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A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Social Work
West Chester University of Pennsylvania
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Education

By
Ashley E. Rowe

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those personal and professional inspirations lost during the writing of this dissertation. May you all rest easy knowing your impact and influence on others will live on in your memory.

To Dr. George J. Allen, former Professor at the University of Connecticut and my mentor who passed in January 2021. As I read through the letter of recommendation he wrote on my behalf for this doctoral program, he described me as having a “caring personal style” while commenting on my “resilience and tenacity” and “concern for the well-being of those she taught and the high level of professionalism.” I learned these things through George and by working with him; it is George, that was so (statistically) significant in my life and that of others he taught.

To my Nanny, Mrs. Betty Wilhour, who passed in July 2021. My maternal grandmother was essential in my upbringing, the development of my compassion for others, and my drive to continually learn as a first-generation college student. The matriarch of our small Central Pennsylvania Dutch family meticulously maintained her home and yard while ensuring all her birds never went hungry. I hope someday I am blessed to have grandchildren to care for in the same way you cared for us.

And finally, to bell hooks, influential feminist scholar and prominent author, who passed in December 2021. After reading one of our first EDD 700 articles in this doctoral program, Theory as Liberatory Practice, I began my own transformative, critical journey born out of those powerful words and love.
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Abstract

Educator preparation programs draw from national and state standards to develop teacher candidates at universities across the United States. This study investigated an alternative competency, critical consciousness, as part of the undergraduate curriculum in an Early Grades major at a predominantly white institution (PWI) in Pennsylvania. By contrasting teacher candidates who engage in a semester-long community immersive experience with those who participate in a traditional program, this study compared cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral dimensions of critical consciousness. The study used a convergent mixed methods design grounded in a theoretical framework consisting of humanizing pedagogy theorized through abolitionist teaching and community-engaged teacher education, employing both quantitative and qualitative elements. The critical consciousness survey, which included two valid and reliable instruments—the short critical consciousness scale and the contemporary critical consciousness measure II—were used to collect data about the community immersive (n=16) and traditional program participants’ (n=77) critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action. Informed by case study design, three focus groups (n=5) generated collective data. Several factors, including the Early Grades major, PK-12 educators, and other teacher candidates within the major, either encouraged and/or hindered the development of critical consciousness. This study found while the community immersive experience builds what participants reference as a critical vibe, survey results demonstrated a lack of critical action across both participant groups.

Keywords: critical consciousness, community-engaged teacher education, abolition, educator preparation program, mixed methods
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Chapter I: Introduction

After 160 credits, countless hours of test preparation, undue stress, and thousands of dollars, my former student achieved her educational goal to be a certified grades PK-4 teacher. As a student of color, she encountered many barriers during her eight-year journey. Advising her during these difficult moments and reflecting on her experience, as well as many of the students I see in my professional capacity, has caused me to wonder: Who benefits from the current structure of teacher education? While I do not believe the monies spent on basic skills testing will lead my student and others like her to be effective educators, the current inequitable, educational system prioritizes test scores over opportunities to deeply connect with communities and develop critical consciousness.

Purpose of Study

According to pedagogical theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b), we teach what we value. If this is true, then subjectivity is inherent in the creation of the competencies for future educators. Many teacher educators, those who prepare teacher candidates within teacher education, argue academic success and cultural competence are essential components in Ladson-Billings’ (1995a, 1995b) culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). However, critical consciousness is the third “neglected dimension of culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 145). While educator preparation programs (EPPs) may incorporate aspects of CRP into the curriculum, there is a need to reimagine teacher education which is fundamentally tied to communities. This research intended to elevate alternative approaches to preparing teacher candidates to define their roles as educators in a society with deeply rooted inequalities. Through the work of the community immersive experience, a humanizing pedagogy in a community-engaged approach provides an example of how to build teacher candidates’ critical
consciousness. Therefore, the purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate teacher candidates’ critical consciousness as part of the curriculum in an elementary-level program at a PWI.

**Problem Statement**

Educator preparation programs prepare students, also known as teacher candidates, for professional teaching roles in schools across the United States. These approved programs in the field of teacher education are fraught with required competencies such as basic skills testing in reading, writing, and mathematics which replicate and reinforce social control over marginalized communities (Au, 2019). However, these competencies do not directly prepare effective educators for current PK-12 classrooms reflective of a “new racism” (Au, 2009; Kohli et al., 2017). Kohli et al. (2017) described these settings as “evasive, subtle, and challenging to identify because it [a new racism] is normalized and hidden under the guise of multiculturalism, colorblindness, and everyday individualized interpretations of policy and practices” (p. 182). Therefore, this study considered an alternative competency, critical consciousness, within an elementary-level EPP. The research utilized recently developed state-wide culturally relevant and sustaining education (CR-SE) competencies to connect with critical consciousness in the methodological questioning of the focus groups (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). Likewise, community-engaged teacher education provides another alternative approach focused on a humanizing pedagogy of love and resistance. By contrasting those teacher candidates who engage in a semester-long community immersive experience grounded in an abolitionist teaching framework with those who are traditional program participants, this study further compared cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral dimensions of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970 as reprinted in 2014, 2018; Love, 2019).
Research Questions and Design

The main questions addressed in this research include:

1. Are there mean differences between the critical consciousness of elementary-level teacher candidates who participate in a semester-long community immersive experience at a PWI compared to those elementary-level teacher candidates who do not participate?

2. Does participation in a community immersive experience at a PWI facilitate teacher candidates’ critical consciousness?

The setting, both of time and place, created a distinct environment for this research.

Rationale for Study

Influenced by the social structure in which they exist, EPPs are restricted by regulations and bureaucratic constraints that filter the training of teacher candidates through scripted curricula and static standards (Au, 2009). In contrast to the marginalizing practices of teacher education in the “era of accountability” (Cochran-Smith, 2017), this research explored alternative approaches where teacher candidates can develop critical consciousness situated within communities.

The concept of critical consciousness was originally defined by Freire (1970/2014) in his seminal text Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Critical consciousness is a powerful tool for societal transformation that inspires individuals to contest oppression and dehumanization within their communities (Picower, 2021; Seider & Graves, 2020). Teachers’ critical consciousness is a key part of that transformation. With typical clarity and urgency, James Baldwin’s (1963) A Talk to Teachers articulated the importance of teachers’ critical consciousness:
The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change. (p. 1)

To ask these questions and live with the questions, as Baldwin said, requires imagination. Thus, teaching for social change must include a radical imagination like that offered by Love’s (2019) Abolitionist Teaching, an imagination that resists and agitates against normative practices.

Traditional teacher education houses a singular, multicultural education course to bridge the cultural and linguistic mismatch between a majority white teacher candidate population with a culturally diverse PK-12 student population (Haddix, 2008). In contrast, abolitionist teaching empowers teacher candidates to educate with the “indominable spirit of an abolitionist who engages in taking small and sometimes big risks in the fight for equal rights, liberties, and citizenship for dark children, their families, and their communities” across curricula (Love, 2019, p. 89). In this spirit of abolition, a critical approach in teacher education addresses the fundamental existence of the “overwhelming presence of whiteness in teacher education” (Sleeter, 2001) driving the need to decenter whiteness (Daniels, 2018; Varghese et al., 2019). Whereas many EPPs adopt a monolithic approach that fails to systemically confront issues of
racism, power, and whiteness (Haddix, 2008, 2016; Riley & Solic, 2021). For example, much of traditional teacher education is focused on “methodological and mechanistic terms dislodged from the sociocultural reality that shapes it” (Bartolome, 1994, pp. 173–174).

In contrast, a critical, humanistic approach perceives methods as inherent within the “social constructions that grow out of and reflect ideologies that often prevent teachers from understanding the pedagogical implications of asymmetrical power relations among different cultural groups” (Bartolome, 1994, p. 177). By taking a humanistic approach based on “Love’s conceptualization of abolitionist teaching center[ing] the risk inherent in going against the grain in school,” teacher candidates grapple with their development of critical consciousness (Riley & Solic, 2021, p. 3; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Zygmunt & Clark, 2021). Relative to Baldwin’s (1963) claim, Love (2019) contended:

To commit to imagining is to commit to looking beyond the given, beyond what appears to be unchangeable. It is a way of warding off the apathy and the feelings of futility that are the greatest obstacles to any sort of learning and, surely, to education for freedom…We need imagination. (p. 102)

This dissertation focused on radical honesty and imagination as part of a community immersive experience building teacher candidates’ critical consciousness through a humanizing pedagogy. Ultimately, critical consciousness is the ability to identify oppression and privilege as it relates to teacher candidates’ own position in society or the status of others, reflect upon the impact of oppressiveness or privilege, and act to end oppression through humanizing behaviors and advocacy (Freire, 1970/2014). Following Baldwin, the struggle for critical consciousness is how change becomes a reality.
Background

Four factors make the timing of this study unique and provide its rationale: 1) Development of culturally relevant and sustaining education (CR-SE) competencies in Pennsylvania, 2) rise of resistance movements within the recent five years, 3) highlighted disparities due to COVID-19 global pandemic, and 4) need for humanizing pedagogy given recent national political leadership that perpetuated dehumanization and oppression.

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education (CR-SE) Competencies

The Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium (PEDC) developed the CR-SE competencies emphasizing critical theory. These competencies emerged as part of the proposed revisions to Chapter 49 regulations guiding state standards for certified professional teachers in Pennsylvania (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). To recognize and rectify bias within our system, the Pennsylvania Department of Education partnered with scholars at institutions of higher education to develop eight competencies:

1) Reflect on One’s Cultural Lens
2) Identify, Deepen Understanding of, and Take Steps to Address Bias in the System
3) Design and Facilitate Culturally Relevant Learning that Brings Real World Experiences into Educational Spaces
4) Provide all Learning with Equitable and Differentiated Opportunities to Learn and Succeed
5) Promote Asset-based Perspective about Differences
6) Collaborate with Families and Communities through Authentic Engagement Practices
7) Communicate in Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Ways that Demonstrate Respect for Learners, Educators, Educational Leaders, and Families
8) Establish High Expectation for Each Learner and Treat Them as Capable Deserving of Achieving Success. (Cole-Malott et al., 2021)

According to these competencies, teacher candidates must continuously reflect on their own life experiences and membership to various social groups (i.e., race, ethnicity, social class, and gender), and they ask themselves how these factors influence their beliefs about cultures that are similar to and different from their own. (Cole-Malott et al., 2021, p. 4; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b)

This dissertation utilized these competencies to frame its research questions as well as specific qualitative focus group questions. This collaborative work from the PEDC highlights an underlying current of resistance movements maintaining a critical approach in the second factor of this section.

**Rise of Resistance Movements in Teacher Education**

Two decades ago, Nieto (2000) argued for equity to be at the front and center of teacher education. Although vast scholarship addressed critical approaches in education (Sleeter, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), Zygmunt and Clark (2021) argued the field is further detached from these principles and “complicit in the propagation of inequity” (p. 3). Despite practice-based efforts in teacher education concerned about how to best prepare teachers for a growingly diverse, PK-12 student body (Haddix, 2016; Milner, 2010), teacher education remains listlessly risk-adverse perpetuating a generic narrative on excellence instead of an action-oriented equity focus.

In 2020, a public, societal reckoning boiled over the surface “due to increased attention to racial justice among broader (mostly white) segments” within the United States (Riley & Solici, 2021, p. 1). Schooling in the United States centers the stories and learning on the dominant
narrative which further excludes those persons from marginalized identities (Picower, 2021). In 2016, the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* produced a special edition motivated by the global spread of the Black Lives Matter movement (Sleeter, 2016). Sleeter (2016) commented on the need to shift teacher education’s programmatic operations from preparing candidates to enter educator preparation programs to a collaborative approach with communities of color. Furthermore, Sleeter called on EPPs to become more selective in admitting white teacher candidates and consider more racially diverse cohorts. However, students of color may not pursue teaching as a profession if they experience racism from their educators in PK-12 settings in the form of exclusionary practices and competencies. Therefore, teacher education must look to consider harm reduction (Daniels, 2018; Riley & Solic, 2021). Daniels’ (2018) harm reduction also takes a damage-centered approach (Andrews et al., 2019) through humanizing pedagogy, ensuring:

> explicit acknowledgement of the ongoing harm of White supremacy in schools via White teachers - and the expectation that White teachers engage in the violent and yet necessary work of exploring our own inescapable complicity in and responsibility for that harm. (Daniels, 2018, p. 163)

When EPPs claim to push white teachers toward critical consciousness the ideological premise should be grounded in framing whiteness as a fundamental and unavoidable harm, not something that can be transcended. Varghese et al. (2019) explored reflective practices of teacher candidates through race-based caucuses to engage in an understanding of their racialized selves. Varghese et al. (2019) stated:

> White teachers (who still disproportionately represent the teacher workforce in the United States) can only authentically, ethically, and effectively teach in an asset-based and
equity-oriented way when they have critically engaged in their own racialized identities and relationships to the broader systems and structures of Whiteness. (p. 2)

Particularly at PWIs, those who hold dominant perspectives may struggle to frame asset-based or strength-based approaches that decenter whiteness and other characteristics of dominant cultures.

When considering the challenges of oppressive groups developing critical consciousness, many would argue teacher education requires a disruption of current practice, particularly at this research site (Harper University)—a PWI. Programmatic interventions, such as the community immersive experience, facilitate critical consciousness through Freire’s concept of praxis, the relationship between society (the macro) and classroom practice (the micro; Riley & Solic, 2021). In the design and advocacy for the creation of the community immersive experience, the teaching team engaged in coalition building across the institution. Another component of their strategic planning included listening, learning, and relationship building with the community surrounding Oren Elementary, the site for the community immersive experience, and Harper University.

The following key benefits to Harper University connected with resistance movements:
1) The alignment with a nationally recognized, award-winning, evidence-based model for educator preparation with racially and socioeconomically diverse children and families in historically marginalized communities; 2) the facilitation of the recruitment and retention of teacher candidates of color, and finally; and 3) the creation of the opportunity to be an ambassador, ally, and accomplice with marginalized communities in a local, urban context (Harper University Teaching Team, personal communication, May 24, 2021). Moving into the third factor of this section, the struggle for injustice and within education is not a new phenomenon; however, it is a battle exacerbated by a global pandemic.
Disparities in Education During COVID-19

Although research on the educational impacts of the global pandemic of COVID-19 continue to be published, scholars underscored the further exposure of “the failure of schools to create educational experiences that are worthy of and trustworthy for students of color and their families” (El-Mekki, 2021, p. 1). Coinciding with the lack of diversity in teacher candidates, PK-12 students experienced unprecedented levels of loss, fear, and uncertainty as their basic needs went unmet. Howard (2021) described a societal “new normal” that calls for a community-centered educational approach with a focus on hope, healing, and a non-traditional method to teacher education (p. ix). The fourth and final factor within my rationale for this study explored the increased need for pedagogies of care and connection given the void and polarization created by the 45th Presidency.

Humanizing Education After the 45th Presidency

The politization of the United States and dehumanization of America, particularly immigrants, women, and other marginalized communities, under the Donald J. Trump Presidency is the third prevalent factor. Although the struggles of these communities have been present and active in social justice movements for a long time, the blatant actions and increased divisiveness of this presidency shined a spotlight on structural injustice for many privileged groups (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). In the normative practices of society, these privileged groups may not have taken notice or been moved to action previously. Andrews et al. (2019) posited the movement toward humanizing pedagogy in the U.S. developed in opposition to the “anti-Indigeneity, anti-Blackness, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-LGBTQ, and antiwoman ideologies (among others)” as embodied in words and actions of national leadership (p. 4). Unfortunately, both PK–12 and higher education learning spaces are not impervious to these
attitudes and actions happening in the wider society around them. These four factors combine to create a unique set of circumstances for conversations around the future of teacher education and how teacher candidates are prepared for the challenges of present-day classrooms. From a rationale of this study emerged a justification for the methodology.

**Rationale for Methods**

This convergent parallel mixed methods design was used where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in parallel, analyzed separately, then merged as approved by the Institutional Review Board (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; see Appendix A). In this approach, survey data from Diemer et al.’s (2020) Short Critical Consciousness Scale and Shin et al.’s (2018) Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure II (CCCMII) measured the mean differences between the critical consciousness of two groups, traditional program participants and community immersive participants, at a PWI. Simultaneously, curricular experiences related to critical consciousness are explored in focus groups of either traditional program participants or community immersive participants (Cohorts in Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Fall 2021).

This study fills gaps in the literature regarding critical consciousness as stated by Watts et al. (2011), Thomas et al. (2016), and Seider et al. (2020). This study’s research questions and rationale benefit from an approach that combined two forms of data collection and provided enhanced value in comparing both sets of results for converging and diverging results. A few critical consciousness studies called for further exploration through mixed methods research. For example, Watts et al. (2011) recommended implementing “case study and mixed-method longitudinal research” to identify and help validate critical consciousness constructs, while narrative methods could add to the knowledge gained from quantitative studies (p. 55). Although Thomas et al. (2016) did not explicitly reference mixed methods research, the study described a
need for more research to understand the relationship between group membership based on social identities and experiences of oppression as part of critical consciousness. Shin et al. (2018) suggested the CCCMII may be a useful pre/post measure to assess students’ critical consciousness development after participating in “social justice-oriented courses, field placements, or cross-cultural immersion experiences” (p. 550). Seider et al. (2020) recommended future research on critical consciousness would benefit from more collaboration between scholars with diverse theoretical and methodological backgrounds (p. 27). For example, cross-discipline approaches through counseling (Shin et al., 2016; 2020), psychology (Watts & Flanagan, 2007), and education (Seider et al., 2020) could provide a unique perspective. This study posited the ability of privileged groups to develop critical consciousness, particularly when considering an intersectional perspective by “recognizing that individuals may belong to both privileged and oppressed groups simultaneously and that these memberships impact and overlap with one another” (Seider et al., 2020, p. 25).

Survey Design

The quantitative phase of the dissertation used a survey design via Qualtrics to answer research question one. Diemer et al.’s (2020) Short Critical Consciousness Scale and Shin et al.’s (2018) Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure II measured the mean differences between the critical consciousness of two groups, traditional program participants and community immersive participants. The short critical consciousness scale’s (ShoCCS) 13-items includes three subscales: Critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action. Diemer et al. (2020) developed this short version of a previously published critical consciousness scale (Diemer et al., 2017) using an item response theory approach for low-information and redundant items. The contemporary critical consciousness measure II (CCCMII) is a self-report measure that assesses
critical consciousness, specifically from an intersectional approach with cissexism, ableism, and sexism. This 7-point Likert scale requires participants to agree or disagree with the 37-items. Shin et al. (2018) developed this measure by building on a previous study (Shin et al., 2016). Shin et al. (2018) observed appropriate levels of reliability and evidence of validity evidence for the CCCMII.

The ShoCCS was selected due to the relatedness of the items as well as the extensive literature by lead author, Matthew Diemer, to the body of research surrounding critical consciousness. While the CCCMII was selected due to the intersectional approach as well as its function as one of the few critical consciousness instruments designed for an adult population and inclusivity of participants from both dominant and nondominant groups.

Case Study

The qualitative phase of my study, and therefore research question two, was informed by Merriam’s (1998, 2001, 2009) case study approach with regard to Yin’s (2018) call for increased attention to mixed methods research. Yin’s (2018) concept of case study as a research process focused on the investigation into a current phenomenon within its real-life context. This context aligns with the community immersive experience and the traditional program experience of Early Grades majors. This case study investigated these conditions using thick, rich descriptions as part of focus groups. Focus groups promote social interaction and a “co-construction of meaning” (Morgan, 2012). Furthermore, focus groups allowed for “combined local perspectives” to see how the pieces fit together as naturalistic data (Grudens-Schuck et al., 2004, p. 2). Since a focus group is a strategically organized discussion structured to obtain perceptions on a distinct area of interest, this technique presented a useful approach to examine teacher candidates’ critical consciousness within their Early Grades major (Kruger, 2008).
Limitations

As with all research, this study encountered concerns worth noting. The first concern was based on restrictions of the potential community immersive participants. Enrollment in the semesterly program and recent adoption of the community immersive experience led to a constrained group to sample from the start of collection. This study is not generalizable beyond the sample. Another concern was the apprehension of traditional program participants to speak about the aspects of critical consciousness and disclose program shortcomings or lack of preparation in areas to analyze their own biases. Like many of the participants in this study, I hold similar privileged identities which may also be considered a limitation if not adequately acknowledged or addressed. Finally, outsider influences on critical consciousness of teacher candidates were also a concern which could only be mitigated to a certain extent. Clearly defining the language used within this dissertation was an important step in a successful study.

Definition of Terms

Pillars of this dissertation include critical consciousness, humanizing pedagogy theorized through abolitionist teaching, and community-engaged teacher education. These terms are further defined based on a synthesis of literature reviewed in Chapter II. The following section previews those essential concepts from key sources to provide descriptive features prior to the deep dive into the literature.

