

**Becoming Critical: Moving Toward a Critical Literacy Pedagogy
An Argument for Critical Literacy**

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Abstract

This article recounts what happened in "Literacy-Based Reading Programs in the Elementary School," a graduate class at a major university in the Southwest as two university instructors introduced elementary classroom teachers to critical literacy as a lens for reading and responding to children's literature. The instructors created distinct spaces for the teachers to acquire and practice their role as text critics who analyze texts with the understanding that texts are not neutral but represent particular perspectives. The instructors believed that by demonstrating ways to critically analyze texts and by providing the critical tools to understand and interrogate invisible unquestioned social practices, the teachers would be able to draw upon these understandings and experiences to build a foundation for critical literacy in their own classrooms.

Luke and Freebody define literacy as social practice and argue that effective literacy draws on a repertoire of practices that allow learners, as they engage in reading and writing activities, to act as code breakers, meaning makers, text users, and text critics. While these practices are variously mixed in proficient reading and writing, Luke and Freebody argue that "... learners need distinct spaces for acquiring and practicing these domains, as well as ample room to practice their integration in meaningful events". The first three components reflect what is commonly observed in many literacy programs and practices, however, the fourth component, text critic, is not as widespread, especially in elementary classrooms. In this domain, learners "critically analyze and transform texts by acting on knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral—that they represent particular points of views while silencing others and influence people's ideas". In other words, the reader learns to look beyond the words on the page and into the province of how the text "works" – linguistically, politically, culturally, and socially – to position the reader.

This article recounts what happened in *Literature-Based Reading Programs in the Elementary School*, a graduate class, during Summer Session 2001 at a major university in the Southwest as university instructors introduced elementary classroom teachers to critical literacy and its relationship to children's literature, and created distinct spaces for teachers to acquire and practice their role as text critic. Borrowing from Giroux (1988) we designed experiences that would encourage teachers to become transformative intellectuals who take control of their learning and teaching and provide their students with the critical tools they needed to understand and interrogate unquestioned social practices while using the same critical tools for interrogating their own cultural practices. We believed that by demonstrating the use of critical tools through children's literature, we would provide the teachers with understandings and experiences they could draw upon to build a foundation for critical literacy in their own classrooms.

Background of the Study

During the past few years, the faculty in the language and literacy division of our college has been engaged in open dialogue around issues of race, class, gender, and social justice. These discussions have caused many of us to rethink the courses we teach: how we organize them, how we teach them, and how we evaluate our attempts to make our work critical. This task was especially challenging as we thought about incorporating a critical stance into this particular course. Like most children's literature courses, this is a popular one. Most teachers take it because they love children's books, and they want to learn about new titles or new practices. The profile sheet we hand out at the beginning of each semester asks students to state two or three things they hope to gain from the class. Most note that they want to get better at facilitating literature study groups, selecting books to use with students of diverse abilities, organizing their classroom libraries, and so on. While we have never had a student say he or she was taking the class in order to select or use books that invite critical conversations around issues of equity, fairness, and justice, we felt the risk involved in promoting a critical literacy perspective was far less than the risk we would be taking if we did not. We argue that critical literacy is a perspective to be acknowledged and worked through rather than ignored or denied. Our question, therefore, was not whether we should incorporate critical literacy into as "inspiring," "fun," and "relevant to my day-to-day life as a teacher."

Critical Literacy Experiences

We showed the teachers how they might implement a critical approach in their classrooms by demonstrating critical experiences in our classroom. Two experiences we found especially generative in creating critical conversations were reading themed sets of books that dealt with issues of systems of meaning and power that affect people and the lives they lead, and generating critical inquiries into characters' lives. (A bibliography of some of the children's literature that we used in this class is shown at the end of the article.)

Books for Critical Conversations

We began by carefully selecting a range of children's books that had the potential to sustain critical conversations in classrooms. These books met one of the following criteria: (a) They make difference visible, and explore the difference that difference makes. (b) They enrich our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who traditionally have been silenced or marginalized. (c) They show how people take action on important issues. (d) They explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people. (e) They provide complex endings for complex social problems.

