs can be a shaping factor within a course experience, a course does not magically direct itself in that sense. As William Ayers (1993) describes, "Bridge building requires someone to lay the first plank!" (p. 77). The course experience had to start with me. I began by inviting my students to share stories about themselves, modeling for them ways that they might be able to open conversations with the children they would be working with. My students journalled with me regularly over the course of their meetings with their children, and by the mid-point in the semester, I was encouraged by both the quality and quantity of the interactions that were taking place - both within the class setting and after hours. That particular semester, more students came by my office to talk about how things were going with their children than ever before. Students shared with me and with each other many of the impressions, surprises, questions and uncertainties that they were bringing from their one-on-one sessions with these children.

There came a point in the semester, however, when the tone within our interactive, supportive class "community" took a drastic turn - the week following the mid-term exam. At this point, I related well to a statement made by Ashton-Warner, "How I hate and fear the killing of inspiration!" As I have found often to be the case in my experience as a teacher, the use of evaluation altered our conversation space as a class. It reinforced the position of teacher as evaluator and student as the evaluated. On exam day, one of my students told me, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" in reference to the difficult examination I had created for them to respond to. At first, I was taken back by the student's statement. I had never experienced such a response before, yet my exams had been similar in semesters past, set up to challenge students to think hard about what we had considered in class and to apply what they had learned to questions I posed. I had not attempted to estrange my students, yet when exams were returned to them two sessions later, it was clear that this had occurred, and much more

dramatically than I had experienced in the past.

Later I reflected further on this student's statement, guessing that perhaps this semester's exam had hit hardest because student expectations were different this semester. For two months, we had been collaboratively establishing an environment in which students' ideas and experiences had been valued. Yet when my students were evaluated on the written exam, attention was focused on "correct" and "incorrect" answers and test scores. Essentially, I moved from a paradigm of trust to a paradigm in which students were "sorted" according to how successfully they acquired fixed knowledge that I transmitted to them (Shor, 1992). In this sense I had, in essence, "disempowered" my students, sending them the message that "knowledge and power are fixed from above, not negotiated or discovered from below" (Shor, 1992, p. 200). I wondered if I could have better prepared my students by creating an exam that aligned more closely to the course experience, inviting student experience and ideas as supports for answers given, rather than requiring prescribed information.

The exam experience was unsettling, and following it I found myself attempting to regain trust by "working harder." In effect, I did not realize that my efforts reverted back to my "old ways of doing things;" I prepared class sessions as creatively as I could, tried to motivate and interest students through my own teaching methods, and contrived ways to get students to participate "upon request." Despite these efforts, I sensed that I wasn't clicking with the class in a dialogic sense; instead they seemed silent. After viewing a videotaping of a class session, I became aware of the fact that I had unconsciously taken the direction of the course back into my own hands almost completely. Comments that I made while observing the videotaping included, "I heard my voice so much; I just went on and on . . ." and "When they had time away from my voice, they came to life." I realized that I had forgotten to do something essential to my purposes. I had not listened thoughtfully to my students, letting them tell me what their needs were. Rather than basing my support efforts upon their stated needs or requests, my attempts had resulted from my personal ideas concerning their needs. William Ayers (1993) expresses an idea, relevant to the need to listen to students, which has become essential for me to return to time and again, since coming to this awareness about my

teaching. He writes:

"Teaching is an interactive process that begins and ends with seeing the students. This is more complicated than it seems, for it is something that is ongoing and never completely finished . . . as the student becomes more fully present to the teacher, experiences and ways of thinking and knowing that were initially obscure become the ground on which real teaching can be constructed" (p. 25).