Critical Consciousness

Based in Freirean pedagogy, Seider and Graves (2020) described three discrete yet overlying characteristics of critical consciousness: 1) A cognitive element of analysis, 2) an attitudinal factor of political agency/efficacy, and 3) behavioral component of social action. Social analysis or critical reflection refers to the ability to identify and scrutinize the social,
racial/ethnic, political, and economic forces that contribute to inequities through a systemic lens (Seider & Graves, 2020). Picower (2011) described how this critical analysis assessed neoliberal educational reforms, such as standardized testing, as exclusionary practices. Political agency is the belief that one can affect social and political change either through individual or collective action (Seider & Graves, 2020). Social action takes a broad view of activism to step into activities such as voting, organizing, or protesting to strategically address and challenge the oppressive forces (Seider & Graves, 2020). With a contextual understanding of critical consciousness, the application of this construct to teacher candidates’ preparation extends to humanizing pedagogy.

**Humanizing Pedagogy**

By design, EPPs do not facilitate critical consciousness in their candidates because most teacher candidates, and often teacher educators, hail from or identify with oppressive groups (Roy, 2018). Riley and Solic (2021) explored “the importance of emphasizing dispositional and ideological change” through the work of teacher educators and teacher candidates toward an anti-oppressive praxis (p. 2). Scholarship supports a humanizing pedagogical stance encompassing the art of teaching through three tenets “(1) engaging in sustained critical self-reflection (for the preservice teacher and teacher educator); (2) resisting binaries; and (3) enacting ontological and epistemological plurality” (Andrews et al., 2019). Most teacher candidates dominantly identify as “white, middle-class, Christian, female, cis-gendered, heterosexual, U.S. born, and for whom English is a first language” (Carter Andrews et al., 2019, p. 8), supporting Freire’s (1970/2014) claim that oppression dehumanizes not only the oppressed but also the oppressor.
Similarly, abolitionist teaching contends those with privileged identities can develop critical consciousness to act as co-conspirators by standing in solidarity with marginalized communities through culturally sustaining, humanizing pedagogy (Andrews et al., 2019; Love, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017). Mustian et al. (2021) questioned “whose voice matters” in times of a diverse PK-12 student population but an overwhelming white and female teaching workforce (p. 59). Some EPPs attempt to challenge high-stakes testing regimes through the “Opt Out Testing Movement” (Epstein, 2009) and the cultural mismatch between PK-12 student and teachers in education through connections to the Black Lives Matter movement (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). Nonetheless, the constant pressure to meet state-mandated initiatives and continued curricular rigidity remains across teacher education. Abolitionist teaching takes an alternative approach to teacher education where “all are working to restore humanity with their eyes on abolishing the education system as we now know it” (Love, 2019, pp. 89–90).

**Abolitionist Teaching**

Kaba (2020) described abolition as a “vision of a restructured society” (p. 1) where all members, regardless of the “distinctions and categorizations that divide us—innocent/guilty; documented/not; Black, white, Brown; citizen/not-citizen” (Heynen & Ybarra, 2021, p. 26), have access to what they need for personal and community safety. While Kaba’s (2020) concept of the prison-industrial complex, “a political vision, a structural analysis of oppression and a practical organizing strategy” (p. 1), was traditionally applied to decarceration, her research and that of Gilmore (2017) extended the “radical place-making view” to the classroom (Heynen & Yabarra, 2021). Furthermore, Love (2019) incorporated abolitionism into her framework of abolitionist teaching through the following three characteristics: 1) Mattering and the cultural wealth of students’ communities, 2) a way of life that resists, agitates, and tears down the
educational survival complex, and 3) radical imagination of survival, love, joy, and cultural practices that expand the ideals of democracy (p. 99). Love (2019) espoused the notion of coconspirators as part of this educational resistance movement. By building on the cultural wealth of students' communities, teacher candidates can facilitate a teaching style that represents their students’ hopes and dreams (Love, 2019; Yosso, 2005). Utilizing abolitionist teaching as a foundation of the community immersive experience represents a critical alternative programmatic approach in teacher education (Zygmunt & Clark, 2021). This dissertation studied the community immersive experience within an Early Grades educator preparation program which formed an interconnected, parallel relationship with a local, marginalized community.

**Community-Engaged Teacher Education**

Zygmunt and Clark (2021) distinguished community-engaged teacher education from community-based initiatives as an approach that “works towards the authentic integration of programs of educator preparation in historically marginalized communities, working in solidarities with their members” (p. 5). This emerging practice in teacher education honors assets within communities’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and communities’ cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). As part of that focus, this approach positions community members as experts and partners in the preparation of teacher candidates (Zygmunt & Clark, 2021). Likewise, “[This approach] engages candidates in intentional experiences through which to develop a critical consciousness” (Zygmunt & Clark, p. 5). The community immersive experience at the research site embodies this approach.

In 2018, interested faculty members at Harper University attended a national conference, Summer Institute for Community Engaged Teacher Preparation at Ball State University, with approximately 20 other institutions representing their respective EPPs (Harper University
Teaching Team, personal communication, May 24, 2021). The first community immersive experience at the research site began in Fall 2019 due to the support from Harper University and collective departmental efforts to develop a unique collaborative, instructional design. One of the leading professional associations in teacher education, The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), developed a topical action group related to community-engaged teacher preparation to build and sustain a shared network of teacher educators. These professionals are committed to preparing community teachers based on Murrell’s (2001) vision. Such teachers have the capacity to enact culturally relevant and sustaining education competencies. The community teacher thus follows five principles, one of which focuses on a “collaborative network of colleagues rather than a single mentor teacher” while another emphasizes “an opportunity to incorporate new understandings in systematic activity” (Murrell, 2001, p. 7). The community immersive experience builds critical consciousness through a facilitation of communities of practice, a “cooperative effort, learning, and shared practice” (Murrell, 2001, p. 51). This dissertation sought to expand on the context surrounding teacher candidates’ critical consciousness as a competency within this programmatic intervention.

Summary

This first chapter presented the conceptual foundation behind this dissertation on teacher candidates’ critical consciousness in connection with community-engaged teacher education as alternative approaches to stagnant, mandated curriculum in teacher education. Furthermore, the research site laid the groundwork for the community immersive experience and its premise on humanizing pedagogy theorized through abolitionist teaching. Thus, the next chapter delves deeper into the literature to explore a movement toward an educator preparation program structure and curricula that develops “asset-, equity-, and social justice-oriented teacher
candidates with the commitments to critical self-reflection, truth-telling, radical honesty, resisting binaries, demonstrating activism, and enacting ontological and epistemological plurality” (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 24).
Chapter II: Literature Review

Dialectic thinking is a process of thought by which opposites can merge themselves in a unifying understanding (Manzo et al., 1992). Therefore, a dialectic view of teacher education incorporates multiple perspectives of the field and attempts to reconcile apparently contradictory information that coexist in the field today. This chapter acknowledges the pluralistic nature of teacher education by contrasting traditional teacher education with concepts of reimagined teacher education. To produce the landscape for this discipline, the literature reconciles differences across three main areas.

This chapter begins with a review of the historical and current state of traditional teacher education which includes professionalization and standardization. The second section discusses scholarship that reimagines teacher education in the Freirean tradition through the following three segments: 1) Preparation of teacher candidates using humanizing pedagogy, 2) connections to Abolitionist Teaching grounded in resistance, and 3) asset-based, community-engaged experiences with culturally sustaining principles. The third section expands on cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral elements of critical consciousness as a necessary competency for teacher candidates supporting the radicalization of solidarity between privileged and marginalized communities. Finally, I provide a theoretical framework to ground my study.

Social Foundations of Education

A discussion of teacher education at the post-secondary level opens with a historical account of education within the United States. While John Dewey may be viewed as the founder of progressive education due to his prolific publications, Steffes (2012) claimed Dr. John Mayer Rice’s critique of schooling led to the first two major educational reform movements. The reforms written in Rice’s *The Forum* began in the 1890s through the 1940s (Cremin, 2010). The
first reform included efforts to reframe and establish teaching as a subject while expanding the curriculum and aspirations of schools. Then again, Rice claimed efforts to restructure school governance demanded priority. The call for professionalism rather than politics to govern schools defined the field in search of expertise and authority (Steffes, 2012). Cremin (2010), another theorist of social movements, concurred with Steffes’ discussion of Rice’s role stating: …in the many separate strands if contemporary protest they were able to weave together into a single reform program; in their perception of the educational problem as national in scope; and in the political sophistication exhibited by their plea for broad public support as the antidote to political corruption and professional incompetence. (pp. 33–34)

As a pediatrician, Rice addressed public school reform through his belief in educational research by pioneering an attempt to conduct an objective evaluation of education through comparative testing (Cremin, 2010). From this work, Rice is also referred to as the one the founders of the American testing movement (Cremin, 2010). Later furthered by the efforts of Edward Thorndike, testing and the standardization of scales and measures to evaluate subjects, such as reading comprehension and math, became an essential element of reform and professionalization (Cremin, 2010, p. 33). Returning to John Dewey (2010) and his take on traditional approaches in education, he claimed:

The traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject-matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity…Consequently, they must be imposed; even though good teachers will use devices of art to cover up the imposition so as to relieve it of obviously brutal features. (p. 188)
A consistent undercurrent implicit in these efforts of reform included issues of access and advantage in education. Steffes (2012) contended advances originated from both the top, middle-classes reformers and business allies, in addition to grassroots, community efforts from the bottom (p. 16). Although there was universal access to elementary schools, attendance at high schools only authorized admittance to those from privileged, white, middle-class backgrounds (Labaree, 2013). The training of teachers inherently engrained into this discussion of professionalism also illustrated the “brutal features” in their own preparation (Dewey, 2010, p. 188).

**Traditional Teacher Education**

The research site, Harper University, like many public colleges and normal schools, served their communities through an obligation to train teachers in their respective state public schools. For example, the research site opened its doors in the early 1870s offering only a single field of study—a two-year course in elementary education—as part of the common school movement (Harper University, 2022, link available at request of reader). After World War I, states and cities created mandatory, special certificates for administrators and superintendents which then trickled to all professional teachers despite their modest status and low salaries (Steffes, 2012). Regardless of differences in faculty opinions on the validity of the art of teaching as a worthy subject in a collegiate setting, University of Michigan’s President appointed William H. Payne to scientifically define and legitimize the field that would become teacher education (Steffes, 2012). By 1933, there were 400 universities reporting departments of education in the United States (Steffes, 2012). The “interlocking directorate” of leading institutions championed by George Strayer at the Teachers College at Columbia University and other partners such as the University of Chicago, joined forces with foundation leadership and school administrators to
establish professional networks and informal conferences (Tyack, 2010). From this network grew increases in normed measures and teaching methods promulgating surveys and quantitative educational research (Steffes, 2012). Statistical survey research illuminated comparable elements of schooling to provide evidence for needed change and expansion. For cities that considered themselves educationally progressive, such as Boston, these statistics exposed shortcomings and promoted reform by prompting local pride and city rivalry (Steffes, 2012). The surveyors developed basic measures, such as PK-12 student testing, which became the statistical determinant of how well schools advanced students through the grade levels. In direct connection, quantitative factors, such as years of training and experiences, assessed the quality of the teaching staff. Unfortunately, these problematic assumptions implied the level of teacher training equated to good instruction, however:

they also privileged the things they could easily count over the things they couldn’t, and they rarely gave weight to less-quantifiable values like the culture of the school, its social impact, the satisfaction of the community, or the moral influence of the teacher. (Steffes, 2012, p. 43)

These less-quantifiable values extended the social sorting that previously began in the 19th century when privileged families maintained their niche high schools that focused on college preparation (Labaree, 2013). Social reconstructionist, Counts (1932) argued schools should challenge the capitalistic system by:

emancipat[ing] itself from the influence of this class, face squarely and courageously every social issue, com[ing] to grips with life in all of its stark reality, establish[ing] an organic relation with the community, develop[ing] a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare, fashion[ing] a compelling and challenging vision of human destiny; and
becom[ing] less frightened than it is today of the bogies of imposition and indoctrination.

(pp. 9–10)

Although these writings preview some of this dissertation’s later focus on reimagining teacher education, Counts (1932) and others were eclipsed by the administrative progressive forces. By translating pieces of Dewey’s work into methods and activity-based curriculum, preparation of teachers focused on motivating the individual educator to circumvent the dominant narratives in schools instead of collectively challenging the power of the established school administrators (Tyack, 2010). Similarly, Steffes (2012) concluded, “while professional authority was not unassailable, it was a powerful force of standardization. Education professionals helped to shape and standardize schooling through norms they sanctioned, networks they created, and conversations they engaged” (pp. 44–45). Educational policy played an even greater role in shaping the discipline through increased standardization in teacher education.

**Politics of Standardization**

In the 1980s, the narrative across the nation changed toward education with the release of *A Nation At Risk* (1983). The report blamed the field of education for the country’s lackluster economic achievement while simultaneously challenging teacher quality and elevating testing as a solution to solve the country’s apparent educational crisis. The private sector, held largely unaccountable for economic shortcomings, remained unscathed from society’s lowly opinion of education. By creating a political spectacle through a “manufactured crisis” (Horsford et al. 2018, p. 35), the following five broad developments facilitated a movement toward what is recognized as the “Era of Accountability” in teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017).

The first factor included an increased global attention on teacher quality with a narrow focus on capitalism. Individualism, free markets, and privatization took precedence over the
thoughtful exploration of knowledge (Cochran Smith et al., 2017; Deresiewicz, 2015). The second contribution was the mass depiction of teacher education as a failure. If teachers were the most important factors in students’ achievement, and PK-12 students’ achievement was inferior, then the teachers were responsible as well as those who prepared them for the field (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). Another contributing factor was the conceptualization of teacher education in terms of outcomes (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). Policies such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top impacted education at every level in this regard. The fourth development was when the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), now referred to as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), followed suit by enforcing standards including reporting test scores for teacher candidates (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017).

At the time, the American Association of Teacher Education (AACTE), a professional association for colleges focused on EPPs, critiqued the policy of evaluating teacher quality through testing, (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). However, the field continues to heavily rely on core teaching standards that outline what educators should know and be able to do to ensure every PK-12 student reaches the goal of being college and career-ready (CSSO, 2013). These standards “cut across all subject areas and grade levels and…are necessary to improve student achievement” (CSSO, 2013). On the heels of A Nation At Risk, Hyman (1984) asserted “focusing on the testing may satisfy the population’s need to vent its concern but will divert from critical educational issues” (p. 15), such as “an examination of curriculum in light of society’s needs and development” (p. 18).

A Critical View of Traditional Teacher Education

Several scholars bring a critical approach to traditional education when evaluating standardization and exclusionary practices through current competencies and curricular rigidity.
Educator preparation programs are fraught with requirements such as demonstrating proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics as part of basic skills testing. Au (2009) noted the purpose of standardized testing is to replicate and reinforce social control over historically marginalized communities. “[Standardized tests] establish universal norms or standards through which to categorize, make comparisons, mark deviance, and hence, sort human populations under the guise of scientific objectivity” (Au, 2009, p. 39). However, if basic skills testing serves as a screening tool for entrance into EPPs, then it disproportionately impacts students of color. Additionally, Haddix (2017) argued EPPs ignore the voices of teacher candidates of color by not connecting with their cultural backgrounds, particularly when the current curriculum and associated field experiences largely serve dominant perspectives of white, middle-classes teacher candidates. Regardless of Smith’s (1984) claim decades earlier that argued, “A democratic society cannot have excellence in education without equity” (p. 9), EPPs continued to promote exclusionary practices that position students of color as inept and perpetuate a segregated field that negatively impacts PK-12 students (Milner, 2020; White et al., 2020).

Research from scholars critical of traditional teacher education are fundamentally exasperated with what Labaree (2013) summarized as the ill-fated, inequitable reality of education—“every time they raise the floor, they raise the ceiling” (p. 114). From this critical lens on traditional teacher education, this chapter moves to review literature promoting a transformative, radical view of teacher education. This reimagined view accentuates the pillars of this dissertation which include humanizing pedagogy theorized through abolitionist teaching, community-engaged teacher education, and critical consciousness as a competency.
Reimagination of Teacher Education

Macedo (1994) discussed the application and reinvention of Freirean pedagogy with Freire on one of his visits to the United States (Solórzano, 2019). Freire stated:

Donaldo, I don’t want [my methodology] to be imported or exported. It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without re-inventing them. Please, tell your fellow American educators not to import me. Ask them to recreate and rewrite my ideas.

(Macedo, 1994, p. xiv)

Likewise, Gottesman (2016) described the viewpoint of another Freirean scholar, critical pedagogue, Henry Giroux, by adding:

we cannot rely on Freire for a structural understanding…One should certainly look to Freire for guidance and inspiration in thinking about how we can build movements for radical social change and the reasons for why education should be central to such a project. (p. 27)

Both Giroux and McLaren (1986) began a discussion about the disruption of teacher education. These scholars expressed their support of a reinvention of education which is furthered by Love’s (2019) Abolitionist Teaching. Despite academia’s characterization as the “ivory tower” in higher education and reference to privileged settings with pretenses of immobility, there is a need to move beyond the stifling and restrictive boundaries in teacher education (Zygmunt & Clark, 2021, p. 60). Furthermore, Tuck and Yang (2014) described “the academy as an apparatus of settler colonial knowledge already domesticates, denies, and dominates other forms of knowledge…It sets limits, but discusses itself as limitless” (p. 235). Therefore, extrapolating a humanizing pedagogy from the tradition of Freire’s (1970/2018) critical consciousness connects directly to the need to recreate teacher education. The following section describes humanizing
pedagogy connections to Love’s (2019) Abolitionist Teaching by exploring abolition, decolonial education, and the co-construction of learning by the privileged (teacher) and the marginalized (students). Finally, this section concludes with an illustration of community-engaged teacher education as part of the Community Immersive experience.

**Humanizing Pedagogy Through Abolitionist Teaching**

Andrews et al. (2019) called for EPPs to endorse a curriculum for teacher candidates that “affirms and sustains their humanity and raises their critical consciousness about societal injustices” as a normative practice through liberatory learning in contrast to oppressive and marginalizing policies (p. 4). This viewpoint draws upon del Carmen Salazar (2013) and Bartolomé (1994) by supporting a reinvention of Freire’s humanizing pedagogy to problematize existing community struggles. Del Carmen Salazar (2013) encompassed Freire’s (1970/2014; 1973) definition “the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and with the world” (p. 133). Concisely, humanization dissects the deficit-minded perspective that furthers othering of marginalized communities. Bartolomé (1994) added honoring students’ resources in the teacher-student shared learning “respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice” (p. 173). These critical works in humanizing pedagogy supports Love’s (2019) scholarship around abolitionist teaching. In connection with Love, Freire (1970/2014) asserted:

> To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity. But the struggle to be more fully human has already begun in the authentic struggle to transform the situation. Although the situation
of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress, it is the latter who must, from their stifled humanity, wage for both the struggle for a fuller humanity; the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle. (p. 47)

Furthering this concept, Love (2019) evoked Anna Julia Cooper’s “recognition of one’s ‘inherent humanity’ with the courage, persistence, vigilance, and the visionary imagine of an abolitionist” (p. 51). Abolitionist teaching advances the field toward a transformation of curriculum as one approach to teacher education that explores resistance as well as individual and collective risk.

**Origins of Abolition**

The definition of abolition is “the ending of a law, a system or an institution” (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). Furthermore, abolish means to “to officially end a law, a system or an institution” (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). Many correlate abolitionism to the liberation of enslaved persons, particularly the anti-slavery movement in the United States and free labor as part of the cotton trade. Although chattel slavery was arguably abolished as part of the 13th Amendment in 1865, some scholars contend that it was never truly abolished but structurally transformed into current day prison systems (King, 2016). The treatment of indigenous people and persecution of tribal groups worldwide also connects to global resistance movements. Lilla Watson (1985), an indigenous Murri Australian from the Queensland territory, is often credited with the following quote, however she contended it was jointly developed as part of an Aboriginal Rights group in Queensland during the 1970s. The quote acknowledged the oppressed/oppressor Freirean dynamic stating: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (Watson, 1985).
Decolonial Education

A component woven into the fabric of abolition and liberation of the oppressed is the valuing or expressed elevation of marginalized communities. In *Pedagogics of Liberation* Dussel (2019) stated a repossession of humanity is rooted in the philosophy of liberation (p. 39). The morality of liberation is listening to the voice of the Othered (Dussel, 2019, p. 166). Dussel offered the significance of “affirming the Other and serving him is the good act; negating the Other and dominating him is the evil act” (p. 165). Decolonial education allows those who instruct to not only teach reading and writing but also foster critical consciousness (p. 186).

Likewise, an abolitionist in the context of teaching seeks to save education and does not rely on education as the savior for all (Love, 2019, p. 88). If freedom is the goal of abolitionist teaching, then co-conspirators harness their power and privilege for the whole of society.

Allies vs. Co-conspirators

Love (2019) believed the pillar of abolitionist teaching is solidarity with those co-conspirators who recognize their privilege and work to challenge the conditions that marginalize communities. A co-conspirator acts as a verb through displays of resistance. Expanding on Allies for Change’s definition of allies, Love (2019) defined co-conspirators as individuals who:

1. Understand where we stand in relation to systems of privilege and oppression; unlearning practices that protect those systems;
2. Have authentic relationships of solidarity and mutuality which are not possible when we try to avoid or transcend power imbalances;
3. Honestly acknowledge and comfort those imbalances;
4. Know social change work is always rooted in collaboration, humility, and accountability;
5. Comprehend the interior journey into silence, meditation, inner wisdom, and deep joy is linked to the outer world of social change. (p. 118)

Allies for Change (2021) represents a network of activists and educators. The concept of “educator activist” does not need to be a separate distinction, but a calling to be embraced by teacher educators and teacher candidates. An exploration of the oppressed/oppressor dichotomy involves individual and collective risk further extrapolating the dynamics of abolitionist teaching framed in Freire’s appeal to re-invent.