We used each criterion as a theme for grouping books. We then invited small groups of students to explore one theme in depth. Each small group was provided the text set of books, a large piece of butcher paper with their theme written in the middle, and markers. They were then given time to read and record responses on the butcher paper. Rather than asking students to read these books and offer open-ended responses such as "I think," "I wonder," or "I noticed," we fronted their discussions by asking them to focus specifically on questions such as "Who benefits?" and "Whose voice is heard or not heard?" These questions helped readers get a sense of which dominant systems of meaning were at work in the text they were discussing. Through these disruptive readings of children's books, we hoped the teachers would begin to understand "... that all texts are motivated—there is no neutral position from which a text can be read or written". For example, after reading *The Story of Babar*, a children's book that had achieved the status of classic children's literature, but in more recent years has been critiqued as being "... patently racist, colonialist, and sexist", one group focused on who in *Babar* was under-represented or misrepresented in the text.

In addition to having teachers engage in critical conversations around children's books, we also provided them with professional readings about critical literacy. Some of the readings explained what critical literacy looked like in practice when using children's literature, and other readings introduced them to what Giroux called the language of critique and possibility

Conversations with Book Characters

We also engaged the teachers in an inquiry around the internment of Japanese American citizens during World War II. We began this study with a strategy we often use to generate curriculum, "Conversations with Book Characters". We began this experience by reading aloud *Baseball Saved Us* (Mochizuki, 1993) and then asked students to respond to the reading using a question and answer format between themselves and the book characters. The students who volunteered to portray the book characters reread the book and talked about the characters among themselves while the rest of the class formulated questions to ask each character. All the students worked hard to understand and question the characters and the context of the era. The discussion between the characters and audience was vivid, and we came away with a range of understandings about the possible motives and behaviors of the characters and perhaps of the time itself. With our help, the students embedded the language of critique and possibility in both their questions and responses. The teachers generated pages of questions as they worked to understand why the Internment had happened and who had and had not benefited from it. As an example, teachers wanted to know who went to the camps and who did not, why no one stopped it, and if there was any resistance.

Method

The class for this study was comprised of the two female instructors and ten other women. The class met for sixteen, three-hour sessions, Monday through Thursday for four weeks in June. The group included teachers from kindergarten through high school; three of the teachers had just received their teaching certification and would be teaching their first class in the fall. Two others had just completed their first year teaching, and one teacher was returning to the classroom in the fall after having spent fifteen years raising her children. The other four teachers had between five and ten years of classroom teaching experience each. All but one of the teachers taught in public schools. Two of the teachers were Latina, while the rest of us were European Americans with an age range from early 20s to late 50s. The diversity of experiences and ages in this class offered a range of perspectives to the study.

We framed our study around Cochran-Smith and Lytle's concept of teacher research which they define as "systematic intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (p. 23-24). Our inquiry examined the following question: What happens when university instructors introduce elementary teachers to critical literacy in their children's literature class? In particular, we wanted to look at how the teachers made sense of critical literacy and how they thought critical literacy fit into their teaching lives. Throughout this study we wrote reflections, took field notes of our daily observations, videotaped and audio taped our group discussions, conducted semi-structured interviews, and read the teachers' reflections and journal responses. We met every day after class to write and review field notes, teachers' reflections, and our transcriptions. As we collected data, we added interpretive commentary about our responses to class experiences.

Erickson's model of qualitative data analysis provided the framework for our analysis procedures. We initially read and re-read our data, and we coded interview, audio and video transcripts as well as written responses from the teachers. As we identified evolving themes and key-linkages between the codes, we created larger categories. Based on these codes and categories, we generated tentative assertions about what was happening in our class, and we continued by reviewing the data looking for confirming and disconfirming evidence to warrant our assertions.

Results and Discussion

By following these analysis procedures we generated three assertions: (a) The teachers gradually moved toward a broadening view of literacy. (b) The teachers wanted to know how a critical literacy curriculum might be implemented in their own classrooms. (c) The teachers felt concerns about taking a critical approach.

Broadening View of Literacy

We began our class with the conviction that critical literacy was not a set of activities but an ideology. We agreed with McLaren's definition of ideology as "a way of viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals, and representations *that we tend to accept as natural and as common sense*[author's italics]" (p. 205). Using this definition we wanted to disrupt the existing ideologies of the teachers in our class with critical dialogue about children's literature. As we forefronted critical concepts during readings about critical literacy, readings of children's literature, classroom discussions, and critical experiences, we noted changes in the teachers' discourse, and we also noted the ways that students began to make sense of new ideas, values, and beliefs. Through our analyses we identified two elements that illustrated how the teachers' views of literacy were expanding to include critical literacy. These elements were evident in the kinds of topics they discussed and the sense-making processes they followed.