At that point in the semester, I asked my students to write letters to me, responding to two prompts: 1) "Where are you?" in relation to the course at this point - how do you feel about it, etc., and 2) "What can I do to support you?" I wanted to, as Ayers (1993) describes, "see the student" as I considered how to support each person, rather than contrive my own means of support which might hit or miss authentic needs and interests. As I opened myself up to students' responses, I sensed our shift back toward the trust paradigm that we had initially established as a class. Students' statements defined specific needs, identified major sources of stress, and revealed misconceptions about pending course requirements which were creating confusion. After receiving these letters, I responded to students individually, and then sought to address needs that were impacting a critical mass of students by negotiating "big issues" with the class as a whole. As a result, added time was given for the completion of a course project, a portfolio representative of their work with their children. In addition, students worked collaboratively with me to create a grading rubric for the project, which we completed in time for them to use it as a reference as they finished work on their portfolios. Cooperative development of the portfolio rubric consumed several class sessions, for which I "dropped" added material that I would have gone over with them. Was this the best decision to make? I hoped so, given the nature of our work that semester. Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) writes, "What a dangerous activity reading is; teaching is. All this plastering on of foreign stuff. Why plaster on at all when there's so much inside already? So much locked in. And not draw it out either. If I had a light enough touch it would just come out under its own volcanic power" (p. 14).

As a result of this self-study, I have considered and reconsidered my beliefs about teaching and learning. Several understandings from the writings of scholars of critical

pedagogy have become clearer for me. My belief that students have "much inside already" as Ashton-Warner (1963) puts it, has been confirmed. I have come to realize that my students have much more to contribute than I have credited them for in the past. I have sensed in earnest the need to work with my students through a participatory, rather than a "banking" model, as Shor (1992) and Freire (1973) recommend. I have begun to realize the difference between having "power over" and "power with" students, as Kreisberg (1992) noted. I have observed that the creation of a trusting, supportive environment invites participation and contribution, and that a teacher-centered, teacher-controlled approach stifles it.

I have also begun to recognize that teaching in participatory, co-constructed ways is extremely difficult. Even in situations such as this self-study, in which I had pre-defined my ideals and made a conscious commitment towards self-evaluating my movement in these directions, I unconsciously took the reins of teacher-control into my own hands on multiple occasions, and I regularly forgot to "listen" to my students. It had been easier than I had thought it would be to lose sight of what I hoped for our class as a growing democratic community.

Finally, my self-evaluative work provoked considerations of several questions that I felt a responsibility to consider as a teacher educator. I had experienced new tensions within my teaching that were connected with my efforts to invite student participation and interaction. Britzman (1991) writes that, "When powers shift, hierarchies invert, and certainty crumbles, and when boundaries are transgressed in voluntary and involuntary ways, the new dilemmas, tensions and contradictions must be accounted" (p. 60). In this respect, I struggled with my position as an evaluator of student work. In one sense, my assumption of this role seemed to breach the trust that I was seeking to build with my students. Yet in another sense, I was well aware of my responsibility to hold students accountable for foundational information and thoughtful consideration of issues that were related to their future work as teachers. Along the same line, I wanted to invite student contributions and encourage students to share interests and "need to knows" that might guide our work together, while on the other hand I sensed the need to direct the attention of our group toward topics that *I* believed they needed to grapple with. Assuming

teacher-control allowed me to do just what it suggests, *control* the direction of our course experience. Inviting students to share that control made me feel uncertain and worried.

Time and time again I recognized how comfortable it was for me to retreat towards teacher-control. Yet I continued to come back to reconsiderations of how important it was not to send students the message that teacher knowledge is *the* sanctioned knowledge, and that their role was to simply receive that knowledge. McLaren (1989) writes that each decision and action that a teacher makes related to life within a classroom is an expression of his or her pedagogical perspective. He states:

“Pedagogy (refers) to the integration in practice of particular curricular content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, and evaluation, purpose and methods. All of these aspects of education practice come together in the realities of what happens in classrooms. Together they organize a view of how a teacher’s work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others and our physical and social environment” (p. 161).