**Resistance, Risk, Hope, and Joy**

Love (2019) discussed freedom dreaming as a collective space giving teachers the opportunity to dismantle the educational survival complex. This concept described a resistance to “schools as a training site for a life of exhaustion” where students of color learn to survive, not thrive (Love, p. 27). Supported by Freire’s (1970/2014) indispensable qualities such as love and hope, Love insisted those dedicated to a liberatory practice should not teach students for this life (p. 27) but resist oppression while building new possibilities (p. 68). Recognizing this fact, teacher candidates need to be taught how to question biases and the normative status quo rather than bringing damaging deficit perspectives to their classrooms (Love, 2019). Likewise, the community must gain a critical consciousness of their situation in terms of class, group, and region from within that same everyday world (Dussel, 2019). Consequently,

Paulo Freire indicates that it is essential for ‘education as the practice of freedom’ to include group reflection with total simplicity…These must be the synthesis of their lives, be it cultural, economic, political, familial; in them they must discover their distinct exteriority. (Dussel, 2019, p. 185)
Liberation begins from their exteriority, being situated on the outside, and those members of marginalized communities (Dussel, 2019). Before standing in solidarity with all their PK-12 students, critical consciousness demands an altering of the perception of self among opportunities for civic engagement (Love, 2019; Thomas et al., 2014). Community-engaged teacher education provides teacher candidates with greater capacity to find hope within the act of resistance.

**Community-Engaged Teacher Education**

The Abolitionist Teaching Network, co-founded by Love (2020), developed a Guide for Racial Justice & Abolitionist Social and Emotional Learning to “develop and support educators to fight injustice within their schools and communities.” This document served as an invitation for educators to generate critical reflection and action, both individually and collectively in their communities, acknowledging the differences depending on setting and needs. Similarly, the Center for Antiracist Education cites the development of critical consciousness as one of its principles in their efforts to create “just systems” (CARE, 2021). These principles and Love’s (2019) Abolitionist Teaching approach informed the current work of Zygmunt and Clark (2021) who initially wrote about transforming teacher education for social justice as part of their cultural immersion program for teacher candidates in 2016. Zygmunt and Clark (2021) provided guidance on how to operationalize culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies through a consideration of their assets. The following sections explore the following three characteristics of community-engaged teacher education: 1) Community members as colleagues through their cultural wealth, 2) equalizing power in collaborative relationships when considering communities’ funds of knowledge, and 3) the art of developing community teachers. Scholarship
over the last three decades aimed to lift-up marginalized communities through an understanding
the assets of communities.

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education

concepts, “culturally relevant pedagogy” and “culturally responsive teaching,” to promote asset-
based understanding of communities of color. While this dissertation alluded to Ladson-Billings’
major conceptual ideas in educational research, Gay’s (2018) contribution requires recognition.
Gay (2018) described a culturally responsive educator with the following characteristics:
Validating and affirming, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering,
transformative, normative, and ethical. To reach “transformation,” educators must “confront
dominant cultural embedded into curriculum and develop intellectual critique to combat racism
and other forms of oppression” (p. 42). Witnessing a lack of criticality in this area, Paris (2012)
questioned if “they go far enough in their orientation to the languages and literacies and other
cultural practices of students and communities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our
increasingly multiethnic and multilingual society” (p. 94).

Paris and Alim (2014, 2017) advanced a “loving critique” of these concepts through
“culturally sustaining pedagogy.” Teaching should be explicit in perpetuating, fostering, and
sustaining “cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 95).
San Pedro (2017) expanded upon this work furthering a consideration of “culturally disruptive
pedagogy” to make evident the socializing of whiteness as well as disrupting hegemonic cultural
norms (p. 1196). To disrupt the “slash” between oppressed/oppressor, San Pedro (2018) and
Paris and Alim (2017) discussed the need to remain dynamic and critical in an ever-evolving
global society that builds on plurality and explicit resistance to deficit perspectives, polices, and
pedagogies. These two asset-based perspectives embrace culture as defined by Hammond (2015) as the “way the that every brain makes sense of the world” inclusive of both lived experiences and the struggle of implementing culturally sustaining practices (p. 22).

**Community Cultural Wealth**

Scaife and Zygmunt (2021) recognized past, exploitative experiences between IHEs and communities that required judicious reparations. Grounded in the work of Yosso (2005), a true collaboration “redefined the community as the architect of imagination” (Scaife & Zygmunt, 2021, p. 20). Furthermore, Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth is validated by Solorzano’s (1997, 2019) tenets of critical race theory in association with the Freirean tradition. Focusing on communities, one of those tenets explored the “centrality of experiential knowledge” through storytelling, family histories, and narratives while another included “the commitment to social justice” and empowerment of marginalized communities (p. 74). To view community members as colleagues, Yosso’s (2005) six elements of community cultural wealth included resistance capital as “the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” in a transformative form (p. 80). While Yosso’s work focused on marginalized communities, those from privileged identities must “flip the script on the traditional paradigm of university/community relations” through listening and learning, establishing trust, and approach their teaching from a position of humility in understanding the knowledge embedded within the lived experiences of communities (Scaife & Zygmunt, 2021, p. 20).

**Funds of Knowledge**

Teacher candidates become “grateful recipients of knowledge” in their partnership with communities when their learning is situated in the richness of their PK-12 students’ lives outside of school and indistinguishable from those students’ successes in the classroom (Scaife &
Zygmunt, 2021). Unfortunately, Love (2019) discussed a prevalent practice of “spirit-murdering” in classrooms represented by the “denial of inclusion, protection, safety, and nurturance” inevitably sacrificing who students are and where they hail from (p. 2). Instead, Scaife and Zygmunt (2021) extrapolated from Moll et al.’s (1992) funds of knowledge to concur with Freire’s (1970) co-constructed learning between teacher and student. Moll et al. (1992) discussed the potential utility of teachers as learners concurrently establishing a symmetrical relationship with parents and families of their students (p. 139). Teacher candidates view their students as already possessing valid knowledge and their families as “first teachers” providing an instrumental impact on their children’s early and continued learning experiences (Zeichner, 2015, p. 119). By participating in community events, family mentorships, and service-learning work in local organizations, teacher candidates are fully immersed in “the community as the textbook” (Olson Beal et al., 2021). Cipollone et al. (2021) described the challenges in becoming equity educators since “… without an understanding of history, funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005)—no amount of content and pedagogical knowledge will allow an educator to connect with, and thus teach children” (p. 177).

**Community Teachers**

Zygmunt and Clark (2021) entwined their writing with Love (2019) describing teacher education as a complicit component in the “propagation of inequity” (p. 3) within PK-12 and higher education. Zygmunt and Clark (2021) provided a vision of hope and healing in their conclusion only after explicitly naming the “market-driven, context-neutral standardization of content, pedagogy, and assessment” as the current setting that serves some teacher candidates well but contradicts the intentionally of teaching as a discipline for all (p. 208). Murrell (2001) defined community teachers as teachers, whom at their core, develop knowledge of culture,
community, and the identity of children and their families. This development can only take place when a teacher candidate acknowledges their own cultural and socially constructed identities. Citing Freire, Zygmunt (2021) contended without the liberatory practices in education, teacher candidates miss the opportunity to develop critical consciousness that “would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of the world” (p. 209; Freire 1970/2014, p. 73).

**Operationalizing Critical Consciousness**

In the 50th anniversary edition of Freire’s (1970) seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Macedo (2018) asked scholars to consider “What definition, against what, for whom, and against whom” before *conscientização*, or the approximate English translation of ‘conscientization’ referred to as critical consciousness, can even begin to be defined (p. 15). Since Freire only offered a conceptual model of critical consciousness without concrete ways to measure it, many scholars bridging disciplines such as education, community psychology, social work, public health, and social science fields have adopted, interpreted, applied, and expanded critical consciousness (Jemal, 2017). As a result, a debate on how to define and operationalize critical consciousness exists within the literature. This section describes the way critical consciousness is currently conceptualized and the context of the research surrounding those models. Examples of scholarship describing critical consciousness as a single-factor model, two-factor model, and three-factor model explain further complexities. To continue making connections to my research, this response offers various ties to teacher education throughout the discussion of these models. Finally, as part of a disruption of current practice in teacher education, my continued demand for an intersectional approach elucidates Freire’s oppressed/oppressor duality beyond a positivist view toward a focus of the intersections of critical consciousness and identities (Darder, 2018, p. 102).
Contextual Implications of Critical Consciousness

Watts et al. (2011) suggested critical consciousness had not yet matured into a well-articulated concept or a comprehensible body of empirical research, which then grew into several efforts to develop and validate quantitative measures of critical consciousness (see Appendix B). Expanding from the table in Schneider (2019), Appendix B provides an outline of measures with associated factors and disciplines of origin. Regardless of a measure’s components, the core concept of critical consciousness addresses oppression from both an internalized and structural level. Jemal (2017) summarized:

The under-recognized role of systemic inequity in individual and social problems, that is, the lack of CC, creates the necessary environment for oppression to rampantly spread through systems from the individual to the macro levels, causing massive, widespread system failure. (p. 604)

Since this Freirean approach originated with rural Brazilian farmworkers’ oppressive conditions, “Critical consciousness is most often theorized as a process that occurs among devalued and marginalized groups” (Shin et al., 2018, p. 540). However, Freire (1970/2014) considered oppression as a dehumanizing force for not only the oppressed but also the oppressor. While most researchers have proposed theoretical models in contexts primarily characterized by historically marginalized populations, some scholars extended critical consciousness to include those privileged groups (Jemal, 2017; Shin et al., 2018). Models include a discussion of the following three factors: 1) Cognitive, 2) behavioral, and 3) attitudinal (Jemal, 2017, p. 610).

Critical Reflection Single-Factor Model

Critical awareness is often conflated with critical reflection through a unidimensional model of critical consciousness as a cognitive state derived from analysis of sociopolitical
inequities (Jemal, 2017). By growing the understanding of the personal relationship between self and society alongside the capability to identify oppression, critical reflection may also comprise critical awareness (Jemal, 2017; Schneider, 2019). Diemer et al. (2017) characterized critical reflection with multiple subcomponents by building upon Freire (1970/2014). Freire observed as marginalized communities developed a deeper understanding of oppressive forces in society, their critical awareness of themselves shifted. In comparison, Shin et al. (2016) described critical consciousness “as awareness of the systemic, institutionalized forms of discrimination associated with racism, classism, and heterosexism” (p. 210). Even though the inclusion of this intellectual component is consistently represented in critical consciousness operationalization, this factor would not exclusively result in Freire’s liberatory goal from oppressive systems (Jemal, 2017).

According to Watts et al. (2003) “resistance is key because analysis without action does not produce tangible change” (p. 186). If critical consciousness is a process that allows communities to feel empowered to change the social conditions that dehumanize and oppress them, then a single-model approach minimizes the other factors (Shin et al., 2018). I also extend this critical consciousness construct to include a comparison with reflexivity in teacher education. Reflexivity is a process of questioning unexamined beliefs as part of an active interrogation of biases (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). Cole-Malott et al. (2021) illuminated the difference stating:

reflection might lead to insight about something not noticed in time, pinpointing perhaps when the detail was missed. While reflexivity is finding strategies to question attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices, and habitual actions to understand our complex roles with others. (p. 2)
This expansion of critical consciousness transforms into a two-factor action-oriented model to clarify the cognitive-action association.

**Critical Action Two-Factor Model**

As alluded to previously, Diemer et al. (2017) defined critical reflection through two subcomponents including the critical analysis of perceived inequalities and the endorsement of social equality (p. 2.). However, Diemer et al.’s model also included critical action as part of the critical consciousness construct. Critical action is often synonymously referenced with social action or civic engagement from individual or collective actions that produce sociopolitical change of unjust policies or practices (Jemal, 2017; Watts et al., 2003; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). While definitions inclusive of action-orientation better connect to Freire’s (1970/2014) goal of liberation, scholars share differing opinions when describing action as the capacity to act versus overt action (Jemal, 2017). Freire (1973/2013) further explored action as the behavioral element of the critical consciousness construct arguing:

> It so happens that to every understanding, sooner or later an action corresponds. Once man perceives a challenge, understands it, and recognizes the possibilities of response, he acts. The nature of that action corresponds to the nature of his understanding. (p. 83)

I extend this critical consciousness construct to include a solution-oriented discussion that provides strategies for interfacing with different constituents, identifying targets, and developing tactics (Midwest Academy, 2015). The Midwest Academy’s (2015) Strategy Chart outlined a structure for effective discourse toward action, which additionally supports the concept of reflexivity in teacher education. The two-factor model leads to a distinction from behaviors toward an understanding of the attitudinal component of critical consciousness.
**Critical Motivation Three-Factor Model**

Political efficacy, the perceived capacity to effect sociopolitical change, connects to a sense of agency (Jemal, 2017; Watts et al., 2003). Seider and Graves (2020) defined political agency as the transformation of an individual’s recognition of oppression and injustice (social analysis) into a commitment to oppose these forces (social action). Additionally, efficacy was included in Watts et al.’s (2011) three-factor model—awareness, efficacy, and action—to emphasize the expressed commitment of combating societal inequities. Moreover, Diemer et al. (2020) created a short critical consciousness scale (ShoCCS) with a new construct of critical motivation to operationalize this attitudinal factor of critical consciousness. Marginalized communities’ analysis of injustice includes critical motivation and action to confront and resist injustice (Diemer et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2011). As the foundation for revolution and problem-posing education, Freire’s concept of praxis brings together the reflection and action as part of critical consciousness. Freire (1970/2014) argued, “discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism; but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis” (p. 65). According to Jemal (2017), “Freire (2000, 1973) developed a problem-posing education, replacing the banking model, to develop CC that included: (1) Identifying the social problem, (2) analyzing underlying causes, and (3) implementing solutions” (p. 612). Engaging in praxis as part of problem-posing education, teacher candidates view their communities and society as capable of transforming and “themselves as possessing agency to bring about such transformation” (Seider & Graves, 2020, p. 6). Furthering the importance of transformative action, Jemal (2017) examined the need for clarification between intersectionality of the oppressed/oppressor binary as well as privileged identities in the critical consciousness construct.
Intersectionality

An intersectional perspective recognizes that “individuals may belong to both privileged and oppressed groups simultaneously and that these memberships impact and overlap with one another” (Seider et al., 2020, p. 25). Coined by Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality is also an analytical framework focused across race, gender, social class, and other socially constructed identities that maintain oppressive systems. With those definitions in mind, Shin et al. (2018) discussed the philosophical premise of critical consciousness asserting “both dominant, privileged social groups and members of nondominant, marginalized groups are socialized to feel comfortable in relations of domination and subordination rather than in equality” (p. 540).

Continued analysis around intersectionality through cissexism, ableism, and sexism led to the publication of the Critical Consciousness Measure II (CCCMII; Shin et al., 2018). Additionally, Shin et al. (2018) suggested using the CCCMII as a measure of internalized domination (i.e., represented by low levels of critical consciousness) among those in the privileged groups.

Thomas et al. (2014) also cautioned that it is essential to avoid sorting “individuals into stigmatized and non-stigmatized groups based on in-group identities” (p. 488). Even though it is commonly acknowledged that some groups are associated as oppressed or as privileged, the individualized experience varies based on social context (Jemal, 2017; Thomas et al., 2014). Applying intersectionality theory, experiences of oppression that align with the critical consciousness construct are integrated into discussions without defaulting to binary language (Thomas et al., 2014). Furthermore, Seider et al. (2020) recommended future research on critical consciousness would benefit from more collaboration between scholars with diverse theoretical and methodological backgrounds (p. 27). For example, cross-discipline approaches through counseling (Shin et al., 2016; 2020), psychology (Watts & Flanagan, 2007), and education
(Seider et al., 2020) could provide a unique perspective that incorporates considerations of privileged groups.

**Privileged Identities and Groups**

Jemal (2017) claimed a discussion around privileged groups also referred to as the oppressor, deepens the investigation of the cognitive element in the critical consciousness construct. Baker and Brookins (2014) defined critical consciousness as how “oppressed or marginalized people think about and respond to inequitable sociopolitical conditions” (p. 15). Unfortunately, this definition fails to analyze the mutually reinforcing connection with privilege (Jemal, 2017). Moreover, Watts et al. (2011) noted privileged youth could work toward a more just society if educated about the consequences of social injustice. According to Jemal (2017), “liberation requires true solidarity in which the oppressor not only fights at the side of the oppressed by also takes a radical posture of empathy” (p. 618). Freire (2014) suggested this approach occurs through the praxis of this “struggle for their liberation together with those who show true solidarity” (p. 51). Likewise, Thomas et al. (2014) contended privileged groups with greater access to resources and power can then operate as allies. As expanded in the previous section, Love’s (2019) Abolitionist Teaching as well as Seider and Graves’ (2020) schooling for critical consciousness research lies at the heart of this mattering and the struggle for freedom in an inequitable school system. Love argued:

White, well-meaning, liberal teachers can be racist too. Therefore, understanding how racism works and understanding how White privilege functions within our society does not bring us any closer to justice, it certainly does not undo the educational survival complex. (p. 51)
Love called theory “one of the most important tools I have been able to use to help me understand the possibilities and limitations of public education …” (p. 146). By holding a deep understanding and connection to the structural implications, teacher educators, and teacher candidates can demand what is needed to thrive in their settings. The subsequent section describes the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

Theoretical Framework

My theoretical lenses stem from critical pedagogy around the construct of critical consciousness, or conscientização, based on Freire’s (1970 as reprinted in 2014, 2018) inescapable concern as the problem of humanization for those dedicated to a just world. Freire (2014) defined critical consciousness as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). In the context of teacher education, critical consciousness encompasses three basic factors: 1) Cognitive critical reflection, 2) attitudinal motivation toward change, and 3) behavior through social actions as part of teacher candidates’ roles as emerging educators (Freire, 1970/2014; Seider & Graves, 2020). This framework begins with an analysis of education as an instrument of oppression (Darder, 2018, p. 116; Freire, 1970/2014) and the role of critical consciousness in Freire’s problem-posing education. Grounded in love and community, the subsequent section discusses a liberatory methodology that represents a life-affirming, dialogical praxis of participation in human interactions (Freire, 1970/2014). Next, this framework focuses on teacher education’s role in preparing teacher candidates by extending Freire’s concept of critical consciousness to teacher candidates’ role as learners through abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019). This “way of life” incorporates critical consciousness of teacher candidates as informed by
humanizing pedagogy and liberating forces within their curriculum (Andrews et al., 2019; Love, 2019, p. 89).

**Critical Consciousness Connection to Teacher Education**


Although Gottesman (2016) disputed the connection between critical pedagogy and Freire’s critical educational project, the relationship between Giroux and Freire remains undeniable. However, Giroux moved to “theorize the relationship between schools and society and the possibility of schools as sites of radical democratic social reform” (Gottesman, 2016, p. 75), whereas Freire’s narrative focused on the role of education in building social movements. Regardless of the discord among the first use of the term “critical pedagogy,” the wave of conversations describing any “critical” education lens grew roots within the field (Gottesman, 2016, p. 99). The 1990s analysis of critical pedagogy moved toward a post-structuralist dialogue of cultural critique (Gottesman, 2016). In that light, Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b) began her work by focusing on the connection to race.
Critical pedagogy provided a platform for Ladson-Billings’ work on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) as published in 1995 and modified in her 2.0 version in 2017. Ladson-Billings’ (1997) discussed critical pedagogy’s denial of race and muted critical analysis of educational and social inequalities (p. 127). In the 1990s and 2000s, this endeavor to elevate race facilitated the proliferation of critical race theory in education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For example, Ladson-Billings (1997) argued “any efforts at critical pedagogy in the context of a racialized society without significant attention being paid to race will never be empowering” (p. 137). While much of the theory surrounding CRP relates to critical race theory, this dissertation focused on the critical consciousness component while touching on associated relationships to race as part of teacher candidates’ cognitive, social analysis.

Ladson-Billings (2017) reflected on her initial concept of CRP through academic success, cultural competencies, and sociopolitical or critical consciousness. Consistent with Freire (1970/2014), the third domain depicted the ability to take learning beyond the confines of the classroom to name and examine real-world programs (Ladson-Billings, 2017). However, “few have taken up the sociopolitical dimensions of the work, instead dulling it’s critical edge or omitting it altogether” (Ladson-Billing, 2014, p. 77). If the purpose of critical pedagogy is freedom from oppression through an awakening of the critical consciousness, then schooling should play an important part in facilitating that critical reflection and agency (Giroux, 1983). Although, Freire posited that the educational system becomes an “instrument of dehumanization” stifling the empowerment of marginalized communities (Darder, 2018, p. 96; Freire, 1970/2014).