Topics. Many of the teachers arrived with a background in and experience with literature studies, so we were not surprised to find that during our first meetings the topics they chose to discuss opened dialogue about children's literature that was rich with personal connections and literary allusions. As an example, in a discussion of *Tuck Everlasting*, Kiersten immediately related to the setting as she made personal connections to memories of a family cabin in the woods. Sharon reflected on the poetic language of the story, and made inter-textual connections to Robert Frost's, *The Path Not Taken*. Some of the teachers noted symbol and metaphor within the story and discussed the greed of the man in the yellow suit, while others made connections to society's current preoccupation with a search for the fountain of youth. The topics of these discussions opened classroom explorations and generated jointly constructed ideas that connected the worlds of text and personal responses; however, we believed that "personal engagement is not enough if students are to learn to read and negotiate the diversity of texts of the culture". We wanted the teachers to go beyond personal connections and move toward a more critical perspective.

As the class progressed, and we introduced a language of critique and possibility and concepts and beliefs concurrent with a critical ideology, we noted a change in the topics discussed in the class. The teachers began to explore topics such as privilege and power and the implication these topics have for literacy education. They grew in their capacity to take a critical stance toward text and to challenge taken-for-granted views of the world. For example, Crystal thought about a favorite childhood book, *Little House on the Prairie* and noted how the perspectives of the Native American characters were absent in the story. She said, "How are you going to convey that to kids — that there is another point of view, that there is another group of people who are suffering in all of these wonderful books that we are reading...." Luz and Diane considered how issues of power and wealth enslaved the children described in the non-fiction book, *Stolen Dreams* (Parker, 1998):

Diane: This young boy worked from the time he was four. In the end he escaped, and he was shot because he was speaking out. It's a whole system and the culture and the system and the poverty are all tied in together.

Luz: ... It has to do with economics and greed and selfishness and taking advantage of people whose voices can't be heard.

Crystal was able to analyze the multiple perspectives and realities represented in a favorite childhood book. She interrogated a view of the world that had become natural to her, and Luz and Diane were not only comprehending a text and linking it to their personal worlds, they were also beginning to analyze the interconnectedness of the dominant systems of meaning at work. They perceived that culture and poverty were part of a larger system that kept the children and the families described in *Stolen Dreams* (Parker, 1998) silent, subservient, and oppressed. In other words, Crystal, Luz, and Diane read the world from a more critical perspective, and this was reflected in the topics they discussed which moved from personal responses toward more critical responses. We noted that "through the personal, students learned to immerse themselves in texts, whereas through the critical they began to distance themselves". These teachers were becoming text critics, understanding that complex cultural and historical structures were embedded within children's literature, and as they started to recognize some of the inequities and injustices in the books we read, they took a step back giving themselves the distance they needed to look at texts through a more critical lens.

Sense-making. The teachers engaged in critical conversations during discussions of professional readings and children's literature. They interrogated some of the cultural and ideological assumptions underwriting the text as well as those they brought to the text as members of a specific social class, culture, and gender. Although the experiences that we created defined a context for the teachers to come to an understanding of critical ideology, we noted the distinct acts of sense-making the teachers used to understand the underlying assumptions embedded in the texts. We observed that teachers began to construct meaning about critical literacy and ideology by making personal and inter-textual connections as well as connections to the larger world.

In reading *The Story of Babar*, many of the teachers recognized the colonial attitudes inherent in the descriptions of the jungle "natives," transparently personified by the elephants in this story, and the wealthy Europeans who lived in the city. One of the main characters, a "rich old lady," bestowed wealth and privilege on Babar and "gave him whatever he wanted." It helped Luz to make sense of the inequities described in this picture book by making connections to her personal life. She remembered:

I'm thinking about some friends of mine who have acquired some nice positions in academia and law ... and I think about their upbringing. A lot of it has to do with positions of wealth from their parents.... But it's the same, that power distribution. They have been positioned, been groomed to ... go to the best schools and universities....