Talking to my students about my beliefs concerning “democratic” classroom practices certainly conveyed to them a message about my vision for teaching and learning. Over time I realized, though, that the actual practices I lived out amongst my students sent an even louder message. Retreat towards teacher control certainly did not affirm any verbal assertions that I made concerning democratic classroom practice. I sensed a need to continually reflect on my words and practices amongst students and to contemplate the messages they sent concerning teaching and learning.

In our work together, I was hopeful that members in my class groups might consider what it meant to be supportive of and supported by other members across participatory class experiences. I hoped that in some way our evolving understandings of learning might be shaped. Yet I still wondered how difficult it would be for my students to live out "democratic" beliefs and practices in K-12 classrooms, particularly those in which children may come from very different backgrounds or levels of privilege. I sensed that my work as a teacher of college level, generally middle- or middle/upper-class students, was probably easy compared to that of teachers who worked with K-12 students

from situations that were far from privileged. McLaren (1989) writes, “When You Wish Upon a Star, It Makes a Difference Who You Are . . .” and goes on to explain that “economically disadvantaged children are being groomed by society at an early age to fail, doomed to perpetuate a vicious and endless cycle of poverty created by a culture obsessed with success and wealth” (p. 150). These children may be familiar with low expectations, poor self esteem, and the feeling that their future possibilities are limited, whereas most of my students had experienced academic success and viewed their futures as subject to their own shaping and as opportunities to succeed further. Undoubtedly, the perceptions that my college students and McLaren's schoolchildren held, concerning their world and their places in it, were different. I guessed that these distinctly different perspectives could not help but influence their classroom experiences.

Whereas I rarely observed in my students issues such as low self-esteem and anger towards society, I realized that some of my students may work with children who were dealing with these issues. Whereas my students rarely disrupted class work or presented behavior problems that impeded our growth as a supportive community, I guessed that students who were being “groomed to fail,” as McLaren (1989) puts it, might indeed channel their anger or resentment concerning this expectation into their treatment of one another. Whereas my students were willing participants, I wondered whether or not students who were accustomed to school failure might prefer to opt out of participation, favoring passivity over the risk of failing in front of their peers. I realized that even if my college students did participate willingly, respect one another, and view themselves as valued agents within our community of learners, their successes in these directions may not necessarily be linked to their understanding of how to move K-12 children towards these possibilities.

I reflected upon the present ideals that I was bringing into my college teaching, as well as the classroom methods that I was using to support these ideals. Would these beliefs and practices have made a difference if I had applied them when working with Maria Charro, or Afiba, Crystal or J.J.? And if I could not answer this question, which I did not believe that I could, how honest was it for me to convey to my students that these beliefs and practices were necessary, realistic or effective amongst K-12 students who

were accustomed to failure? Goodman (1992) writes, “There are very real dangers in not situating our theorizing within visions of practice” (p. 169). Given the differences between my college teaching situation and my students’ future teaching opportunities, I wondered if perhaps the course experience in which we were engaging was more useful for students’ present “academic” considerations of educational theory than it would be influential on their actual visions of practice in real classrooms with real children. I sensed a gnawing need to situate my own theorizing within the experience of working in a K-12 classroom. As I approached the capstone experience in my doctoral studies, the dissertation project, I hoped to connect this “need to see” with my dissertation work.

Connecting Theory with Instructional Practices in an Elementary Classroom. As I completed the 1995/96 school year, seeking a venue for my dissertation research, my faculty advisor introduced me to three area teachers who were finishing their Master's work together, Sarah Rhea, Kelly Ainsworth and Rebecca Matthews. My advisor had been one of their course instructors that semester, and all three had expressed to her their desires to return to K-12 teaching following their Master's work and pursue the development of what they called "student-centered" classrooms. Their work interested me. I was told by others that all three teachers were seasoned, had reputations as teachers who were committed to their students, and were willing to take risks for the purpose of moving towards what they believed might best meet their children's needs.