Dehumanization

Matters of educational inequity continue to be perpetuated throughout PK-12 education. Schooling in the U.S. centers the stories and learning on the dominant narrative which further
excludes marginalized communities (Picower, 2021). Therefore, dehumanization is the direct result of injustice, violence, and marginalization on behalf of those holding dominant identities (Darder, 2018, p. 96; Freire, 1970/2014). This culture of hegemony can be analyzed through critical analysis in the pursuit of humanity by both the oppressed and the oppressor (Darder, 2018). The oppressed can imagine new possibilities only by persistently engaging with the conditions that facilitate dehumanization. However, liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership but a result of their conscientização. (Freire, 2018, p. 67).

**Problem-posing Education**

Advancing critical consciousness, Freire’s (1970/2014) problem-posing education rebels against the “banking” concept of education. Freire believed schooling deposits disjointed information that is detached from reality. Consequently, the role of the student is limited to accepting, organizing, and storing those learned deposits (Freire, 2018, p. 80). This concept perpetuates students as passive receptors prone to fragmented views of their world and forces them to adapt into the existing (oppressive) reality (Freire, 1970/2014). Additionality, this concept takes a deficit-minded view of marginalized communities which focuses on changing the consciousness of the oppressed instead of directing attention toward the situations that oppress (Darder, 2018, p. 109). Mirroring this form of education in universities, EPPs’ teacher educators deposit information into their students (teacher candidates) who are preparing to be new professionals.

Until teacher education is ready to go deep into conversations about oppression and privilege, often social justice efforts feel like “slapping a coat of paint on a rotten foundation” (Mayorga & Picower, 2019, p. 224). Through a radical approach, teacher educators can chip away at teacher candidates’ dominant narrative and strive for active solidarity with marginalized
communities (Mayorga & Picower, 2019). Freire (1970/2014) further explained the potential for a communal learning process which transforms values, attitudes, and practices that nurtures dialogue within the teacher-student partnership. Freire’s revolutionary praxis supports the idea of education as a practice of freedom through both collective and individual empowerment (Darder, 2018, p. 140).

**Liberatory Methodology**

Freire (1970/2014) explored generative themes within a methodological approach that is best understood through individualized experiences and relationships with the world. Through this understanding, growth in critical consciousness leads to purposeful action with a transformative intent (Darder, 2018, p. 129). People, including teacher candidates and their PK-12 students, are no longer objects acted upon by oppressive conditions but empowered subjects to act upon their environment (Jemal, 2017). Thus, true liberation requires a repossession of humanity (Freire, 1970/2014). Freirean pedagogy confirms that critical action should return to analysis and dialogue, such that reflection and action join to form praxis (Jemal, 2017).

**Summary**

Establishing a dialectic view of teacher education, this chapter synthesized sources from several scholars beginning with the traditional design of teacher education and concluding in my theoretical framework around the three pillars of this dissertation—humanizing pedagogy theorized through abolitionist teaching, a community-engaged approach to teacher education, and critical consciousness as a competency for teacher candidates. This alternative approach to teacher education values teacher candidates’ knowledge of the self and the communities in which they engage as opposed to furthering essentialism through competencies, such as basic skills
testing. The next section outlines the methods utilized in this dissertation’s quest for a reimagined teacher education.
Chapter III: Methodology

To build upon the existing research on community-engaged teacher education and further inform the operationalization of critical consciousness, I aimed to both explain and explore a reimagination of teacher education through a mixed methods inquiry. Implementing an approach through quantitative and qualitative strategies, this study investigated the following research questions: (1) Are there mean differences between the critical consciousness of elementary-level teacher candidates who participate in a semester-long community immersive experience at a PWI compared to those elementary-level teacher candidates who do not participate?; and (2) Does participation in a community immersive experience at a PWI facilitate teacher candidates’ critical consciousness?

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my mixed methods approach which includes applicable theory to accompany this research process. First, I describe traditional program participants and community immersive participants. Next, I outline the data collection instruments, the critical consciousness survey (Appendix C), the focus group consent and participation questionnaire (Appendix D), and the focus group questions (Appendix E). The critical consciousness survey includes two instruments, Diemer et al.’s (2020) Short Critical Consciousness Scale and Shin et al.’s (2018) Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure II. Finally, I detail my quantitative and qualitative analysis including methodological limitations and threats to reliability and validity.

Procedural Overview

This study was approved to deliver a quantitative cross-sectional survey to traditional program participants as well as community immersive participants. Along with the survey, a description of the purpose of the study, potential risks, benefits to the participants as well as data
protection and confidentiality measures were included as part of the informed consent (see Appendix A and F). This study was also approved to allow survey participants to opt into two respective focus groups. Therefore, the study is situated in a mixed methods design.

**Mixed Methods Decision**

This mixed methods study used a convergent design to contrast measured results with personal perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The value of a mixed methods study expands on the practical nature of integrating the results from two databases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 289). Fetters and Freshwater (2015) described the critical element of adding value in their illustrative equation of mixed methods research stating “1 + 1 = 3.” After collecting and then analyzing data from two separate databases, the subsequent merging of the data allow for complementary data on the same topic to be contrasted and compared (Morse, 2009). By incorporating both strengths and weakness of qualitative and quantitative research, a more complete understanding of the research program can be obtained. One benefit to this design allows for data to be corroborated.

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggested focusing on a central phenomenon, such as the development of critical consciousness through a community immersive experience, to guide the study. The purpose statement then indicates the intent to understand this phenomenon with specific participants. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore teacher candidates’ critical consciousness at a PWI with an emphasis on the unique program, a community immersive experience, for Early Grades PK-4 majors. The participants and site are central to the understanding of this research.
Setting and Participants

This research site, Harper University, is a large institution at a former normal school that prepares many teacher candidates in Pennsylvania. In connection to its historical underpinnings, this regional comprehensive four-year university is also recognized as a PWI. Within this site, there are approximately 12 educator preparation programs as majors leading toward initial teacher certification. Harper University serves as one of the largest approved program providers in the state.

This dissertation focused on a representative sample from a population of students with 30 or more credits in the Bachelor of Science in Education, Early Grades major. The Early Grades curriculum is approved by the research site and the Pennsylvania Department of Education as a certification program leading to the licensure of professional educators in a PK-4 grade band. In addition to the state, this EPP’s program outcomes are aligned with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Principles (INTASC), the National Association for the Education of Young Children Standards (NAEYC), and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Due to the framing of the research questions, participants are described as either traditional program participants or community immersive participants. Traditional program participants are those students who have not been able to participate or those who have not applied and been selected to participate in the community immersive experience. On the other hand, community immersive participants are students currently or formerly involved in a specialized program developed in Fall 2018 and implemented in Fall 2019 to work closely with a marginalized community encompassing mainly students of color. The curriculum context, including current standards, of the Early Grades PK-4 program at
the research site provides a picture of the participants with relation to this dissertation’s emphasis on critical consciousness.

**Traditional Program Participants**

At the time of data collection, total enrollment in the 121 credit Early Grades program consisted of a total of 926 total teacher candidates and was designed to be completed in four years of study including first-year students. This EPP continually draws the greatest number of teacher candidates and represents the largest program at the research site. The program provides a broad background in general education, an understanding of children, the knowledge and skills needed to teach children, and is based on state-wide standards.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Early Grades PK-4 framework declared “today’s PreK-4 teachers must be prepared to serve and to value a diverse group of young children and families in a variety of educational settings” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016, p. 3). This document continues to outline the knowledge, skills, and competencies teacher candidates will acquire as part of their EPP. The professional core emphasizes six areas: 1) Development, cognition, and learning, 2) subject matter content and pedagogy, 3) assessment, 4) family and community collaboration partnerships, 5) professionalism, and 6) adaptations and accommodations for diverse students in an inclusive setting and meeting the needs of English Language Learners. The relationships with families and communities were of particular interest in this research, which is simplified later with the following brief paragraph,

This section describes the way candidates must use their understanding and knowledge about the complex characteristics of children’s families and communities to create and sustain respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families, and to
involve all families in their children’s development and learning. (PDE, 2016, p. 11)
The candidate competencies section also later described the application of teacher candidates’
understanding of children and family diversity. This section called for strategies for becoming
“cross-culturally competent” (PDE, 2016, p. 28) specifically requiring candidates to identify “the
impact of culture on one’s own beliefs, values, and behaviors” (PDE, 2016, Section B4 p. 29).
However, this 2016-dated document ends at that statement.

Likewise, another state entity, the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early
Learning (OCDEL), reviews childcare and early learning opportunities for children from birth to
school age. One of their early learning standards also discussed the importance of establishing
and maintaining relationships with parents while encouraging children to see similarities and
differences between themselves and others (OCDEL, 2014). This competency also emphasized
the explicit discussion of differences in thoughts and feelings as part of the role of the adult or
educator (OCDEL, 2014).

From the state-level to the national-level, the NAEYC National Governing Board adopted
the Advancing Equity in Early Childhood standards in April 2019. NAEYC stated they hoped
“each child increasingly recognizes and uses language to describe unfairness (injustice) and
understand that unfairness hurts many” (NAEYC, 2019, p. 1). One of the key recommendations
for early childhood educators is to establish reciprocal relationships with families and embrace
the role of the family in child learning. However, educators may not be engaging in critical
conversations with parents and their administrators in efforts toward recognizing intersections of
power and oppression. The move toward critical consciousness is apparent in the previously
mentioned CR-SE competencies (Cole-Malott et al., 2021), which emphasize a deep exploration
of biases through critical reflection as opposed to current education standards and competencies
which fail to dismantle racialized hegemonic perceptions in schools. Nevertheless, alternative curricular approaches like the community immersive experience offer teacher candidates an opportunity to do this work if candidates avail themselves to the opportunity.

**Community Immersive Participants**

This undergraduate, specialized program takes a unique approach to interfacing with the community. While there are 800 candidates within the Early Grades major with more than 30 credits, the requirements reduce those who may be interested or able to participate. For example, a community immersive participant must be an Early Grades major who is willing to be available for full days (8:00 AM-5:00 PM) on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays (Harper University, 2022, link available at request of reader). The experience also requires some evening and weekend commitments. Based on previous participation numbers of the three cohorts in Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Fall 2021, cohort sizes range from 8-12 participants. Participants are traditionally sophomore and junior status (defined by 30-89.5 credits) in the Early Grades major due to the grouping of the courses needed (three 300-level courses and two-200 level courses). Participants engage in a series of courses within the Fall academic semester under the instruction of a particular group of EPP faculty employing a team-teaching approach.

While community immersive participants engage in the same required courses as traditional program participants, the community immersive experience provides an opportunity for teacher candidates to consider the role of justice-focused community teachers through an integrated manner in partnership with Oren Elementary in an urban community. Oren Elementary partners with the college as outlined previously through a community-engaged approach. This experience requires a specific application process to ensure teacher candidates’ commitment to an ongoing process of analyzing how oppression, power, and privilege impact
educational PK-12 settings. The program also necessitates that teacher candidates are willing to travel from their location to Oren Elementary. The curriculum of this experience is highly integrated with a shared focus on Love’s (2019) Abolitionist Teaching framework and an intentional focus on the concept of a community teacher. The teaching team emphasizes connections across course content, assignments, and field experiences within the elementary school setting.

This bounded system provides a case to illustrate complexities through a concrete, contextual, interpretable way (Merriam, 1998). Miles & Huberman (1994) also described this approach as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). The epistemological perspective of the researcher allows for a “critical (questioning one’s own and others’ assumptions)” approach, which was used in this study (Crowe et al., 2011). Merriam (1998) further emphasized three distinctive attributes of case study as particularistic (focuses on a particular event, program, or phenomenon), descriptive (provides a rich description of the phenomenon under review), and heuristic (illuminates the reader’s comprehension of phenomenon under study; Yazan, 2015). Five steps of a case study approach include: 1) Defining the case, 2) selecting the case, 3) collecting and analyzing the data, 4) interpreting data, and 5) reporting the findings. The first three steps are described in this chapter. To begin, a critical component is gaining permissions to work with the sample and site to distribute the quantitative measures.

**Participants in Quantitative Data Collection**

The quantitative phase of my study used a survey design via Qualtrics to answer the first research question. Diemer et al.’s (2020) Short Critical Consciousness Scale and Shin et al.’s (2018) Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure II collected data to then measure the
differences between the critical consciousness of two groups, traditional program participants and community immersive participants. The traditional program participants were contacted via email on behalf of the chairperson of the Department of Early and Middle Grades Education. This department provided a list of participants who met the inclusion criteria for this sample. Understanding the complexity behind the sampling procedures illuminated in the next section further outlines methodological steps.

**Sample and Sampling Procedure**

Using a random number generator, I selected 100 participants from the 786 traditional program participants list provided by the department at the time of data collection to randomly stratify the sample. Due to student enrollment into the major and change of major requests, this number may vary day-to-day according to Harper University’s analytics dashboard. I ensured none of these 100 participants were potential community immersive participants. To compare equal-sized groups, the initial recruitment was sent to 100 participants to allow for a return rate that is comparable to the second group. Therefore, a simple random stratified sampling strategy was employed.

After approximately three weeks of data collection, there was only a 10% return rate. Consequently, due to the need to increase the response rate, I revised the study’s recruitment efforts through the IRB to attend five sections of a required undergraduate course in the Early Grades major. I promoted the study in these sections by providing an overview of critical consciousness as well and a QR code that linked to the quantitative instrument, the critical consciousness survey. These five undergraduate course sections included a total of 110 teacher candidates, however only 66 of these teacher candidates were Early Grades majors with 30 or more credits. Also, these sections did not include any community immersive participants since
those teacher candidates took a specific section of that course as part of their semester-long experience. Overall, when considering the potential 100 randomly selected participants as well as the 66 potential participants, the return rate for the critical consciousness survey (n=77) was approximately 46%.

Due to the study’s design, a separate recruitment took place for the community immersive participants. These participants were contacted by the program director of the community immersive experience using current email records from their program database due to their familiarity with this faculty member. This sampling strategy represents a convenience sample because all participants were willing and available to provide answers pertaining to their unique experience (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). See Table 1 below for the descriptive data of the participants.
**Table 1**

*Descriptive Data of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>First Attempt Recruitment: 786 (100 randomly selected potential participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program</td>
<td></td>
<td>Second Attempt Recruitment: five sections of a required Early Grades course (66 potential participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24 from three Fall semester cohorts in 2019, 2020, and 2021 (one participant did not pursue an EPP and two candidates are non-enrolled)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immersive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ability to opt into a focus group only for those in this participant group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ability to opt into a focus group only for those in this participant group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immersive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The figure displays the differences and similarities within the samples.

**Data Collection Schedule**

Participation in the study took place in the Fall 2021 semester for both traditional program participants and community immersive participants. The critical consciousness survey took approximately 15 minutes (ShoCCS – 13 items; 1 open-ended question; CCCMII – 37 items; Demographic questions). The Early and Middle Grades Education department distributed the critical consciousness survey to traditional program participants via email with the opportunity to opt into the traditional program participant focus group.

Whereas for the community immersive participants, the program director of the community Immersive experience distributed the critical consciousness survey to Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Fall 2021 community immersive participants with the opportunity to opt into the
community immersive participant focus group. Current and previous participants in this program were more likely to recognize and act upon a communication from the program director. If participants opted into their respective focus group, then each participant completed a 5-minute focus group consent and participation questionnaire (see Appendix D).

To increase participation, I sent reminder emails and additional promotion to both participant groups after the previously mentioned IRB-approved modification. After three weeks of the particularly low return rate for the traditional program participants through the critical consciousness survey, this IRB-approved modification also included an added incentive to increase participation by including a $25 Amazon gift card for participation in a focus group.

**Participants in Qualitative Data Collection**

The qualitative phase of my dissertation is informed by Yin’s (2018) suggestion for the use of a case study approach as part of mixed methods research to provide evidence for the second research question. This work takes a heuristic quality of a case study to explore teacher candidates’ critical consciousness in a single, case study bounded system—the Early Grades major and activities and events of a “within-case” experience through the community immersive experience (Miles et al., 2014). According to Merriam (2001), “heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (p. 30). For example, Stake (1981) confirmed “previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights into how things get to be the way they are expected to result from case studies” (p. 47). The heuristic quality of a case can also “explain why an innovation worked or failed to work” and “evaluate, summarize, and conclude, thus increasing its potential applicability” (Merriam, 2001, p. 31). Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) added:
By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounded it by specifying how and where, and if possible why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings (p. 29).

As Yaszan (2015) stated, Merriam argued like Yin that “emergent researchers can use it as a research strategy separate from other qualitative research methodologies” since this design provides structured strategy (p. 139). A case study helps to investigate the conditions within one of these units from thick, rich descriptions as part of their focus groups. Focus groups promote social interaction and a “co-construction of meaning” (Morgan, 2012). By holding a focus group for both traditional program participants and community immersive deeper connections were possible amongst participants critical consciousness and questions around their class activities, assignments, and discussions.

**Sample and Sampling Procedure**

This purposeful sample was intentionally identified to understand the central phenomenon through a detailed understanding (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The traditional program participants are specifically those candidates who did not participate in the community immersive experience at the research site. Whereas the community immersive participants specifically decided to participate into their semesterly program.

**Data Collection Schedule**

After consenting and participating in the critical consciousness survey, teacher candidates opted into their respective focus groups. Traditional program participants and community immersive participants provided consent and completed a short, focus group consent and participation questionnaire before sharing their availability for scheduling purposes. Then, two
60-minute focus groups were held via Zoom technology due to flexibility and teacher candidates’ recent familiarity with the tool because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Finally, transcripts were reviewed using the app Rev.com to increase accuracy.

Due to a unique phenomenon and confounded variable, the participants in the initial traditional program focus group shared an interdisciplinary Urban Change minor which led to additional recruitment and another focus group was scheduled and held. However, only one participant opted into the second focus group to share their insights on critical consciousness.

**Generalizability**

The intent of this research was not to generalize, but to integrate multiple forms of data to explain convergence or divergence. However, the act of drawing broad inferences from observations is frequently a standard in quantitative research. This research examined an example of an Early Grades PK-4 EPP that integrates critical consciousness and an abolitionist teaching framework so other programs may view “potential transferability and appropriateness in their own settings” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 307). This research was not meant to generalize to all community immersion programs or existing EPPs but rather provide an illustration. Providing findings consistent with other EPPs’ experiences or potential consideration of alternative approaches in teacher education may move toward a transformation.

**Researcher’s Bias and Positionality**

My role as the researcher is informed by my worldview which intersects with a pragmatic and transformative perspective. Although a convergent mixed methods design may be appropriate for a pragmatic worldview, further exploration of a dialectical framework proves fitting for this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 69). A transformative worldview recognizes the inherent connections to political agency and a change agenda to address and
redress oppression (Mertens, 2007). Marshall and Rossman (2016) considered the importance of situating the self within research which includes an understanding of power and the complexities of identities in this work.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the tool (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As a straight, cis-gendered, able-bodied, white woman, I hold some of the same identities as most teacher candidates preparing to be educators at this PWI. As part of my program and study, I have thought more about my positionality beginning with my colorblind approach to race as a child raised in a rural, small community. When I began this work, I claimed to "not own my race," but have thought more about how whiteness presents in all facets of my life. Chiariello (2016) quoted a white in-service teacher, "By examining your whiteness and by working to dismantle [racist] institutions, you’re working towards equity” (para. 19). Similarly, in foundational scholarship on whiteness, Helms (1990) described the nature of racial identity work requiring individuals to first take the journey themselves. In approaching this work, I concur with Daniels’ (2018) description of their views of whiteness itself that it “lives in White bodies, communities, and structures, the work of dismantling White supremacy must also largely take place within those same bodies, identities, structures, and communities” (p. 16). With this spirit, I identified the following instruments to shape this dissertation.

**Instrumentation**

Data were collected from quantitative and qualitative sources before being integrated from both the traditional program participants and community immersive participants. The quantitative source, the critical consciousness survey encompasses three subparts: 1) Diemer et al.’s (2020) The Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS), 2) Shin et al.’s (2018) Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure II (CCCMII), and 3) demographic questions.
The ShoCCS was important to determine teacher candidates’ critical consciousness. In addition, teachers’ critical consciousness intersectional approach with sexism, cissexism, and ableism was determined using the CCCMII. The qualitative sources include both the focus group consent and participation questionnaire and the focus group questions. The qualitative data collection came from focus groups with traditional program participants and community immersive participants. The focus groups allowed for deeper understanding of participants’ responses to the survey. Both sources of data collection were necessary to answer their respective research questions.