Luz saw that "the rich lady provides a model of life without working... " and a model of privilege based on wealth. She made personal connections between the undeserved privilege in *Babar* and in her personal life, which, of course, was shaped by her cultural experiences. In this case the role that Luz's cultural and social history played in her personal response reflected her awareness of power and privilege and the manner that it positioned Babar -- and her friends -- in today's society.

Other teachers found that building connections to different texts helped them make sense of the critical approach we took toward our readings. Continuing our discussion of *The Story of Babar*, Diane made connections between the importance of European clothing as a symbol of power in Babar and a story about Gandhi that she had recently read with her middle school students:

That issue of clothes! I was reading a story of Gandhi ... and it brought it up there.... They brought out that the clothing was such an important issue...and if you didn't wear British clothing you were a second-class citizen.

Diane made sense of the colonial and patriarchal perspective that Brunhoff took toward the "natives" of Africa by connecting it to another text. She realized that for Babar to be accepted as a civilized being, he needed to be dressed in Western finery, and she found real-life confirmation of this in the story that she read to her students about Gandhi. Like Freire and Macedo, Diane noted that colonialism robbed native people of their culture while "acculturating them into a predefined colonial model" (p. 143). The teachers were coming to understand that "texts not only carry meanings, but also serve ideological functions in the larger society.... They do cultural work by promoting, in subtle ways, a set of values", and in this case, the values had to do with Western costume. Diane began to notice the "ideological functions" of these books.

In contrast, other teachers made sense of critical issues through connections to the world around them. Linda and Luz discussed, from a historical and contemporary perspective, one of the dominant systems of meaning that influence our lives. During a discussion of *Baseball Saved Us*, a story of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, they said:

Linda: What was the government insinuating toward the Japanese with the internment? What did the American people really think? Their thinking must have been influenced by what the government did.

Luz: The government is not perfect, but what the government says, people tend to believe.

Luz and Linda made connections to the world around them, and they noted the power of government to influence our thinking. Luz's present-tense response implied that she felt that the government was still a powerful influence. These teachers wanted to understand how a dominant system such as our government influenced lives and thought while silencing voices during the internment of Japanese American citizens.

The teachers were making sense of the texts by referring to their personal experiences, to other texts, and to the world around them. They were perceiving "the interconnectedness of social conditions and the reading and writing practices of a culture" in the books we were reading, and as they looked back at children's literature set in the past, they also looked forward to make connections to present-day concerns. These teachers tried to make sense of systems that positioned and silenced them through their power and our unquestioned reliance on them. The teachers interrogated dominant systems of meaning to understand the "practices of a culture" in their own lives.

Through these reading experiences followed by dialogue, the teachers came to a greater awareness of the critical issues embedded in children's literature. As they perceived that texts were not neutral and had multiple meanings, they began to realize that this kind of curriculum had implications for their own curriculum. They wondered what that meant to them and to the way children's literature was used within the literacy curriculum in their classrooms.

Critical Literacy Curriculum

Paolo Freire argued that students needed to be problem-posers. As a direct result of our reading and critical conversations around children's literature, they were beginning to question systems that dominated society from historical and modern perspectives, and they wanted to understand these questions more fully. While the teachers in our children's literature class were curious about the idea of a critical curriculum and were beginning to consider the need for this approach, their big questions focused on how to implement a critical literacy curriculum, and what it would look like in practice.

We referred to the many questions about how to implement a critical literacy curriculum as the "but how?" stage of critical literacy. The teachers wanted to know how to create a space for complex dialogue and multiple perspectives, and one of their recurring questions centered around which kinds of books they wanted to use for critical conversations. We read books that openly discussed social issues and others that disguised and naturalized the issues within the texts. Kiersten spoke for many of the teachers as she held up the book, *The Story of Babar* and said:

Would this be a worthwhile book for kids? It would be interesting to read it to them ... seeing ... what kids would pull out of it ... but I think that at the same time if you are going to do that, why not read a book like *Sister Anne's Hands* ?

Kiersten wondered if reading a book filled with unquestioned assumptions and unstated biases would be appropriate for elementary students, however, we believe that a critical literacy curriculum is a stance that shows up in a teacher's thoughts and "encourages students to question what is going on around them." We realized that Kiersten's question was complex because it was not about if she should use this book but more about how she could use a book like *Babar* to encourage students to question what was going on around them. The teachers decided that some books could be put on the shelf for "free reading," while others, like *Babar*, begged for discussion and reflection.