Sarah Rhea, one of these teachers, had taught for sixteen years, fourteen of which had been in the local Valley City School System. Her experiences had included teaching both in upper elementary classrooms and in the system's gifted program for 3rd through 5th grade children. Having taken a one year leave of absence to complete her Master's degree, Sarah's desire was to return to Valley City in the fall of 1996, this time seeking a primary level teaching position. When I first met with Sarah during June of 1996, I was almost immediately impressed by her demeanor. Not only did she present herself as knowledgeable and articulate, but she also exuded an energetic enthusiasm about teaching and an undeniable commitment to children. Listening to her talk about her hopes for the following Fall, it would have been extremely difficult not to become excited with her. On several occasions when Sarah and I met amongst other colleagues across the course of

summer 1996, I noticed that her enthusiasm and energy were infectious. Sarah had a way of drawing out the best in her colleagues, enthusiastically responding to their ideas and building upon them with further considerations. Never once did I sense that these "planning sessions" for future classroom responsibilities seemed like "work" to Sarah. She appeared to genuinely enjoy talking about teaching and learning. I quickly realized that Sarah was an extraordinary person and was fully expectant that she was also a remarkable teacher.

As we continued to meet or phone one another that summer, I expressed to Sarah my desire to learn more about her beliefs about teaching. I found out that a fellow graduate student had interviewed Sarah twice during the previous Spring, asking her a variety of questions concerning how her graduate work had effected her as a teacher, and how she envisioned that it may have an impact upon her teaching practices as she returned to the classroom. When I asked Sarah if I might listen to those interview tapes, to enhance my growing understanding of her beliefs about teaching, she readily assented.

Both her interview responses and the ongoing conversations that I had with Sarah framed my initial perceptions of the teaching ideals that she espoused. Reflecting upon these sources, I came to view Sarah as a teacher who was setting out to facilitate a classroom setting where students' ideas and concerns were heard and valued. Sarah expressed her appreciation, in particular, for the "modeling" that she had taken part in within a recent graduate course. She described this course experience for me: *"At the beginning we came in, as you tend to do, with your own ideas. But the more we went the more you started to respect everyone else's ideas, even if they were different, and their approaches. And the more we started to be good listeners. I respect everyone in that class."* Sarah added that she desired to facilitate this type of environment in an elementary classroom, explaining that she hoped *"to encourage the feeling that what the kids have to say is important, to me and to each other, and that they can learn from each other."*

I also perceived that Sarah desired to build her classroom curriculum, in part, upon students' interests and needs, continually measuring herself against the question, *"Am I listening to what the kids are saying?"* She provided me with an example of how

she might attempt to accomplish this by describing her collaborative work over the course of the Spring 1996 semester on an *"inquiry project"* with a seven year old boy whose name was Jerome. She explained:

"He has such great thoughts! That's how the inquiry really came up, because I didn't really think of it, and he didn't, of course, say, 'Let's do an inquiry!' But he kept asking all of these questions: 'Well, what about that?' 'What makes this?' We'd just be talking, and I'd think, 'We need to take advantage of this and do something he's interested in.' So that has been very eye opening."

Sarah described her hopes for a similar curricular focus she might move toward in the Fall, *"I want to try to have my classroom kind of evolve around inquiry . . . not ignoring the skills, but involving the skills as we go in our units. As we're discovering and reading and listing facts, we can use our specific skills in reading and writing."* During a joint conversation with other colleagues, Sarah mentioned the possibility of beginning the school year by inviting children to create "legacy boxes" as means of learning about her students. By encouraging the children to collect personal artifacts that held meaning for them and asking them to talk about these objects and share the stories behind them, Sarah hoped to find out more about each child, as a starting point towards moving in an inquiry-based curricular direction.