Survey

The critical consciousness survey included two instruments from the scholarship surrounding critical consciousness. The first is the short critical consciousness scale (ShoCCS) which includes three subscales: Critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action. The first subscale measured youths' critical analysis of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and gendered inequalities. The second subscale measured the perceived ability and commitment to enact social change. The third subscale measured participation in social and political action to change perceived inequalities. However, total scores were not calculated, because the three subscales are relatively distinct. This 6-point Likert scale required participants to agree or disagree with statements associated with the 13-items. Higher scores on each subscale reflect a greater degree of critical consciousness. Diemer et al. (2020) developed a short version of a previously published critical consciousness scale (Diemer et al., 2017) using an item response theory approach for low-information and redundant items. Two separate studies within Diemer et al.’s (2020) study examined developmental processes among marginalized youth, ages 13-19, through an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; Diemer et al., 2020). Diemer et al. (2020) utilized a graded response model to determine reliability, particularly
focusing on a new construct of critical motivation that was not present in the initial study, (Diemer et al., 2017). Specific psychometric properties can be summarized by the following Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant Studies and Scales</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Diemer et al. (2017) – Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS) | α= 0.90 (Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality)  
\* \* α= 0.88 (Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism),  
\* \* \* α= 0.85 (Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation). |
| Rapa et al. (2020) – Critical Consciousness Scale Shortened (CCS-S) | α= 0.84; Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality  
\* \* α= 0.82; Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism; removed in Diemer et al. (2020)  
\* \* \* α= 0.79; Critical Motivation  
\* \* \* \* α= 0.80’ Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation |
| Diemer et al. (2020) – Shortened Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS) | α= 0.82; Critical Reflection  
\* \* α= 0.80; Critical Motivation  
\* \* \* α= 0.80; Critical Action |

Note: Research through the University of Michigan’s AC²ME (Advancing Critical Consciousness, Methods & Equity) Lab continues to expand on this research.

The critical consciousness scale’s subscales were internally consistent, particularly for shorter measures (Diemer et al., 2017). Rapa et al. (2020) resulted in comparable reliabilities reported from Diemer et al.’s (2017) CCS validation study. Finally, Diemer et al. (2020) published the version utilized for this dissertation that included the critical motivation scale and subsequently removed the critical reflection: egalitarianism scale due to Rapa et al. (2020)’s finding that developed and validated a streamlined tool suitable for individuals with varied sociodemographic characteristics. The ShoCCS scaled items represent individual characteristics of critical consciousness with emphasis on continued research supporting a more systematic
study of the complex relationships between the component parts (critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action; see Table 3).

Table 3

*Short Critical Consciousness Scale Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ShoCCS</th>
<th>Scaled Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection (Items 1-4)</td>
<td>• Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer changes to get good jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Women have fewer chances to get ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Motivation (Items 5-8)</td>
<td>• It is important for young people to know what is going on in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It is my responsibility to get involved and make things better for society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Action (Items 9-13)</td>
<td>• Contacted a public official by phone, mail, or email to tell him/her how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you felt about a particular social or political issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* A full description of all items can be found in Appendix C, The Critical Consciousness Survey.

The contemporary critical consciousness measure II (CCCMII) evaluates general critical consciousness as well as utilizes an intersectional approach with sexism, cissexism, and ableism (see Table 4). This 7-point Likert scale requires participants to agree or disagree with the 37-items. Higher scores on the instrument are indicative of greater levels of critical consciousness. A total scale score, as well as subscale scores, can be derived from this instrument. Shin et al. (2018) developed this measure through an examination of both an EFA and CFA by building on a previous study (Shin et al., 2016). Shin et al. (2018) observed appropriate levels of reliability and evidence of validity evidence for the CCCMII. Specific psychometric properties of the CCCMII, include reliability for subscales: $\alpha= 0.92$ (sexism), $\alpha = 0.95$ (cissexism), $\alpha = 0.92$ (ableism). Overall, the CCCMII’s reliability ($\alpha = 0.96$) provided further support of reliability while construct validity was also supported by the results from EFA and CFA. Convergent and
construct validity was demonstrated through significantly predictive relationships between the CCCMII and other existing measures of sexism, genderism/transphobia, ableism, and social dominance orientation using their intersectional framework (Shin et al., 2020, p. 540). Evidence derived suggested that responses to the CCCMII were not strongly influenced by socially desirable responses (Shin et al., 2018). In addition to these valid and reliable instruments, there is one open-ended question about curricular experiences as well as demographic questions (see Appendix C).

Table 4

Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure II Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCCMII</th>
<th>Scaled Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cissexism (Items 1-15) | • It is appropriate for elementary school curriculum to teach children that there are more gender identities than man and woman.  
• People who identify as cisgender (those who continue to identify with the sex they were assigned at birth) receive unearned privileges and advantages within U.S. society. |
| Ableism (Items 16-29)   | • People with disabilities are generally treated more poorly in U.S. society than those without disabilities.  
• Societal barriers are the cause of many of the problems from which people with intellectual disabilities suffer. |
| Sexism (Items 30-37)     | • Whether or not they realize it, all women have been negatively affected by sexism.  
• Some women choosing to have babies is not the cause of income inequality between men and women in the United States. |

*Note:* A full description of all items can be found in Appendix C, the Critical Consciousness Survey, second component.

Focus Groups

Both traditional program participants and community immersive participants completed the focus group consent and participant questionnaire. This questionnaire included demographic questions as well as a few open-ended questions regarding their intention to pursue teaching or engage in the community immersive experience. However, the primary goal of the questionnaire
granted access to scheduling through the app, Doodle, at a mutually agreed upon time for the majority of participants opting into these groups. The focus group questions were informed by the culturally relevant and sustaining education (CR-SE) competencies developed as part of the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium in April 2021 (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). These competencies are part of state-wide discussions which connect to critical consciousness – cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral components (see Appendix E).

Two data collection instruments were necessary: 1) A focus group guide with topical questions along the lines of critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action, and 2) a field note guide with content for observational data and personal reflection data. Due to the limitations of teacher candidates’ schedules and recent comfortability in utilizing site-approved technology for Zoom, focus groups were held on this computer-based platform. Miles et al. (2014) suggested data collection should be performed alongside analysis so the researcher can cycle between existing data and developing strategies for collecting new data (p. 70).

Data Analysis and Coding Procedures

Mixed methods research employs “a combination of methodologies that includes different formulations of research questions, sampling, data collection, analysis, and reporting” (Parson et al., 2021, p. 52). Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed within-case analyses that involve analyzing, interpreting, and justifying data that help to explain the phenomena in a bounded context. Similarly, Merriam (2001) shared data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidation, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning. (p. 178)
Figure 1 below focuses on how the data analysis came together after data collection prior to merging and interpretation of the convergent study.
Figure 1

Implementation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>QUAN Data Collection</th>
<th>Products</th>
<th>QUAL Data Collection</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program participants: Randomly survey 100 participants from EMGE list (did not engage with the community immersive experience), expanded to promotion within History of Education courses</td>
<td>• Numerical scored items</td>
<td>• Transcript</td>
<td>• Theoretical / Deductive Codes thematic analysis</td>
<td>• Select focus groups from both groups</td>
<td>• Analytic Memos / Discussions</td>
<td>• Traditional Program participants</td>
<td>• Community Immersive participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive participants: Survey 24 viable participants from immersive semester list (engaged in the program during F19, F20, F21)</td>
<td>• Survey measures: demographics, ShoCCS, CCCMII, open-ended curricular question</td>
<td>• Look for convergence or divergence</td>
<td>• Theoretical / Deductive Codes thematic analysis</td>
<td>• Theoretical / Deductive Codes thematic analysis based on theoretical framework:</td>
<td>• • Critical Reflection</td>
<td>• 1. Self-Analysis</td>
<td>• 2. Critical Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>QUAN Data Analysis</td>
<td>Products</td>
<td>QUAL Data Analysis</td>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>Products</td>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>• Look for convergence or divergence</td>
<td>• Critical Reflection</td>
<td>• Relate qualitative themes to quantitative variables</td>
<td>• • Mean comparisons (T-tests)</td>
<td>• Means</td>
<td>• 1. Self-Analysis</td>
<td>• Significance values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cross-tabulate qualitatively derived gaps with dependent variables (components of critical consciousness)</td>
<td>• Consider how the merged results shaped a more comprehensive understanding of critical consciousness</td>
<td>• Discussion with theoretical framework implications</td>
<td>• Relate qualitative themes to quantitative variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This matrix brings together all phases of the dissertation from data collection, data analysis, data merging, and data interpretation.
Quantitative Analysis

The first research question had to be answered quantitatively. Both descriptive and inferential statistics can be analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software after data are organized, prepared, and cleaned. All items are positively scored meaning there are no reverse-coded items. The ShoCCS contains three subscales as alluded to previously, 1) Critical reflection (Scale items 1-4); 2) critical motivation (Scale items 5-8); and 3) critical action (Scale items 9-13; see Appendix C). Since the CCS does not lead to a cumulative critical consciousness score, the three subscales must be analyzed individually. Independent t-tests are used to compare two groups.

Using comparative analysis, such as independent sample t-tests, I determined group differences. The independent variables are the two groups: Traditional program participants and the community immersive participants. Dependent variables represented the outcomes in my study, such as individual ShoCCS subscales. Also, by contrasting the means of the different groups’ responses to questions, I sought to determine the differences between the two participants groups.

Qualitative Analysis

The second research question had to be answered qualitatively. Typical analytic procedures include the following phases, “1) organizing the data, 2) immersion in the data, 3) generating case summaries with categories and themes, 4) coding the understanding, 5) offering interpretations through analytic memos, 6) searching for alternative understanding, and 7) writing the report or other formatting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 217).

In the qualitative phase, the data needed to be initially prepared and organized. The transcription and organization of the focus group data was an important step in establishing an
audit trail for researcher credibility and trustworthiness. The development of the data log with corresponding dates, locations, settings, and participants’ details including contact information to distinguish between the focus group data was critical in this phase (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Converting any audio files or fieldnotes into text data can also involve technology, such as the app Rev.com, which transcribed focus groups with multiple participants. Then, the data were thematically coded using theoretical coding based on Merritt (2021) and previously outlined literature surrounding critical consciousness.

**Theoretical Coding**

Through a deductive coding strategy, which included a predetermined set of codes based on critical consciousness scholarship, the focus group data were coded utilizing Merritt (2021) as reference. These codes also derived from previous research from Seider and Graves (2020) and the quantitative instruments previously outlined by Diemer et al. (2020) and Shin et al. (2018). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested beginning with a “start list” by creating a codebook of the initial set of codes which is also informed the quantitative results (p. 58). To ensure the quality of the data, I engaged in reflexivity as a strategy to question attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices, and habitual actions to understand my role with that of participants. This process calls for active engagement with oneself as the researcher who can also serve as a tool.

**Trustworthiness**

Due to my interest in the community immersive experience and critical consciousness as a competency in teacher education, there is a personal bias which needs to be reconciled within the data. According to Miles et al. (2020), checking for the researcher effects provides evidence for the trustworthiness of the data. Keeping research questions in mind firmly helped the study
remain present while centering conceptual thinking, not necessarily sentimental or interpersonal thoughts (Miles et al., 2020). Data triangulation based on the data source, the method, the researcher, and the theory could have produced confounding or conflicting findings as well.

Integration

A critical element of any mixed methods design is the integration of the data. Greene et al. (1989) described five purposes for using mixed methods: 1) Triangulation, 2) complementary, 3) development, 4) initiation, and 5) expansion. However, missing from this work is the value-added element of integrating methods. For example, it is not enough for a mixed methods study to use the results from one strand to inform the other strand, but it can help reconcile participant responses on a quantitative measure with their personal experiences. Just as the scholarship on critical consciousness takes a cross-disciplinary approach through counseling (Shin et al., 2016; 2020), psychology (Watts & Flanagan, 2007), and education (Seider et al., 2016), mixed methods research can similarly provide a balanced, methodological approach if the researcher thoroughly “mines the data” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017, p. 289). Integrating findings from personal experiences in their EPP, particularly highlighting the unique community immersive experience, with quantitative survey data provided evidence about teacher candidates’ critical consciousness.

Threats to Validity and Reliability

Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) discussed some potential threats when implementing a convergent mixed methods design. It is important to draw correct inferences and accurate calculations from the merged data. Validity in mixed methods research reflects the ability of the research questions, and related constructs, to accurately measure what they are assumed to
measure. Whereas reliability ensures consistency of measures. This study mitigated potential threats to validity and reliability in several ways.

Validity Threats

From the start, this research used parallel questions to address the concept of critical consciousness in both quantitative and qualitative phases based in scholarship with theoretical underpinnings. With this design, there was potential to have unequal quantitative and qualitative sample sizes. However, as outlined in this study’s research questions, group means were compared with individual experiences as shared in the focus groups. Therefore, there is convergent validity of the qualitative results with the quantitative results to demonstrate corroborated conclusions. Another potential threat is the distinct acknowledgement of separate databases, which can be mitigated by a thorough integration of data. Merriam (2001) described one internal validity check as a disclosure of the researcher bias as discussed in previous sections within this chapter as well as in a subsequent chapter.

Reliability Threats

In this design, researchers tend to overlook non-significant findings, so it is essential to take multiple reviews when assessing the data. Case study requires a specific, clear bounding of the phenomena as a purposeful sample to illustrate the construct of critical consciousness. Diemer et al.’s (2020) ShoCCS was validated with a youth sample ages 13-19 and a majority (63%) of participants identifying as Black/African American whereas Shin et al.’s (2018) CCCMII was validated using adults. Although racial differences of the instruments’ validation sample and that of my study exist, it was important to reflect on the binary of Freire’s (1970) oppressed/oppressor dichotomy and place continued emphasis on an intersectional approach when considering critical consciousness as a competency. Another threat, or stressor as Marshall
and Rossman (2016) states, was that of guaranteeing enough time for a rich study with thick
descriptions. While focus groups may have reliability concerns, there were more benefits to
utilizing this approach particularly in support of some of the theoretical foundations of this
dissertation. Freire (1970/2014), as well as Love (2019), advocated for individuals to realize the
joint humanity in the transformation or our realities as one. Intensive group activities offered a
model for focus group research through Freire’s (1970/2014) “study circles” as a critical
educational tool to bring together lived experiences and shared truths (Liamputtong, 2011).

Another potential reliability threat included a social desirability bias wherein participants
answer questions in a manner that could be viewed favorably by others. The two quantitative
scales lessened this threat through their repeated analyses. While there are community immersion
experiences at other IHEs, replicability of this method in its exact form may be difficult.
However, other IHEs may consider transferability to their own sites when reviewing the
instruments and analysis strategies. Merriam (1998) discussed qualitative reliability concerns as
the “process of making meaning” (p. 178). Finally, my own researcher bias influence in support
of student movements to disrupt current teacher education was also a potential threat. During this
study, I approached the research with systematic procedures to establish a trail of verifiable
evidence and researcher neutrality through my analytic memoing and frequent researcher
discussions.

Data Triangulation

Research involves triangulation to seek convergence and corroboration by comparing
findings from the qualitative data with the quantitative results. Data triangulation includes
collecting data across different samples, places, or times. Grounded in the research questions,
this study collected data from two groups. Specifically, quantitative data collected through the
critical consciousness survey began with random selection of traditional program participants. Despite the required additional targeting of this group through the five undergraduate course sections, traditional program participants were still randomized during this study. Qualitatively, the opportunity to conduct two traditional program participant focus groups did allow for different opportunities in time to collect data. However, since reliability and validity are based in positivistic notions, Merriam (1998) argued it is almost impossible to apply those concepts to qualitative inquiry (Yazan, 2015). In a sense, there are opposing theories of knowledge construction representing “something of a misfit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). The following limitations preview some constraints within this study that are expanded upon in Chapter V.

**Limitations**

There are a few limitations worth noting in this methodology. Surveys are always snapshots in time and may not have fully captured the story at hand as human participants are always changing. Unfortunately, due to the unique nature of the community immersive experience there was a chance of low survey participation due to the small sample size.

**Informed Consent and Protection of Human Participants**

As part of the quantitative phase, participants gave informed consent within the critical consciousness survey in Qualtrics which explained the study, any potential harm, or benefits, as well as ensuring confidentiality (see Appendix F). Next, as part of the qualitative phase, participants had the opportunity to participate in a 60-minute focus group. If not interested in this subsequent phase, participants concluded their engagement with this research and exited the survey. However, if they wished to continue their participation, they were directed to a separate focus group consent and participation questionnaire which sought additional informed consent. The questionnaire similarly explained the study, any potential harm or benefits as well as
ensuring confidentiality in masking their identities using pseudonyms. Three years after the completion of this study, I will destroy the collected data.

**Summary**

Stake (1995) offered, “good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking” (p. 19). For teacher candidates to become co-conspirators, not simply allies, understanding systems of privilege and moving toward honest acknowledgment and confrontation of those imbalances develops authentic relationships (Love, 2019). Good thinking as part of critical consciousness facilitates this analysis when incorporated into a curriculum to establish a powerful element within educator preparation programs.
Chapter IV: Results

In this chapter, I examine the data regarding critical consciousness of teacher candidates and associated connections to their Early Grades curriculum. This dissertation’s critical consciousness survey included two valid and reliable scales, Diemer et al.’s (2020) ShoCCS and Shin et al.’s (2016) CCCMII, with which to compare the traditional program participants and the community immersive participants. This mixed methods study also employed focus groups as the collective means for teacher candidates to discuss critical consciousness connections to their work as preparing educators in both participant groups. This chapter examines quantitative results, then outlines qualitative results. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary to preview the integration of results leading in the subsequent chapter.

Quantitative Results

The first research question in this dissertation sought to determine if there are mean differences between the critical consciousness of elementary-level teacher candidates who participate in a semester-long community immersive experience at a PWI compared to those elementary-level teacher candidates who do not participate. In addition to the two previously mentioned scales, responses to demographic questions provided an illustration of the participants as well as some differences between these groups.

Demographic Results of Quantitative Sample

As of September 2021, the Early Grades major is the second largest undergraduate major at the research site with a total of 969 enrolled students in the educator preparation program leading toward a Bachelor of Science in Education and PK-4 certification. The vast majority, 85% of those students identified as white, with 5.7% identifying as Latino and 3.5% identifying as African American. This context is important for the specific demographics of this study.
While the initial recruitment phase randomly identified 100 traditional program participants, the study expanded the recruitment effort seeking additional traditional program participants within five sections of a required course within the Early Grades major in Fall 2021. Therefore, a total of 77 traditional program participants were included in the sample with full responses to the first quantitative instrument (ShoCCS). Of the 27 participants from the community immersive group, two were non-enrolled and were no longer completing their academic progression at the site and one completed in a program outside of the Early Grades major so they were not considered an option for this study. Therefore, of the 24 plausible community immersive participants, 16 participated in this study.

The traditional program participants were made up of sophomore status students (n=49, 64%), junior status students (n=10, 13%), senior status students (n=9, 11.5%), and the remaining blank entries (n=9; 11.5%). Comparable to the overall demographics of the major, 84% of respondents identified as white with seven teacher candidates of color replying to the survey (n=77). While 57% of traditional program participants (n=44) identified as able-bodied, 31% (n=24) did identify as having a disability. Of the sample, 83% (n=64) identified as “woman” and 74% (n=57) participants noted their sexual orientation as “Straight/heterosexual.”

Of the 24 community immersive potential participants, 16 completed the survey. Of these participants, six participants were from the initial Fall 2019 cohort, three were from the Fall 2020 cohort (virtual due to the COVID-19 global pandemic), and seven were from the currently enrolled Fall 2021 cohort. Almost half (n=6; 46%), identified as a teacher candidate of color with three Black/African American participants and three Hispanic, Latino/Latina/Latinx or Spanish origin participants. While 80% (n=13) of community immersive participants identified as able-bodied, 31% (n=5) also identified with the following disabilities: Development disabilities,
mental health/emotional disabilities, learning disabilities, unseen disabilities, and the option to self-describe. Fourteen participants (87.5%) described their gender identity as “woman” whereas twelve (75%) participants identified their sexual orientation as “Straight/heterosexual.” In both participant groups, all but one participant fell in the 18-24 age group, with one participant identifying as 25-30 years old. The following figure highlights some differences and similarities between each of the participants groups, which is a unique finding at the outset of this study. The racial-ethnic identification of the two participant groups provided the greatest differences in demographics.

Table 5

Demographics of Participant Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Racial - Ethnic Identification</th>
<th>Able-bodiedness</th>
<th>Gender Identification</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>9% teacher candidate of color</td>
<td>31% Identified as having a disability</td>
<td>83% Woman</td>
<td>74% Straight/Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>46% teacher candidate of color</td>
<td>31% Identified as having a disability</td>
<td>87% Woman</td>
<td>75% Straight/Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Surveying the Elements of Critical Consciousness

The literature on the subject outlined three components of critical consciousness for the purpose of this dissertation. The cognitive, social analysis component was represented in both scales, particularly the ShoCCS’s critical reflection subscale and the CCCMII. The CCCMII provided a total critical consciousness score, whereas the ShoCCS can be broken down into three distinct subscales and cannot be calculated as a total. Each individual subscale represented a
characteristic of critical consciousness within the ShoCCS. The second attitudinal component, particularly reflected in the ShoCCS’s critical motivation subscale, indicates self-efficacy of teacher candidates to impact change. Finally, the third behavioral component, displayed in the ShoCCS’s critical action subscale, relates to teacher candidates’ activities to engage as citizens in a participatory society.