Likewise, we believed that reading books about social issues invited "teachers and their students to move away from passive reading and become more actively engaged in texts that support critical conversations and social action." The teachers acknowledged that the concepts of social action were inherent in reading and reflecting on critical children's literature because books about social justice had the potential to invite a sense of compassion and respect for others. Luz said of these books, "I think that it is a foundation for social action because if you don't respect a culture or community ... I don't think you will care much to take action." We also observed that while the teachers considered taking action against injustice, some of them felt ill-prepared to accept a mantle of social activism, and Linda confided, "We need to be taught to protest... everybody ... that's my age, we were never taught.... So how do we as non-protesters teach our kids how to go through that process?" We shared personal stories and readings about teachers and students who had taken action and discussed missed opportunities and possibilities for action within our schools and communities.

Although the teachers saw the potential for action through children's literature, they admittedly did not know how to go about it. They wanted to know how they were supposed to take action when it was something few of them had ever done. However, we believed that children's literature that explores social issues has "the potential to increase awareness and sensitivity to issues of social justice and the importance of social action." We also felt that by having the conviction that children's literature could help students feel compassion and understanding for others who were oppressed and marginalized, the teachers were coming to terms not only with what a critical literacy curriculum might include, but what a critical stance might mean to them and to students in their classrooms.

We believed that problem-posing and critical inquiry were “empty processes when the question is not one that matters in the life of the inquirers”. The teachers’ critical conversations and questions about *Baseball Saved Us* mattered to them and were filled with potential for research about an historical event and the inequities and injustices that surrounded it. The teachers discovered that while our perspectives and understandings of the internment of the Japanese American citizens had deepened, they continued to find more questions to ask. Through this critical experience, the teachers experienced the potential for exploring critical issues and the recursive nature of a critical literacy curriculum.

Concerns and Resistance

As we observed teachers shifting their beliefs toward literacy as a non-neutral practice, and we began to identify the elements of a curricular framework that support critical literacy, we also noted that many of the teachers struggled with concerns about critical literacy. Not only had their beliefs about literacy been disrupted, but also some of the teachers began to question their ways of seeing themselves in the world. They interrogated their ideological, historical, and cultural beliefs as they took stock of their positions of privilege in our society. Some of the teachers showed resistance to these ideas as they wondered what critical literacy really meant to them as teachers. Their resistance focused on two areas -- their concern over the political nature of critical literacy and their responsibilities for using accurate texts with students..

Resistance and the political nature of critical literacy. The teachers’ immediate concern was directly linked to the political nature of teaching, especially in these times of accountability and the focus on test scores. They understood that “literacy is inherently a political project” as they questioned where critical conversations and discussions of critical issues would fit in their literacy curriculum. Many of the teachers taught in environments that relied on very specific literacy skills from pre-determined curricula. They wanted to understand what effect a new way of looking at children’s literature, one that puts the power of critique in the hands of their students, would have on them and their students, but in particular, they wondered what the parents would say when their students came home discussing issues of critical justice.

The teachers in our class were concerned that parents might object to controversial issues discussed in the classroom. Sharon wrote in a reflection, “My school community has a lot of parent involvement, which is wonderful, but it has sometimes gotten to the point where when parents speak they are listened to more than the teachers....” Crystal and Kiersten echoed Sharon’s concerns. After discussing the graphic descriptions in the book, *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida*, they debated about using it in their classrooms. They concluded that it would be appropriate for older students, but Crystal ended the conversation by saying, “I would just feel like I’d have parents calling.”

Lewis describes literacy practices as social acts which are embedded in larger goals and cultural practices. The teachers considered changing the literacy practices of their classrooms by introducing critical literacy and the role of text critic to their students. By doing so, they knew they would also be challenging accepted cultural/educational practices embedded in the cultural practices of schools and families who perceive and limit the role of literacy in the classroom to code breakers, meaning makers, and text users. The teachers felt a level of concern about the consequences of creating a curriculum that encouraged text critics who would question accepted and established social practices.