Sarah added that over the course of her work with Jerome she had found herself becoming intensely involved in exploring his learning processes. She mentioned, *"I think you want to be that involved with everybody . . . you know, you need a class of ten!"* Given my own teaching experience and awareness of the demands placed upon a teacher's time, I was sensitive to the reality that Sarah alluded to, the constraint of possibly having too little teacher to go around. I was appreciative of Sarah's honesty as she described additional concerns that she had considered as she formed her ideas for teaching in the Fall. She expressed, *"I hope my ('student-centered') class isn't going to be total chaos, where the kids are swinging from the roof!"* She added that she sensed the need for support from colleagues as she sought to nurture a participatory classroom environment, stating, *"These are the kinds of things that you can't teach by yourself."* Her desire was to maintain connections with colleagues that she had completed her Master's program with,

mentioning Kelly and Rebecca in particular, for the purpose of providing each other with a continuing support network. Because her teaching assignment was not determined until mid-summer, she expressed at an earlier point that she held uncertainties about the building context within which she would teach, wondering whether or not the atmosphere there would be open to curricular ideas which were built upon students' needs and interests. She admitted, *"I'd love to be in a school where people are doing an inquiry of their own."*

Despite the factors that remained yet unknown, as well as the risks that Sarah had considered, her resolve to move forward with her purposes was firm. Sarah expressed to me that her Master's work had greatly influenced her evolving beliefs about teaching. She explained, *"What they (the university faculty members with whom she had studied) have exposed me to, made me think about and read . . . I've thought, I need to go try some of these things out."* She explained that in her past years of teaching, although she was consistently rated as "Superior" by her former building principals, *"I was teaching, but I was not teaching well. I think you're a stronger teacher if you have an understanding of how people learn. This year, I really had time to think about what I really think about how children learn and how that influences everything you do."* It was apparent that Sarah viewed the ideas that she had considered as a graduate student as having provided her with an important foundation that had been missing in her former teaching.

Without exception, across all of our summer conversations as well as the interviews which Sarah had provided me access to, I noted that Sarah continually mentioned professional literature that had impacted her beliefs about teaching and learning. She had been particularly impressed by the accounts of teachers who had studied their own efforts towards meeting students' learning needs. On several occasions she mentioned the work of Vivian Gussin Paley, who authored both Kwanzaa and Me (1995) and You Can't Say You Can't Play (1992). Sarah commented that she desired to emulate both Paley's emphasis on valuing differences amongst her students and Paley's marked, though sometimes painful, honesty concerning her own progress and regressions throughout her efforts to accomplish this. Sarah also mentioned To Teach (1993), by William Ayers, the book with which I was familiar that focused extensively on building a

classroom in which students' needs and interest were a starting point for all decision making. In addition, Sarah noted that Learning Denied (1991), by Denny Taylor, had informed her awareness of the blaming and labeling that can occur when a child is not successful in school, and had also caused her to think about how seldom teachers reflectively examine whether or not their practices are "missing" children. Sarah also commented on the work of Lisa Delpit, author of Other People's Children (1995), mentioning that the book had raised several questions which she was hoping to examine further across her teaching efforts. She explained, *"Is she (Delpit) telling me that I need to teach my African American children or my Thai kids differently than my white children? And what about those that come from Appalachia? Do we wait until they're comfortable in their own discourse? Do I differentiate instruction? I want to know more about that, since I do deal with several different cultures in the city schools."* Throughout all of these discussions about the work and ideas of educators, I was struck by Sarah's intense commitment to serve the needs of her students and by her openness to beliefs, ideas and practices that were consistent with that commitment. My respect for Sarah continued to grow as I became better acquainted with her.