Due to the unequal group sizes between traditional program participants and community immersive participants, sixteen cases were randomly selected from the traditional program participant group to allow for analysis of similar sized groups. Table 6 and 7 illustrate the mean scores for this study’s critical consciousness survey with respect to each instrument. Using descriptive statistics, participants’ mean subscales of both instruments were calculated within this study’s critical consciousness survey—the ShoCCS and the CCCMII. The ShoCCS subscales included: 1) Critical reflection, 2) critical motivation, and 3) critical action while the CCCMII subscales included 1) cissexism, 2) ableism, and 3) sexism. The 6-point Likert scales of the ShoCCS’s critical reflection and critical motivation subscales ranged from “slightly agree” (4) and “mostly agree” (5). However, the critical action subscale ranged from “never did this” (1) to “once or twice last year” (2). Finally, the 7-point Likert scales for all three CCCMII subscales fell around “slightly agree” (5).
Table 6

*Mean Scores for the Critical Consciousness Survey – ShoCCS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Critical Reflection</th>
<th>Critical Motivation</th>
<th>Critical Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n=16 for both the Traditional Program and Community Immersive participants.

Table 7

*Mean Scores for the Critical Consciousness Survey – CCCMII*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Cissexism</th>
<th>Ableism</th>
<th>Sexism</th>
<th>CCCMII total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* n=16 for both the Traditional Program and Community Immersive participants.

While there are relatively high means for the CCCMII as well the ShoCCS, the means in ShoCCS’s critical action subscale are notably low. Most participants have never engaged in critical action according to the questions asked in these scales. However, some participants described critical action in response to the open-ended survey question inquiring about “types of activities or assignments have you engaged with to reflect on your identity groups (i.e., race, skin color, ethnicity, gender identity, age, nationality, language, class, economic status, ability, sexual orientation, religion)?” Responses surrounding critical action varied from women’s walks to Black Lives Matters protests to participation in student organizations such as Hillel. The most telling responses emphasized work conducted outside of the Early Grades program within
general education writing courses or specifically through other co-curricular experiences. One anonymous participant stated:

When considering this question exclusively to my CESW courses, no coursework or assignments encouraged me to reflect on my own personal identity groups. Thanks to my courses within the (Urban Change minor), and with my service abroad experiences (thanks to trip preparation activities), I was able to reflect on my personal identity groups in order to then personally connect this to my teaching practice.

While others provided statements about the lack of self-analysis stating, “I haven’t done much about my identity” or simply declaring “none” or “not much.” This open-ended reflective question was intentionally inserted after the ShoCCS and before the CCCMII to break up the scales and allow for free thinking on the part of respondents. To further analyze critical consciousness through the survey, the next three sections review the following elements that theorize critical consciousness: 1) Critical reflection, 2) critical motivation, and 3) critical action.

**Critical Reflection**

Many instruments include this component of critical consciousness. The ways individuals engage in analysis of inequality is the foremost researched component of critical consciousness (Heberle et al., 2020). Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) argued “we cannot think ourselves to liberation,” noting “the disproportionate attention given to critical social analysis as compared to action” (p. 813). The ShoCCS focus on the perceived inequalities like the cognitive concepts of Shin (2016)’s CCCMII that focused on specific ‘isms’ of discrimination. While it may be more possible to foster dialogue in a classroom within the academy where many EPPs are housed, it may be more difficult to mobilize teacher candidates toward action (Diemer et al., 2021).

Utilizing an independent samples t-test, I compared the mean scores of critical reflection
(traditional program participants’ M=4.34 and community immersive participants’ M=4.57) between the two participant groups; however, there were no significant differences.

When looking more broadly at all data (n=77) for traditional program participants and (n=16) for community immersive participants, I compared specific responses to each question within the subscales. Table 8 displays the disparities between the four questions in this construct, which signal a higher critical reflection for the community immersive participants.

Table 8

Critical Reflection Comparison – ShoCCS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Q1: Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get good jobs</th>
<th>Q2: Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get ahead</th>
<th>Q3: Women have fewer chances to get ahead</th>
<th>Q4: Poor people have fewer chances to get ahead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The 6-point Likert scale include “slightly agree” as 4 and “mostly agree” as 5.

While there is no statistical difference in critical reflection, there were descriptive differences. Differences among Q2 and Q3 related to certain groups have fewer chances to get ahead. This important difference describes some cognitive discrepancies amongst the two groups. Like critical reflection, critical motivation reflects no statistically significant results, however this construct provides an opportunity for further comparison.
**Critical Motivation**

This subscale was newly validated within the ShoCCS due to increased frequency in the literature alluding to the desire of participants to enact change. Diemer et al. (2015) referenced the inclusion of this component in associated research with the measure of adolescent critical consciousness (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016) to the perceived capacity to effect change. This “critical agency” subscale reflects individuals’ engagement in and ethical commitment toward transforming their society thereby predicting actual participation in social and political action (Diemer & Li, 2011). Although there were no statistically significant findings in the mean differences of this area (traditional program participants’ M=5.01 and community immersive participants’ M=5.00), this construct is an area for future research, which is discussed in the next chapter. Also, when looking at the larger sample, community immersive participants displayed higher scores for critical motivation in many of the individual questions when compared to the traditional program participants (see Table 9).

**Table 9**

*Critical Motivation Comparison – ShoCCS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Q5: It is important for young people to know what is going on in the world</th>
<th>Q6: It is important to correct social and economic inequality</th>
<th>Q7: It is my responsibility to get involved and make things better for society</th>
<th>Q8: People like me should participate in the political activity and decision making of our country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The 6-point Likert scale represents a “4 = slightly agree” and “5 = mostly agree.”
Critical Action

This subscale focuses on engagement in anti-oppressive activities (see Table 10). Diemer et al. (2021) contended critical action should be recentered despite the emphasis in social science research on critical reflection. A focused conception of critical action includes collective mobilization to change policy through “advocating, protesting or demonstrating for social justice for marginalized communities, such as LGBT people or women” (Diemer et al., 2021, p. 13). In this subscale, I found a significant difference between the two groups’ means scores (traditional program participants’ M=1.41 and community Immersive participants’ M=1.85). Also, when studying the larger sample, the community immersive participants scores remained higher than the Traditional Program participants.

Table 10

Critical Action Comparison – ShoCCS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Q9: Participated in a civil rights group or organization</th>
<th>Q10: Participated in a political party, club, or organization</th>
<th>Q11: Contacted a public official by phone, mail, or email to tell him/her how you felt about a particular social or political issue</th>
<th>Q12: Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting</th>
<th>Q13: Participated in a human rights, gay rights, or women’s rights organization or group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The 6-point Likert scale represents a “1 = never did this” and a “2 = once or twice last year.”
These critical action scores in Table 10 are low compared to the critical reflection and critical motivation scores. However, of note in Q10, the community immersive participants are more likely to join a political group or organization, which is a pre-requisite for collective action. Critical action provides a finding worth further discussion through an independent $t$ test as well.

**Significant Difference – ShoCCS Critical Action**

Although findings comparing the means of the groups did show differences, the only statistically significant difference was in the ShoCCS’s critical action subscale. Utilizing an independent samples $t$-test, I compared the mean scores to determine this statistically significant difference (see Table 11). The statistically significant finding of $p=.054$ for the critical action subscale noted a difference between traditional program and community immersive participants. However, the $t$-test utilized for the CCCMII resulted in no statistically significant findings but did provide some further insight into participants’ critical reflection.

### Table 11

*Independent Samples $t$ Tests of ShoCCS Subscales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscales</th>
<th>Traditional Program</th>
<th>Community Immersive</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection</td>
<td>4.344</td>
<td>.961</td>
<td>4.578</td>
<td>1.331</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Motivation</td>
<td>5.016</td>
<td>1.188</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>1.118</td>
<td>.949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Action</td>
<td>1.413</td>
<td>.459</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>.812</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n=16 for both participant groups; p $\leq .05$*
Deeper Dive into Critical Reflection – CCCMII Scores

This instrument focused on items geared toward an adult population as informed by intersectionality to help participants gain awareness of how they might harness “their privileged social identities to participate in the liberation of devalued and marginalized groups” (Shin et al., 2018, p. 551). There were no statistically significant differences in the CCCMII subscales questions between participant groups (See Table 12). Again, I randomly selected 16 traditional program participants to compare equal sized groups.

Table 12
Independent Samples t Tests of CCCMII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscales</th>
<th>Traditional Program</th>
<th>Community Immersive</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cissexism</td>
<td>5.208</td>
<td>.982</td>
<td>5.425</td>
<td>1.019</td>
<td>.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ableism</td>
<td>5.576</td>
<td>.845</td>
<td>5.638</td>
<td>.807</td>
<td>.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexism</td>
<td>5.883</td>
<td>.938</td>
<td>5.766</td>
<td>1.028</td>
<td>.734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n=16 for both participant groups; p≥.05.*

To provide more specific comparison of questions within the CCCMII, I assessed individual questions within each subscale: 1) Cissexism with 15 items, 2) ableism with 14 items, and 3) sexism with eight items. While the full tables can be found in Appendix G, I selected those with the greatest disparities for Tables 13, 14, and 15. It is important to note that participation did drop off with less respondents (n=55 for traditional program participants and n=16 for community immersive participants).
Table 13

*Cissexism Comparison – CCCMII*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Q1: It is appropriate for elementary school curriculum to teach children that there are more gender identities than man and woman.</th>
<th>Q3: Health insurance should cover sex re-assignment surgeries for those who desire them.</th>
<th>Q7: Limiting our pronouns to “he” and “she” is harmful to those who do not conform to traditional gender identities.</th>
<th>Q8: People who identify as cisgender (those who continue to identify with the sex they were assigned at birth) receive unearned privileges and advantages within U.S. society.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The 7-point Likert scale represents a “4 = neither agree nor disagree” and a “5 = slightly agree.”

In each of these questions, the community immersive participants maintain higher scores. However, within the ableism subscale that is true for all questions except Q26. As with the previous subscale, I’ve selected a few sample questions with greatest disparities for Table 14.
Table 14

Ableism Comparison – CCCMII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Q16: Discrimination against people with physical disabilities is a major problem in U.S. society.</th>
<th>Q17: Focusing on helping people with disabilities adjust to the barriers in our society, instead of breaking down barriers themselves, maintains ableism.</th>
<th>Q26: The notion that people with mental illness are more prone to violence is a lie promoted in U.S. society.</th>
<th>Q28: People with disabilities are generally treated more poorly in U.S. society than those without disabilities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The 7-point Likert scale represents a “4 = neither agree nor disagree”, a “5 = slightly agree”, and “6 = agree.”

Within the final subscale, sexism, four out of the seven scores were higher in the traditional program participants than the community immersive participants. Of particular interest is the disparity in Q34.
Table 15

Sexism Comparison – CCCMII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Q30: Discrimination against women is still a significant problem in the United States.</th>
<th>Q31: Some women choosing to have babies is not the cause of income inequality between men and women in the United States.</th>
<th>Q34: The pressure on women to be physically attractive is stronger than for men.</th>
<th>Q35: Whether or not they realize it, all women have been negatively affected by sexism.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The 7-point Likert scale represents a “5 = slightly agree” and “6 = agree.”

Each of these CCCMII subscales contribute additional context to the demographics shared earlier in this chapter. Shin et al. (2016) hoped the CCCMII could be viewed as “a measure of internalized domination (i.e., low levels of critical consciousness) among those in the privileged groups related to gender and ability status” (p. 551). In situations where participants hold dominant identities, the CCCMII can assess their critical consciousness of others’ oppression and how they individually profited as members of privileged groups (Diemer et al., 2016).

**Summary of Quantitative Results**

Variations among the surveyed elements of critical consciousness provide a glimpse into participants’ reactions. The clearest evidence alludes to generally low critical action, though there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups’ critical action. However, neither critical reflection, including the supporting factors in the CCCMII, nor critical motivation
significantly vary. Overall, it may seem like there are small differences among these two groups, but the qualitative findings offer a deeper dive and starker contrast into their connections to critical consciousness.

**Qualitative Findings**

The second research question in this dissertation inquired as to if participation in a community immersive experience at a PWI facilitates teacher candidates’ critical consciousness. This question is answered by comparing and contrasting responses from traditional program participants and community immersive participants in focus groups. The focus groups provided opportunities to collectively gather and discuss critical consciousness with relation to participants’ common curriculum as Early Grades majors. The five total participants in the focus groups voluntarily opted into these opportunities to disclose their insights on critical consciousness in a shared manner. The coursework structure of the Early Grades program includes courses not only taught by instructors within the Department of Early and Middle Grades Education but also foundational courses outside of the department. These other departments have varying tendencies with respect to criticality in their philosophical approach. For example, one department is recognized for their dedication to “fostering the development of educators with the requisite critical consciousness and pedagogical skills to act as public intellectuals; citizen-teachers capable of creating pedagogical spaces and practices that are relevant, impactful, and liberating for their students” (Harper University, 2021, link available at request of reader). These critical leanings impact instructional delivery and course content within the educator preparation programs across this public PWI.

The following section centers the comparison of participants through three main themes of critical consciousness: Critical reflection with self-analysis, critical motivation, and critical
action. Participants also shared content around the factors that either helped encouraged the critical vibe or hinder it by leaning more toward a conventional vibe, such that is found in traditional educator preparation programs. The final section of this chapter leads into the discussion of participants’ engagement with varied opportunities. The sample demographics begin the qualitative analysis.

**Demographics of Qualitative Sample**

The first focus group was held in November 2021 with two traditional program participants, Angelina (she/her) and Ellen (she/her). These candidates also shared a common connection in that they both participated in an interdisciplinary minor focused on urban studies and youth empowerment (referred to in this study as the Urban Change minor). These candidates opted to take this minor due to their interest in critical consciousness and community action. However, while these participants shared their knowledge of the community immersive experience, they were not able to participate due to their course schedules. Angelina described herself as an “ambassador” of the community immersive experience as she noted in the focus group. She stated:

I actually helped Professors Emily and Mary [instructors who teach courses within the Early Grades majors but are members of another department] in thinking through and like being an ambassador for the program when they were just getting started, so getting that first cohort of students and I really wish I would have been able to be a part of that.

As noted in Chapter III, with the phenomenon of the Urban Change minor, I attempted to hold another focus group to obtain participants without this unique minor, as this does not reflect the majority of traditional program participants. I offered multiple options to meet with other traditional program participants; however, only Charlotte was able to join for another group.
Further details about this limitation is discussed in Chapter V. Charlotte (she/her), a traditional program participant from a successful attempt on December 12th, was able to provide data outside of the influence of this interdisciplinary minor.

The community immersive focus group was also held in November 2021 with two participants, Sarah (she/her) and Rose (she/her), who respectively participated in the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 semesterly experiences of the program. Sarah engaged in the inaugural in-person semester of the community program in 2019, which led her to comment that she had a hard time remembering some specifics of the experience. Although Rose’s experience was more recent, it was virtual during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The following Table 16 outlines participant demographics.
### Table 16

**Demographics of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (pronouns)</th>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Academic Status</th>
<th>Other Academic Programs</th>
<th>Racial-Ethnic Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angelina (she/her)</td>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Special education major; Urban Change minor; Autism minor</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen (she/her)</td>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>Alumni a</td>
<td>Literacy minor; Urban Change minor</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte (she/her)</td>
<td>Traditional Program</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Special education major</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah (she/her)</td>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Special education major; Autism minor</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose (she/her)</td>
<td>Community Immersive</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>White; Latinx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All participants identified as Women and Straight/heterosexual.

a Participant completed their Early Grades program in May 2021 but attended the group at the request of Angelina and participant’s enthusiasm for the topic.

These participants each brought their own unique backgrounds and lens to their respective focus groups which, in most cases, allowed their responses and reactions to create a shared environment producing collective data. This contextual knowledge of participants’ settings and background was critical to framing the coding of the data.

**Coding Patterns and Questions**

Influenced by thematic coding used in Merritt (2021), I employed levels of analysis commonly used in social science research to further consider micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.
For example, meso-level research examines the study of groups, including teams, units, and organizations, such as the Early Grades program. Whereas, macro-level research examines the political-administrative environment, including national systems, regulation, and cultures. Appendix H provides an overview of themes and subthemes with corresponding descriptions while previously mentioned Appendix E outlines the focus group questions for each participant group. I examined participants’ critical reflection and critical action themes through the significance of micro-, meso-, macro-schemas. The micro-level represents a context within a specific class, whereas the meso-level represents within the Early Grades program. Finally, the macro-level schema represents the broader sociopolitical setting of education within U.S. society.

The focus group question centering on this construct asked for examples of “an action you have taken to disrupt policies, practices, procedures, and norms that disadvantaged learners as defined by race, ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and gender.” Self-analysis was separated from micro-, meso-, and macro-schemes of critical reflection to stress participants’ active acknowledgement of their own identities, beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and biases. From the literature, this theme also encompassed a critical awareness of the relationship between self and U.S. society. The focus group questions asked participants to discuss “an activity, assignment, or class discussion where the various aspects of your identity, upbringing, beliefs, and value.” Alternatively, critical motivation is distinguished by the subthemes of efficacy and capability to make change as compared to want and desire for change. The focus group question that related to this construct inquired as to any “activity, assignment, or class discussion, related to the role of the teacher as an agent of change (one who believes they have the capacity to challenge oppressive systems).” Appendix I references code occurrences to show
frequencies with each participant with subthemes. A brief overview is provided in Table 17 as a synopsis before delving into than in-depth comparison.

**Table 17**

_Frequencies of Code Occurrences for Participants_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Angelina (Traditional Program)</th>
<th>Ellen (Traditional Program)</th>
<th>Charlotte (Traditional Program)</th>
<th>Sarah (Community Immersive)</th>
<th>Rose (Community Immersive)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Motivation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Action</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Note._ Two themes similar to that of Merritt (2021), opportunity structures and opportunity constraints, morphed into themes related to the critical vibe and the conventional vibe. These themes are discussed in Chapter V.

The findings from all focus groups are examined below by weaving data provided from Angelina, Ellen, Charlotte, Sarah, and Rose. To best compare and contrast participant groups, passages are integrated in the below sections. Beginning with critical reflection, participants provided data on the cognitive element of critical consciousness.

**Critical Reflection**

The intellectual capacity of participants to evaluate pluralities, the existence of multiple groups with respect to differences, constitutes levels of analysis within the classroom (micro-), the Early Grades program (meso-), and on a systemic, societal level (macro-). Teacher candidates holding privileged/dominant identities which benefit from current systemic structures promote social, racial, and economic advantage (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). As shared in Chapter
II, the existing state of teacher education perpetuates dominant, normed characteristics of white supremacy such as individualism, right to comfort, or objectivity (Minnesota Historical Society, 2021). When asked about the “various aspects of your identity, upbringing, beliefs, and values,” both Angelina and Ellen provided greater specificity in their responses than their traditional program peer, Charlotte. However, Sarah and Rose engaged in a semester of coursework that began with a discussion of identities and an integration into the fabric of their community. Participants’ self-analyses pull apart specific occurrences of this work.

**Identities and Harm Reduction**

In advance of working with their own PK-12 students who bring their own identities to their classrooms, teacher candidates’ identities influence their approaches to instruction. Both Angelina and Ellen described an authentic acknowledgement of their own biases surrounding the profession of teaching in contrast to Charlotte’s wonderings about the meaning of “identity.” These three traditional program participants specifically referenced gender as a related component or a connection to their teaching philosophies as part of their acknowledged identities. Ellen offered:

… teaching philosoph(ies) are very based off the Piaget and all of the very old, somewhat outdated theorists that we've talked about. And not that that's not also important … I think a lot of teachers might go into teaching because maybe we don't realize what other jobs there are. Teaching is the first job you're exposed to as a young person, and it's the one we see the most often. And so I feel like a lot of young women especially are like, "Oh, I'm good with kids. I'll go into this." So that was a lot of what our beliefs and identities were around, just like told I was this nurturing person.
Ellen’s passage described some societal messages about the feminized role of teaching and those who identify as women normalized as “nurturing.” According to the National Center for Education Statistics, public school teachers in 2017-2018 were 76% female (NCES, 2021). This number has grown over the last 30 years (Hansen & Guintero, 2018).

In contrast, Charlotte asked, “is like identity like gender?” and when probed about conversations of identities within classes, she stated, “um no not really like there's never been anything brought up within the students like my classmates.” Charlotte’s sole statement referenced a class conversation about “Teachers’ pay and then they're talking about women versus men and how they (men) get more opportunities.” Later, she also provided a gender-based statement recognizing her dominant identity of whiteness, “Like being a white female that I’ll probably get more opportunities than others of a different race because that's just how the world is at this point.” Alluding to a lack of exploration of one’s own identities within her classroom experiences, Angelina discussed the challenges around identity, biases, and intentions:

I feel like, that deciding to pursue a career in education has such good intentions with it, like (teacher candidates) want to do good, and want to take care of children, and want to make change. And then you're bogged down with all this coursework and it's like this maybe isn't what I thought education would be. And I think just addressing those good intentions, I feel like at the time of addressing those good intentions, you have to check the bias. And like, it's hard because once you tell someone that they're doing the right thing, but they're doing it wrong, they're like, "Well, it's the right thing.” There's wrong way to do that.

Angelina’s comments described a lack of self-analysis leading to harm without a grounding relationship between self and society. Her recognition of teacher candidates’ “good intentions”
carried into the discipline with unchecked biases can lead to harm more so than the “good” purpose that was intended when selecting their major. The “wrong” way refers to unchecked biases causing damage which is supported by Daniels (2018) and Riley and Solic (2021). Angelina’s comments previewed further evidence of her in-depth work of critical reflection and a stark distinction from Charlotte, who did not make similar kinds of statements. However, Angelina and Ellen’s self-analysis compares similarly to some of Sarah and Rose’s passages.