Resistance and accuracy of texts. We read books and articles that illustrated how different authors represented the same people and subjects, and how those different representations benefited some groups and continued to marginalize others. As an example, we read multiple texts about Rosa Parks, and noted how each version positioned the reader and Rosa Parks in a different way. Some texts referred to Rosa Parks’ act as serendipitous and to Rosa Parks as nothing more than a tired seamstress. Other texts described the power of the collective action that was behind Rosa Park’s planned act of civil disobedience. The teachers were exposed to varying perspectives of Rosa Parks’ contribution to the civil rights movement -- from someone who reacted to a situation out of nothing more than fatigue to someone who participated in a courageous act of planned resistance. Clara, a new teacher worried about her responsibility to students, struggled to make sense of the multiple texts about Rosa Parks. She wrote::

It feels so overwhelming to me that ... I also have to analyze children’s literature. AND [capitals in the original] how will I know it is accurate because what is the truth anyway?.... I cannot teach my students history and information that I know might be biased....

Clara understood the inherent biases in texts and the notion that they represent a perspective that may privilege one worldview over another. She worried about her responsibility as a teacher to sort through the different perspectives.

Linda had similar concerns about the multiple texts we read about the Japanese Internment. To a number of the teachers, this was the first time they had studied the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. We read children’s fiction and non-fiction literature about this event, but several of the teachers wanted to know more. They checked their classrooms to see how or if this incident was included in their social studies textbooks. They were surprised to find this incident in American history only briefly mentioned, omitting many of the perspectives that we had discovered in our readings. This

concerned Linda, and she worried about her responsibilities as a teacher to portray history accurately. She said:

I didn't realize how much of our history was given to me incorrectly.... It is a lot of responsibility to confirm that everything that our texts tell us is true. I feel overwhelmed when faced with this task for everything I read or teach...."

Linda's concerns repeated those of sociologist and historian, Loewen, who said in a study of twelve American history high-school textbooks that they "supply irrelevant and even erroneous details while omitting pivotal questions and facts in their treatments of issues..." (p. 272). Linda was concerned that her knowledge of history came from textbooks she no longer trusted and that her knowledge might also be irrelevant or erroneous. She felt overwhelmed with the burden of having to verify everything in classroom textbooks so she would not perpetuate misconceptions to her students. Concerns about accuracy of texts caused resistance from some of the teachers as they began to understand that texts were non-neutral and consisted of public and hidden agenda. Whether reading children's literature or social studies textbooks, we encouraged the teachers to interrogate all the texts in their classrooms.

Conclusions

In this study, teachers worked hard to re-envision what reading would mean in their classrooms when they enacted a critical literacy approach. As teachers added the role of text critic to the roles of code breakers, meaning makers, and text users, they had to ask themselves what that meant to their literacy curriculum. They had to reconsider what kinds of books to select for their classrooms if they were to use them to generate critical conversations. The teachers also had to reevaluate what kinds of discussions they wanted to have with their students, moving from the shelter of "safe" topics to unknown terrain where commonly held notions would be disrupted. In addition, teachers found they had to redefine what they meant by aesthetic response, agreeing with Lewis who argued "that another kind of aesthetic response is an awareness of the text as constructed world" (p. 259). Understanding children's literature as both aesthetic and cultural text allowed the teachers to expand their definition of aesthetic to include looking "outward from the works to their social meanings".

Just as the teachers re-envisioned their classrooms and teaching, so did we. Some teachers felt the burden of critical literacy. They felt overwhelmed with problems of race, ethnicity, gender and class discussed in our readings. The oppression, systems of domination, and the weight of the injustices staggered them. We realized that instead of moving toward hopeful action, the teachers were frozen in place with concern about our readings. Upon reflection, we realized we had not done enough to link criticism to hope (Edelsky, 1999; Kohl, 1995; Peterson, 1994).

We also came to understand the need for time and experience to make sense of critical literacy. Corrine's statement, "It feels so overwhelming to me... I guess I am left to fight through this vicious cycle [of injustice]" suggests that four weeks was not long enough for teachers to process this multifaceted topic. It might be better to offer this class during a sixteen-week semester so students have time to reflect on and try out some of the experiences in their classrooms.

What did work well in our class was dealing with critical literacy at both theoretical and practical levels. By carefully structuring critical literacy and giving teachers the language of critique, they came to understand that what matters about critical literacy is what we do with an activity, how we position it for reflection and critique. As Luz stated, "Though I would not necessarily change the topics or content of my classroom, I would certainly change the manner in which we learn." She indeed understands that critical literacy is an ideal—a belief and not merely another program to be transmitted to and digested by her students, and we concur.

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