Across our conversations together, I noted that Sarah rarely used the word "democratic" when describing her projected teaching practices. Instead, she frequently talked about ideas such as building a *"student-centered"* classroom environment, and nurturing a sense of *"community"* amongst her students. Her commitment to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and minority racial groups was evident. In fact, she explained to me that she *"would prefer"* to work with kids who weren't from privileged backgrounds, stating, *"I am just more excited about the city. I think the city is a little more dynamic . . . I like the diversity in the city. I like learning from the kids and them from each other."* Although Sarah didn't use all of the theoretical language of scholars such as McLaren, Dewey or Freire, she seemed to embody the "heart of a teacher" which these authors were writing about. I was grateful when Sarah agreed that I might observe her and assist in her classroom across the course of the following school year, pending the approval of whomever might become her building principal. I was well aware that I had much to learn both from and with Sarah as we sought to integrate our

beliefs into lived practices.

Midway through the summer months, Sarah learned that she would be teaching at Eastside Elementary School in the Fall, at the second grade level. She was elated when she learned that Kelly Ainsworth, her close friend and one of the teachers that she had just finished her Master's program with, had also been hired as a second grade teacher at Eastside. They would be teaching in adjacent classrooms. In subsequent meetings that I had with Sarah across the end of the summer, she informed me of curricular planning that she and Kelly were collaborating on, of books that they were mutually reading to help them prepare for the Fall, and of her appreciation for the Eastside building principal, Mr. Dixon, who had created this opportunity for them to work together, knowing that they shared similar ideals about teaching and learning and that they desired to provide support for one another.

As the Fall approached, I looked towards my opportunity to learn from and with Sarah over the course of the 1996/97 school year as a chance to consider many questions which my past teaching experiences at both the elementary and college levels, and my continuing readings about critical pedagogy and democratic classroom practices had raised. I respected a statement made by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1996), editors of the Teacher's College Press Practitioner Inquiry Series, which points out a "growing realization that teachers who engage in critical practice are strongly positioned to enrich and alter our understandings of teaching" (p. x). My hope as I have engaged in this project has been to enrich my understandings about teaching as I have observed, worked with and learned from the experiences that Sarah encountered across the course of her year with second grade children at Eastside Elementary School.

I began this work with the understanding that classrooms such as Sarah's do not exist by chance, and that they are not created automatically or without struggle. My own experiences suggest otherwise. Although my questions and considerations have certainly evolved over the course of the project, I began my research by focusing on the need to examine several factors that I perceived may have an impact upon Sarah's experiences with her students. Research questions that I formulated and pursued included:

1. Across the course of the school year, how does Sarah talk about her work with her students? What ideas, issues, etc., does she raise in her

discussion of the year's experience?

2. What activities, assignments and class policies does Sarah construct or co-construct with her students? What words and actions does she use to introduce and carry out these things? What is the relationship between what Sarah talks about and what she carries out in the classroom?
3. What people, material resources or other factors does Sarah report as having an impact upon her work with students? Are there specific supports of significance to her? Specific constraints?
4. What is Sarah's sense of the building context within which she teaches? How does she describe the vision or purpose that the school is moving towards? How does Sarah perceive that her classroom practices are placed amongst the practices of other teachers in her building?
5. How is Sarah's work with her students viewed by members of her school community or others who she identifies as salient to her practice?

For practicing or preservice teachers who may be interested in exploring what it means for a teacher to attempt to "see the needs and interests of students," as Ayers (1993) suggests, as a starting point for teaching, this project offers the story of a teacher who has made such an effort. The story is presented in strands which, woven together, provide a multi-faceted perspective of Sarah's work across the course of a school year.

Chapter 2 tells the story of my work as a researcher and the processes that I engaged in as I worked toward learning about Sarah's beliefs and practices. Chapter 3 presents a chronological perspective of Sarah's year with her students, highlighting vignettes of occurrences and conversations that characterized her work with her students over the course of time. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide an analysis of core constructs which I believe characterized Sarah and her students as they evolved together toward democratic community. Chapter 7 focuses on the impact that context and supportive individuals had upon Sarah's evolving praxis. Finally, chapter 8 concludes this work by presenting the personal meaning that I have constructed through participating in Sarah's classroom and the reflections that I would like to leave with the reader.