Although Sarah and Rose were not part of the community immersive experience at the same time, their comments reflect similarities and unique elements based on the situational settings at that given time in society. For example, Rose’s participation in the community immersive experience specifically came the semester after, and during the continued, racial reckoning shaped by the murder of George Floyd. The intentionality of the community immersive experience as an opportunity structure steeped with a focus on collaborative relationships and community wealth begins with an initial understanding of self in relationship to society. Rose described her intentionality behind self-analysis and the connection to others stating, “I am like really obsessed with people understanding their own biases.” She expanded on that “obsession” by further acknowledging the need to bring that understanding “in with my classroom teacher” as part of her current semesterly field experience under the guidance of her faculty, Professor Emily, who is instrumental in the facilitation of her critical consciousness.

Similarly, Sarah spoke about an initial activity in the first week of the community immersive experience. She stated:

We do an identity map [with Professor Emily] where you literally like go through all of those things about yourself like if you're a girl, if you're a boy, if you're white, black, middle class, straight, yeah, you go through every single thing, and then you put down as
privileged or something else. You split them up, and then you just go through how all your identities impact your life and everything.

Sarah described this work and that of the Community Immersive experience as “eye-opening,” particularly referring to the integration with the community which was emphasized by the community immersive teaching team faculty (Professors Emily, Mary, Harriet, and Victoria) who formally launched the program in Sarah’s first semester of Fall 2019. Sarah, who participated in this program as a sophomore, stated, “a lot of the things you wouldn't think of, just of student backgrounds and stuff, like finding out how different they are from us, or just even the idea of like you never know what's going on at home.” This next section continues to expand on critical reflection from the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels beginning with the class-specific schema.

**Purposeful Conversations Seeking Depth**

Comments related to individual classrooms within their curriculum revolved around the impact of their professors who instruct courses within the Early Grades program. Ellen explained her process of finding “critical conscious” professors within the site:

I feel like with my education there is before I found the critical conscious professor; I really had to seek out those people, and stay in that path, and add a lot more work to my own schedule to stay with them.

Similarly, Rose depicted Professor Emily opening the conversation in her classes to the foundational work of acknowledging the intersectionality of teacher candidates’ identities. She described Professor Emily as:

someone who opened my eyes to that, so again, like the eye-opening. I remember there was one point we were actually at her house, and I was like, wow, like I'd never ... Yeah,
It was kind of that moment of like, okay, I never thought about this or talked about it (identities), and that was year two, three almost. Yeah, I feel like the farthest that we talked about like is like how many brothers and sisters do you have, and like where you live.

Likewise, Angelina’s passage below agreed with Ellen and Rose regarding professors’ impact. She also referenced a required History of Education class:

So I think the only class specifically within the Early Grades major that I was asked to think more about like my own teaching experience or schooling experience and my identity within educational systems was the [History of Education] course. And I also think like, it is very luck of the draw with the professors that you have, like Ellen was saying for certain classes, because like, I didn't have, [Professor Emily] for my literacy classes; but I think with the History of Education class, we were asked to look at what the purpose of education is or the History of Education that was like my midterm and my final. So my midterm was like the purpose, my final was the History of Education. And I think this done maybe intentionally, but I feel like in all those assignments, they make it pretty general. So I could have done those assignments and not even touched, you know, topics of racism or poverty in schools.

Charlotte also recognized the same course Angelina recalled but mentioned the final paper assignment was mostly about her teaching philosophy. The distinction between both Charlotte and Angelina’s experience with this course possibly alludes to what Angelina referred to as the lack of some teacher candidates’ ability to go “deeper.” Sarah also spoke about the History of Education class that was part of her community immersive experience, specifically making connections to critical action and teacher activism examples that are later discussed.
Additionally, Sarah offered a specific connection from a course in her community immersive experience to that of the local community. She initially described the class activity led by Professor Harriet as part of their seminar before entering Oren Elementary for field experiences:

I remember we had this worksheet … I guess, you could call it [city] slang terms. I don't really know how else to put it. But, and we took a second, everyone, I think there was nine of us in this group. We took a second to just, all write what you think it means, and there was one girl who was actually lived 10 minutes away from the school, so an African American. I just remember we were kind of all looking at her for, not like the answers, but it turned into a discussion with her, like her explaining it to us, and then it kind of turned into like, okay, how did this make you guys feel?

The teacher candidates in the community immersive experience did this group activity and engaged in a discussion as an introduction to (the city) and then discussed cultural assumptions they each held about the area. Sarah recalled her own internal reflection growing up in the suburbs but learning about some of these terms from “social media” instead of her peer who intimately knew the area and the terms as part of the exercise. While Professor Harriet and the teaching team incorporated the community into assignments, other field experiences in the Early Grades program may not have addressed those relationships in a direct and integrated manner.

Charlotte depicted a specific experience she had with a student of color in a field course within the Early Grades program. The situation was in her field site, a kindergarten center where “there's a lot of students that English isn't their first language.” She also shared that her classmates referred to it as being in “a bad area” and “an urban area where these students are coming from low-income households and they're mainly from [city]; it's like right outside the [city].” Charlotte also offered. “I made this mistake like around Halloween … I asked one
student what they dressed up as for Halloween and [they] said ‘I don't celebrate Halloween; I don't dress up.’ … I believe she's Muslim.” Later in that course, Charlotte shared, “We had to make a lesson plan as our final assignment for that, and she [the professor] asked like what went wrong, what would you do differently, so I mentioned that.” Charlotte’s continued level of critical reflection appear to be more “surface-level” which Angelina later references as a common characteristic in many Early Grades courses. Many of these conversations could go deeper; however, they often do not do so to give teacher candidates more perspective on how these situations connect to their own identities beyond what may or may not be visible. Next, all participants were asked to speak holistically about the Early Grades program when considering the unit, meso-level schema.

**A Missing Vibe**

While there are required courses within the Early Grades major shared between all participants, it is important to consider that Angelina, Charlotte, and Sarah selected to be double majors with Special Education. Also, Angelina and Ellen chose to participate in the Urban Change minor. Angelina and Ellen’s influence of the interdisciplinary Urban Change minor provided a contrast to their major coursework, whereas Charlotte was not able to draw from the critical approach derived from the foundations of that minor. Sarah and Ellen drew mainly on their community immersive experience but referenced examples of purposefully pursuing some of the professors, such as Professor Emily, in other major-required courses. The additional educational credits in these other programs influenced the overall curricular experience. Angelina offered:

We’re [Ellen and I] are both very biased towards the [Urban Change minor], but only because those professors make it such a point to bring that into their classes and I just
wish that every professor did … everyone that's in the room for like our [Intro to Urban Change class] walks away after every class—mind blown, so passionate, like education is the key to changing the world. But you walk out of one of the [Early Grades] classes and it's not the same vibe. And I just struggle to understand why, because I would like to think everyone's as passionate about education that's in a teacher preparation program as the people in those [Urban Change] classes. But I think everyone comes into college with their own schooling experiences that then lead them to believe what the role of the teacher is or isn't.

Angelina’s focus on the contrasting “vibes” between her EGP courses and her Urban Change courses in this passage highlight the disparities between her experiences. She attempted to explain her wonderings about what other teacher candidates bring to the classroom, but without deep reflection into one’s identities, biases, and assumptions, the role of the teacher cannot be profoundly explored. While Angelina shared her hope for what she wished would happen in her major, Ellen also provided similar critical feedback on her Early Grades major summarizing her frustration:

I feel like they [Professor John; Early Grades faculty; Student Teaching Supervisor] try to cram so much of what we don't get in our [Early Grades] program into these seminars so teachers aren't … like walking out, we got at least some sort of exposure to it. But also, I'm student teaching, I'm tired. I have so much other stuff that I have to worry about. And now I'm getting the repetition. And I appreciate it, and whatever, but it's just sad that they [Professor John] maybe feels like he has to cram it all in because he's passionate and wants others to be exposed, whereas if it was just scattered throughout, or more focused, or there is like some sort of requirement, to meet that early on in the educator program.
Ellen’s comment about “cramming in” a critical approach instead of having it “scattered throughout” rang true in Sarah’s comment about the community immersive experience. Sarah acknowledged content related to teacher candidates’ development of critical reflection, “it needs to be brought up sooner in, I think our classes, whether it’s creating a class.” Sarah was encouraged by professors to take part in the Urban Change minor but did not have the academic flexibility since she was already pursuing an Autism minor as well as the Special Education double major.

Again, Charlotte did not reference any of these similar insights, but frequently commented on the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on her curricular experience. That limitation is explored later in Chapter V but represents unavoidable context for her comments. However, she did share about the lack of discussion within her Early Grades program regarding families and communities. Charlotte commented:

… yeah we didn’t (talk about families and communities). it's hard because, like in the class they only learn like you (English Language Learners); so that's what everything focuses on (English Language Arts), so they don’t want to learn about each other.

Her comment references her perception that the kindergarten students did not want to learn about each other and their background, but instead just wanted to focus on learning English. That observation missed the need to incorporate and respect the various pluralities in the classroom. Also, when asked about her overall experience in the Early Grades major, Charlotte shared, “when you're taking six classes you start to notice how much of your time is wasted by certain features.” As a first-year student in the 2020-2021 academic year, Charlotte’s entire year of the program was remote due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Oftentimes, her comments circled
back to a feeling of being “on Zoom again learning nothing” referencing her frustration with the virtual modalities of instruction.

**Privileged Voices**

Much of the data with specific reference to education from a systemic level derived from Angelina and Ellen’s focus group, but Rose also offered an important observation. Ellen shared insight into one’s privilege to be able to remain comfortable in conversations around identity as a normed practice. She remarked:

> I think it is uncomfortable for people and people that don't want their bubble burst to push against it [societal norms]. But I think a professor has to stay on it because it's so important. And even if you're not in an urban setting, you're probably not going to have all students with your exact background and you should be ready for that. And you should have representation anyway, but I think a lot more people need that.

Ellen’s reference to “that” could refer to “representation” but she is suggesting increased exposure to “others” through greater “understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation for the history, values, experiences, and lifestyles of other cultures” as stated in CR-SE Competency 1 (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). Angelina also commented on societal oppression and intersectionality of her identities. She stated:

> … as a woman, I'm in a minority group of one thing, but also in the majority group of so many other things. And it wasn't until I had those activities where I was asked to look at my identity did I even think I've had it rough, but other people have it rougher. You know what I'm saying. So it wasn't until I was going into the extra-curricular things or bringing my own personal perspective or lens to look at those assignments there that I got that out of it.
Although there was not a refined discussion around Angelina’s acknowledgment of her role in oppression during the focus group, she did reference activities and experiences outside of her major that played an important part in facilitating her critical consciousness. That factor is explored in Chapter V but represents a necessary framework for her comments around critical reflection. Angelina specifically discussed a co-curricular “service trip” as the first time she thought about her identity, which did not come from curricula. However, this structure was again reflective of Angelina’s choice to participate in an experience challenging her in ways she may or may not have found within her curriculum.

On the other hand, Rose specifically made connections to her curricular experience in the community immersive experience and the community of Oren Elementary. She commented on her realization that “nothing is a child’s fault” because there are “deep inequities in the system … that have been there for years and years.” During her community immersive experience, she taught a day after someone was “shot a block away from [Oren Elementary School].” Rose shared Professor Emily held a discussion with the community immersive teacher candidates to help digest the content before they entered the classroom with their Oren students:

Professor Emily was just like, if the kids aren’t paying attention today, like no one can get upset. They were up all night by the sound of helicopters and people screaming in the streets. That changed my mind, like changed my life because like that’s not their fault like yeah it’s the world we’re living in.

Shifting from critical reflection toward the attitudinal capacity for participants to move into action, the next section focuses on critical motivation.
Role of the Teacher

Within their curriculum and teaching practices, participants distinguished between their ability to effectively make and create change as compared to their willingness or desire to engage in critical action. Participants’ individual understanding of the role of a teacher affected their responses. Angelina again referred to the History of Education course stating:

I know at the end of it, I think he was trying to get us to see how history has changed and how education plays such a big role in that change … I remember there was a big strike happening in, I want to say, California at the time that I was taking the class, and he made it a point to update us every day on what that was, why they were doing it, what could be the results of it, and how teachers were the ones making this change happen. Outside of that, I think, again, a lot of my courses were just so heavy on teaching strategies and practices, the role of the teacher was just up to you to define.

Ellen referenced the success of some professors to challenge teacher candidates in ways that felt deeper. She acknowledged:

What Angelina said earlier about you could take it surface level and get the same grade, or you could dive deeper if you had the language to do that, that spoke so many volumes because thinking back, I feel like I had professors freshman and sophomore year that [had] good intentions trying to use “agents of change” type language.

These reasonings are not comments about their own abilities to create change, but more comments regarding the lack of discussion around teachers as change agents through their curriculum. Similarly to Angelina and Ellen, Rose identified Professor Emily as an instructor who was able to challenge her thinking around activism. She stated,
I chose to be in the [city] thing, and then she [Professor Emily] is the teacher for the [city] thing, so it worked out; I know sometimes I leave Professor Emily’s class really with like the idea of being an abolitionist teacher, and like changing the system …

Rose referenced Love (2019) as a text they are reading in this course, which has influenced her attitude toward change.

On the contrary, Charlotte mentioned one of the critical consciousness survey questions in this study that discussed teaching about more than two genders. She exclaimed: “I, like my God, that question [amazed visual expression] you step over that boundary that feels like it, just like the fact that you might have to teach those one day it's like oh gosh.” Charlotte’s role of a teacher does not embody elements of change, but indecision and reservation for doing the “wrong thing.”

Alternatively, Angelina’s willingness to commit herself toward action is evident in her continued pursuit of opportunities outside of the traditional curricular bounds. She reflected on an elective internship experience as part of her Urban Change minor with a non-profit stating:

I wouldn't have known about these things if I was not within a network of educators that were exposing me to it. So I think it's just very like pick and choose. If you want to live in your own little bubble of education, you very easily can. But also, once you're in a network, the opportunities for change are very much there and apparent, and you can see it within your schools.

She also availed herself of a new course which was not required within her Special Education major as part of a curricular revision in that department:

I also think as far as like procedures, norms, practices … I took the new trauma-informed education course that's part of the new Special Education major. I learned a lot about
restorative justice in the classrooms and a restorative circle as opposed to normal, typical punishment procedures within classrooms.

This example of Angelina’s desire to engage in action crosses over into the behavioral element of critical consciousness in which participants described their actions within the classroom, the major/University, and involvement in education more broadly at the state or federal level. Like critical reflection, critical action is analyzed on the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

**Challenging Biases**

This behavioral component of critical consciousness emphasizes the ability to “advocate for the disruption of harmful school-level and district-level practices, policies, and norms” as stated in the CR-SE competency 2 (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). Critical action also incorporates “communication, collaboration, and resource gathering” to redress biases (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). One specific example provided by the CR-SE competency 3 is the ability to “create lesson plans with questions and activities that capitalize on students’ lived experiences, realities, cultural identities, and heritage” (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). In this section, the previous utilized micro-, meso-, and macro-schema will again focus on the classroom, the Early Grades program, and societal levels. Overall, once again, Charlotte’s comments seem distinctly different compared to the other two traditional program participants, specifically Ellen. Whereas both Sarah and Rose’s comments as community immersive participants are more in step with Ellen and Angelina’s actions. The contrast between Ellen and Charlotte’s micro-level critical action highlights obvious disagreement.

**To Teach or Not to Teach It**

Ellen recalled a time within a specific Early Grades class, where the following occurred:
... somebody was talking about how they've seen parents that were super lazy and didn't care about the kids, and the teacher said, "Well, there isn't really a parent that doesn't... It's very rare that you meet a parent that literally does not care about their kid." And that was all that was said about it, and it wasn't really addressed like the racist and classist connotation ... Because I ended up calling it out. Because it's like we all know what kind of parent you're picturing, you just aren't saying it. So it's like we got to address your bias here if you're going to be a teacher because I don't think you're talking about a parent that looks like you when you say that ...

Ellen did not hesitate to respond in this situation even though as she described, "[I] Didn't make a lot of friends.” She questioned her peers’ attitudes and presumptions evident in class discussions and behaviors even though there was some personal risk involved. Ellen’s disposition toward humanizing her students and her commitment to understanding the completeness of their realities through an asset-based perspective demonstrated a true embodiment of critical consciousness. She conveyed this through her depiction of her classroom stating:

I've been able to create a really special classroom environment of children that want to share their experiences and their traumas. And they're only in second grade, but the amount of heartbreak that they've experienced and chosen to share has been really ... I don't know even the word for it. And I think that goal of creating a safe space for these students ... We have our little calming corner and like I had a little guy that came in and the first thing he said to me is sometimes he gets angry and has issues to throw stuff and hurt people. And I think they can see that I'm like ... You can't make me uncomfortable. Because I think a lot of times, people don't know how to respond. Like something like,
"Oh, we don't talk about that in school." It's like, "Oh, that topic is off topic." I think that really shuts down a kid, so try not to make anything feel off limits. And also talking to them like real people.

Charlotte’s disposition appeared uncertain and differing with respect to the classroom environment of Ellen’s design. Charlotte displayed a reluctance toward classroom action in her comment:

bring[ing] anything [identity-based] in the classroom because they are so young, I don't think they should be like exposed to that kind of…because you don't want to be wrong, you know when I teach wrong information, but in those situations it's not right or wrong it's just your belief, but to be even harder, because everyone has different. I mean I don't feel like I would have to teach a lot because it's quite a young age, like they barely know who they are themselves.

Conversely, Rose used an example of how she has learned to create a lesson plan modeling after Professor Emily’s template. She stated:

… she [Professor Emily] adds questions about like critical consciousness and like things like that. I feel like I think about that a lot when I write lessons as in how is this affecting this student's like life?; but it just kind of gives you reasoning onto why you're doing what you're doing.

Rose’s extra-effort of adding a critical layer of to her lessons plan development was also emulated by Sarah’s additional emphasis on the importance of communicating with her English Language Learners in a field experience course. She studied Spanish after school to learn better ways connect with them and acknowledge their heritage. Sarah stated, “the girl [PK-12 student] was even surprised that I could introduce myself in Spanish to her.” These examples from Ellen,
Rose, and Sarah show attention toward culturally responsive teaching practices where teacher candidates strive to integrate multiple perspectives without shying away from doing “wrong.”

The divergence between Ellen and Charlotte continued into the meso-level university-level action within the Early Grades major. Additional indication from experiences in the Urban Change minor provided evidence of further disparities from the Early Grades program’s content.

**Leaning Into Discomfort**

With reference to the curriculum within the Early Grades major, Ellen shared:

I think it was [Early Grades] 200-level, we had a placement. And he [Professor John] did a good job of calling stuff out, but I think maybe it was like … I don't know if he's tenured, but wasn't tenured at the time. Now that I know him and have taken more of his classes, he's much more on the nose with it. but I don't know that we dug as deep as we could have into it. Or maybe just the class wasn't as engaged. I feel like sometimes, that would happen where in the Urban Change minor, there's people that really chose to be there and are really passionate about it. And then when it's brought up in the early ed classes, there's maybe two people that are like, "Yeah!" And the rest of the class were like, "He's annoying." And that was the vibe. If you can read between the lines of the assignment, you get a lot more out of it, but it needs to be a lot more explicit. And I think knowing how to have that discourse is really important because the few people that were engaged weren't able to engage because so many did not have that uncomfortable discussion, perhaps.

Ellen referenced a connection to Professor John and their level of academic safety as well as her peers’ sense of comfort with a topic. Often, discomfort is needed to develop critical consciousness particularly with those who identify with majority groups. However, that
discomfort can be rejected by participants creating a vibe that Charlotte continued to discuss by stating, “I mean I’m not one to tell someone like what they're doing wrong by all means because I'm only 19, but I feel like part of the reason why they're not learning is because of her [referring to her mentor teacher].” This reference to mentor teachers/PK-12 educators as following a conventional vibe is discussed further in Chapter V. Overall, there was not a large discussion of action within the Early Grades program at the university-unit level. However, Rose did acknowledge a student organization with several teacher candidates, includes EGP majors and others, that are advocating for change with educator preparation programs across Harper University that Professor Emily introduced her to within her class:

... it's a club at [Harper University] that's like anti-racist educators, or something like that, or like teachers. Teachers should not be allowed to be racist. Like we should be required to be at least like, name one kind of thing about that, being an anti-racist educator is different than just being not racist, right.

The CR-SE competency 2 also discusses professional development opportunities for educators to analyze “forms of oppression, such as, racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism” from institutional levels that privilege some groups over others (Cole-Malott, 2021). Action is required to redress these biases. The final schema in critical action connects to addressing broader, societal inequities. Angelina, Ellen, and Rose tackled examples of critical action on this level.

*Societal Re(actions)*

As mentioned earlier, Angelina’s elective Urban Change Internship provided a critical approach. She described her action through her work with an “organizing non-profit in an urban setting (those who are passionate about policy change or just like changing the norms of school as it is).” Angelina claimed, “I was able to create a Black Lives Matter at school campaign that I
sent out to those educators.” Although much of Ellen’s action connected more with the micro- 
and meso-level work, she claimed, “I feel like that's definitely not something I've done as much 
of that I wanted to but being a first-year teacher was so overwhelming, but I was kind of giving 
myself the grace.” She did provide an example of district-level work by her team literacy lead 
that connected to national action-oriented scholarship stating:

They'll say like, "Our equity lens," and it's Gholdy Muhammad's research who … I love 
her. But this is so poorly done, we might as well not do it. I love my literacy leads, but it 
was like if you're going to have that conversation, you got to have that conversation. And 
it was so surface level and really abstract. I think right now the district is dipping their 
toes in and people are feeling satisfied with it because they're referencing great creators, 
but they're not doing enough of it.

From Ellen’s studies as a literacy minor, her comments were particularly concerned with this 
effort potentially foreshadowing her future action in this area. While Rose also did not provide 
specifics of her own societal-level action, she articulated a great example action from her 
principal at Oren Elementary. She recalled:

She told us this story about when she first got hired at a different job, and the job made 
the students wear all black shoes, and hold their hands behind their back, and have their 
cheeks puffed up when they walked in the hallway, like a ducktail and bubbles. If their 
shoes weren't black, they would Sharpie in any part that wasn't black. [The principal] was 
like, "No way I'm doing that. I'm not treating my students like they're in jail, or treating 
them like an animal, or coloring their sneakers." She literally got in trouble multiple 
times with the principal's office and she was just like, "Fire me then.” I remember hearing
that, and that was just like, you don't have to do it. Then, they didn't, and they just switched the rule.

Rose further expanded on this example of action to the societal expectation of teaching in urban areas. She claimed she tells others about her interest in urban teaching, and they respond with "What is wrong with you?" Her reply offered a different perspective:

I'm like, "Watch me do it." So many people think that, that there's a whole entire group of kids who aren't deserving of like love and good educators, and that's where like I feel like it, you know? It's not fair that there's so many people who are so against teaching in an urban area; I remember I was talking to some lady, and she was like, "Well, I teach at this school, and each student gave me a $100 gift for back to school night." I was like, "That doesn't make me want to ... That's not something [somewhere] I want to teach."

Similarly, Sarah also reflected on societal reactions to urban teaching and her exposure to it at Oren Elementary through the community immersive experience. She stated:

... if I say, "Oh, I'm going to be a Special Ed teacher in [city]," their reactions are always entertaining. It's like, "Oh, oh, wow. Good for you. They need more people like that."

The amount of times I've heard that, I've lost count. Just even whether it's the [city] aspect, the special ed aspect, or a TV, a teacher simply right now, especially with all this COVID stuff and burnout everything ... It's motivating in a way, because you want to be that person to make these other people kind of realize like it's not as bad as it seems, and I think that's kind of what [the Community Immersive experience] made me realize ...

These more subtle acts from Rose and Sarah initiating conversations with others about the stereotypes behind urban teaching may not have been possible without their participation in the community immersive experience. These examples display ways of mitigating societal
inequities. Participating in this alternative approach to teacher education is indeed an action in and of itself. Critical action can lead to additional critical reflection, which continues to facilitate critical consciousness.

From this section’s review of critical action, Chapter V synthesizes the various factors mentioned by participants that promoted their chances to develop their critical consciousness. While some of their statements already suggested the effectiveness of specific minors, professors, and co-curricular activities, it is crucial to focus on these characteristics as essential factors in the development of teacher candidates’ critical consciousness.

**Summary of Qualitative Findings**

The previous sections described the main themes of critical consciousness, such as critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action. These themes were explored through participant voices and comments surrounding their perceptions of class activities and interactions as Early Grades majors at Harper University. The concept of the critical vibe can be found in Angelina, Ellen, Rose, and Sarah’s perspectives; however, it is absent from much of Charlotte’s cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral elements.

**Summary**

This chapter provided quantitative results from the study’s critical consciousness survey as well as qualitative results from the traditional program and community immersive focus groups. While both participant groups’ quantitative data displayed relatively high means in critical reflection and critical motivation, critical action means were markedly low. Since these quantitative results show some slight differences between these two groups, there may be a “critical vibe” apparent in the traditional program participants’ cognitive and attitudinal components of critical consciousness. However, there is a statistically significant difference
between the traditional program participants’ critical action and that of the community immersive participants. The concept of the “vibe” is more deeply explored through the qualitative data and further echoes the quantitative result that the community immersive experience, as well as other structures at Harper University, centers critical vibes. Although a vibe through the community immersive experience does not definitively center critical action, it may possibly steer teacher candidates in the direction of action. Four of the participants also discussed a conventional vibe within the Early Grades program. The focus groups provided an illuminating contrast of critical consciousness when deconstructing Angelina, Ellen, Rose, and Sarah’s viewpoints with those held by Charlotte. The final chapter of this study integrates these results through a dialogue around critical and conventional vibes in association with the theoretical framework of humanizing pedagogy and community-engaged teacher preparation.
Chapter V: Discussion

I began this dissertation with an anecdote propelled by my own critical reflection on who benefits from the current structure of teacher education. When teacher candidates with (or without) privileged identities remain unchallenged in their comfort zone, they avoid what this dissertation refers to as the critical vibe. As one of the contributions of this study, the vibe features the implicit, and sporadically explicit, view of teacher education from a critical mindset. While not a concrete, rigorous program or set of courses, the critical vibe is most often ambivalent, complicated, and frequently transitory. Data from this study signals that EPPs could go further to encourage critical consciousness, particularly action-oriented imperatives. Expanding beyond even their most critical curricular elements, such as the community immersive experience, EPPs can foster action in line with its criticality. The critical vibe is contrasted by a phenomenon in the traditional educator preparation program sample which I refer to as a conventional vibe, represented by a status quo, surface-level exploration with an individualized focus lacking regard for the collective. While the critical vibe, as a partial facilitation of critical consciousness, is not a silver bullet solution to traditional teacher education, the data justify some thoughts and recommendations for ways to build a sense of urgency and empower tomorrow’s educators. This study began by posing two essential questions through a mixed methods inquiry. Those questions included:

1. Are there mean differences between the critical consciousness of elementary-level teacher candidates who participate in a semester-long community immersive experience at a PWI compared to those elementary-level teacher candidates who do not participate?
2. Does participation in a community immersive experience at a PWI facilitate teacher candidates’ critical consciousness?

This chapter examines these questions by 1) applying the theoretical framework alongside the concept of the critical vibe, 2) elevating the community immersive experience as a structure that promotes the critical vibe, 3) discussing the integrated results on critical action, 4) summarizing the findings, 5) identifying limitations, 6) providing practical implications for EPPs and teacher candidates, and 7) suggesting future research.

Embracing the Air

If vibin’ is the act of not stressing and welcoming the relaxation of the air and chill surroundings (Urban Dictionary, 2022), then the critical vibe can extend to Ford’s (2015) theorization of “air as a condition of the common” (p. 9). Considering “air is an entirely immersive substance; it envelopes us even as it constantly eludes us” (Ford, 2015, p. 5), the critical vibe similarly feels that way for some teacher candidates in this study.

Ellen (traditional program participant) juxtaposed her experience in the Urban Change minor with her experience in the Early Grades program by discussing the missing critical vibe amongst her Early Grades classmates. She was empowered by Professor John’s attempt to go deeper into conversations that unpacked privilege, discussed societal inequities, and challenged biases. Despite Ellen’s energetic response to his attempt at facilitating critical consciousness, the rest of the Early Grades class rejected the effort by calling him “annoying.” She continued stating, “And that was the vibe. If you can read between the lines of the assignment, you get a lot more out of it, but it needs to be a lot more explicit.” Consistent with Ford (2015), Ellen described the missing vibe, or implicit conventional vibe as Ford (2015) observed, “it is often only when something is ‘wrong’ with the air that we take notice” (p. 11). Although Ford (2015)
asserted, “the air envelopes us and binds us together; it is a necessary condition for being and relating” (p. 11), the air, as with the critical vibe, remains elusive and “difficult to grasp” (p. 11).

The concept of the critical vibe in contrast to conventional vibe extends to the theoretical roots of traditional and critical theory. Horkheimer (1937) stated:

it [society] is suspicious of the very categories of better, useful, appropriate, productive, and valuable, as these are understood in the present order, and refuses to take them as nonscientific presuppositions about which one can do nothing … the critical attitude of which we are speaking is wholly distrustful of the rules of conduct with which society as presently constituted provides each of its members. The separation between individual and society in virtue of which the individual accepts as natural the limits prescribed for his activity is relativized in critical theory (p. 207).

For those who adopt what Horkheimer (1937) referred to as a “critical attitude,” they transition toward a “conscious opposition” (p. 207). In many ways, the critical vibe demands more effort to maintain by taking risks and seeking out those who support it. In contrast, the conventional vibe is easier, more available, often seen as a default mode of operation or cruise control setting. Despite some professors’ efforts in the Early Grades program to center a critical vibe in Ellen’s example, teacher candidates’ elicited responses trend toward a path of safety, security, and shallow or ephemeral discussions, which this dissertation’s framework helps makes clear.

This section enhances the three pillars of this dissertation: 1) Critical consciousness, 2) humanizing pedagogy theorized through abolitionist teaching, and 3) community-engaged teacher education through the critical vibe. This study sought to explore alternative approaches where teacher candidates can develop critical consciousness, particularly when situated within
communities rather than just a university campus. While the community immersive experience is one clear structure, this section also addresses seven elements that facilitate the critical vibe:

1) Major Faculty / Curriculum Inside the Major
2) University Faculty / Curriculum Outside the Major
3) Mentor Teachers / PK-12 Educators
4) PK-12 students
5) Co-curricular involvement
6) Family / Upbringing

Interestingly in this study, some of these elements intersect depending upon the disposition and mindsets of the individuals involved. The following five elements facilitated the conventional vibe:

1) Major Faculty / Curriculum Inside the Major
2) Mentor Teachers / PK-12 Educators
3) Teacher Candidates
4) Family / Upbringing
5) COVID-19 impact / Pandemic learning

These later elements particularly hindered, restricted, or limited participants’ development of critical consciousness. This section blends participant perceptions of both the critical vibe and the conventional vibe using the elements above. Data woven together in the subsequent section embraces the plurality of these themes.

**The Right Spot to Hear It**

All participants focused on the professors’ involvement in their curricular experience as well as limitations within the curriculum of the Early Grades program. When referring to the
classes Charlotte enjoyed, she stated, “I think a lot has to do with professors; like they make all the difference.” However, both Ellen and Angelina (traditional program participant) described a deeper connection to the goal of teaching and faculty influence on the facilitation of their critical consciousness. Ellen shared:

Professor John saying once you see it, meaning the injustices, you can't do nothing about it. And that is what it felt like, of like once you saw … Even something if like … And not that this is a minor thing at all, but it's like the disparities between representation and books. Once you see that … every time you look at kids' books, you're like, "Oh my gosh, there's not a single person of color." There's not a single accurate representation of a person of color. But you see it everywhere you go …

Ellen described her hopes for her educator preparation program and the field of teaching:

Because we’re raised in a racist world and we have to accept that truth … nobody’s just, anti-racist growing up. We weren’t raised to be. I really wish that there was a mandatory class freshman year of like, “Hey, this is what teaching is. Check your biases. If you’re super uncomfortable …” It sounds harsh, but it’s like this isn’t the career for you. You are a public servant. Anyone could walk through those doors that deserves just as much love and understanding and grace. I wish that we started as, like, this is the expectation, not your test scores, not anything else. This is the expectation, and do what you have to do to get there. We’ll provide you support there. And I think if it started from day one, we wouldn’t have to have those conversations to begin with. And I think we could start off our teaching careers much more equitable.


Mutual care is one of the most, if not the most, important responsibilities and challenges of our
collective society (Kushner, 2019). However, even though Ellen noted “doing something about it” is important, the quantitative mean for critical action was low for both participant groups (traditional program participants’ M=1.41 and community immersive participants’ M=1.85).

Ellen later connected this insight with a text from an unspecified course and expressed aspirations for her EPP and future teacher candidates by stating:

> Ibram X Kendi’s book, *How to be an Anti-Racist*, totally changed my life of being able to view every action as racist or anti-racist. I feel like so many professors … if we could just all get comfortable with that language … And it’s not an attack. It’s a learning moment … that reaction that you have when I said I taught in [city], like it's racist, classist, and how can we grow from that? I think that would be such a game changer. I noticed that you have to be in the right spot to be ready to hear it. And it's like, how do we get more people in that spot sooner? It's such a tough question to answer.

While Ellen did not participate in the community immersive experience, this program helps “get more people to that spot sooner.” Love (2019) would understand that spot as one where co-conspirators act through displays of resistance. This process of moving toward that spot requires educator activists shaped with Freire’s appeal to re-invent. However, that spot requires extended exposure to the critical vibe and being engrossed in a critical atmosphere. As stated in an earlier chapter, “Liberation begins from their exteriority, being situated on the outside, and [with] those members of marginalized communities” (Dussel, 2019). Before claiming to stand in solidarity with marginalized communities, critical consciousness necessitates an adjustment of the perception of self among opportunities for civic engagement (Love, 2019; Thomas et al., 2014).

Along similar lines, Angelina argued for a deeper exploration of these issues within the educator preparation programs stating,
the teacher [Early Grades professor] that like pushes them [teacher candidates] to think deeper and actually understands that the purpose of education is not just take care of these kids, but to make sure that they’re set up for when they graduate and move on into society.

This example displays the critical vibe facilitated and centered by professors who advocate and incorporate it into their curriculum and syllabi. Although Ellen agreed with Angelina’s claimed perception held by many teacher candidates that children are “someone to take care of,” she called for teacher candidates to delve into their privileged identities. The passage below gives an example of how the conventional vibe is maintained by teacher candidates which, if uncontested by professors or peers, maintains conventional views. Ellen stated:

And I think a lot of people do see teaching as like it's cute. I get to decorate my room and make it fun. And I think that is a lot of how people enter college thinking teaching is, and it is so not that. But I think for me, getting comfortable, seeing the world how it is, you could stay growing up in a super White, super privileged area. I could have gone back and just done that and stayed in that little bubble of everything’s fine, everything’s cute and pretty. And I have a big budget to spend on that. But when you go into the world of education, if you see the complete picture, I think you have to get really comfortable with like being called out for like a racist view or classist view. It's a bit like everything comes down to that.

Ellen’s reference to “getting comfortable” viewing the systemic injustices of the world at face value requires un-comfortability, particularly from those with privileged identities.

Angelina and Ellen were able to compare their experience with their Early Grades faculty to the faculty in their Urban Change minor. Ellen was introduced to the Urban Change minor by
Professor Emily (teaches a course in the Urban Change minor but mainly instructs courses found in closely connected department with the Early Grades program; not an Early Grades faculty member). Ellen believed, “Professor Emily really made you rise to what they were asking of you; and then she mentioned the [Urban Change minor] and I was like, ‘I'm going to do whatever I can.’” Taking this minor meant Ellen needed to enroll in course overloads to take “seven classes for the rest of my semesters” (an estimated 21 credits a semester), which would be described by many as uncommonly extensive and extraordinarily rare in its level of difficulty.

Similarly, Angelina’s additional coursework extended her graduation timeline. At the time of the focus group, Angelina was at 160 earned credits, which is many more than the required 120 credits to complete a degree. Both Angelina and Ellen chose a more difficult route to pursue the critical vibe.

Angelina and Ellen took a direct approach through their comments on the limitations within the Early Grades program. Angelina discussed different paths she felt a teacher candidate could travel. In her perspective, these paths become clear when entering “student teaching and you realize that there's two routes to go.” The first route, with which Ellen also concurred, is the teacher who “still makes that salary, and looks at the curriculum, maybe gets involved in some clubs, whatever.” However, referring to another opposing path, Angelina described a teacher who “stays after and looks at it [curriculum] through a whole different lens.” Angelina and Ellen felt prepared to be the teacher of the second route, because as Angelina claimed, “I do have the tools now to look at a lesson, break it down, and add in what I need to add in and still be hitting the same objectives” by “putting [on] that critical lens when you're looking at a curriculum or planning your lessons.” However, Angelina believed many teacher candidates “get the
curriculum and (are) like, ‘Oh my goodness, this is like a free pass for the rest of my career’ because they do not have those skills that she acquired outside of the Early Grades program.”

This passage reflects Freire’s (1970/2014) problem-posing education that rebels against the banking concept of education. The intent is to direct attention toward the conditions that oppress without bringing damaging deficit perspectives to their classrooms (Darder, 2018, p. 109; Love, 2019). Love (2019) further stressed that teacher candidates need to be knowledgeable on how to question their biases and the status quo through a transformative curriculum with professional examples. Rose (community immersive participant) provided one such example of Professor Emily’s vulnerability when sharing one of her stories:

I just remember one time Professor Emily told us there was a little girl in her class who wore a new hijab, where she taught, and then when she started wearing it, the girl thought that Professor Emily started calling on her less. Professor Emily observed her biases to see, do I have a bias on people wearing hijabs. If you don't ever review your own biases, and that's something that I can, that I do constantly and like kids need to do. Like it's really crazy how deep you can have a bias in your head that you don't even know is there.

Professor Emily offered this example as a way of immersing her class environment in the critical vibe. A critical vibe comes about and gets centered when professors strive to include such stories, discussions, assignments, etc. However, teacher candidates need to be in the right spot to hear it within their curriculum and educational experiences. In addition to faculty, participants learned greatly from their field experiences and mentor teachers/PK-12 educators as well as their PK-12 students.
Modeling Criticality in PK-12 Settings

All participants discussed their field placements or work with their district partners. Ellen referenced specific examples with her district literacy lead and critiqued some of the work performed in her building:

[they] planned a lesson, but they talked about segregation and all those things, but we've never talked about race. It was so out of the blue. And so it was like, "To teach this effectively, we have to go back and do some foundation work." Where it talks about racism in a very kid-friendly way.

Although Angelina claimed she would set up her future “classroom very differently than where I've been placed for field or where I'm student teaching,” she recognized the importance of creating boundaries and establishing a safe environment for learning. She shared:

I think learning to be as transparent with my students as I can to just open that safe space.

I think as far as being a teacher, you can't be like a therapist, and you can't be the one who fixes all of their problems. But if you just act like everything is perfect, and everything is fine, and you're there it's for school only, you're not going to get much out of your students academically or about them as a person and a human being too.

In this example, Angelina leans into the critical vibe but also recognizes her responsibility to center a critical vibe with her future students. While Angelina conveyed her hopes for her future PK-12 students, Ellen specifically referenced some of her own learning with her second-graders. She further reflected on the literacy lesson addressing segregation:

And there's this page where it talks about different identities and it's like, "Indigenous, Latinx, Black," all the different ways a kid could identify themselves. And it was that moment like, "You’re white. Why are there only white teachers?" That kind of
conversation we got to have in a very low risk way. And a lot of our conversations
around segregation and stuff, they brought up like why police officers are still mean to
brown people was like the question one of them asked. So, I think like just opening that
little bit of a door of like yeah, you can talk about my skin. That's fine. I'll tell you about
it. We can talk about your skin if that's where you want to come in at.

Those low-risk conversations related to injustice can be perceived as an element of the critical
vibe, which reflects a flavor of critical consciousness. The entry points of PK-12 students into
these conversations about identities can start early, though some teacher candidates and
educators may have differing opinions on the appropriateness of that work such as Charlotte’s
hesitation about “bring[ing] anything [identity-based] in the classroom because they are so
young, I don't think they should be like exposed to that …” Love (2019) discussed abolitionist
teaching as a transformation of curriculum that explores resistance as well as individual and
collective risk. Charlotte portrayed her risk aversion sharing, "because you don't want to be
wrong, you know when I teach wrong information, but in those situations it's not right or wrong
it's just your belief, but to be even harder, because everyone has different.”

Contrary to an avoidance of risk, Rose shared the narrative of the principal of Oren
Elementary’s action. While the individual risk for that principal was high, the principal arguably
felt the collective risk of that biased rule was greater than her own individual risk. The
community immersive experience guides their teacher candidates to view Oren students as
already possessing applicable knowledge and their families as “first teachers” (Zeichner, 2015, p.
119). To oppose the complicit component which reproduces societal inequities within PK-12
classrooms, teacher candidates must collectively consider their active or passive contributions.
The Robotic Teacher

Discussions among teacher candidates can be viewed as contributing to the critical vibe or maintaining a conventional vibe. However, these discussions were mainly referenced by Angelina and Ellen, traditional program participants, regarding their peers who maintain a conventional vibe. Both Angelina and Ellen’s comments related to their fellow teacher candidates specifically addressed their concerns about some of their peers through the following two examples. Angelina described an experience where another peer was interviewing for teaching positions in Pennsylvania in Spring 2021. According to Angelina’s recollection of the story, her peer’s interviewer asked, "What are some ways you plan to bring social justice into your classroom this year?" Angelina described the exchange between her and her peer, whom she “loves dearly” stating:

[The Peer said], "I literally had no clue what to say. Like why would they ask me that in an interview?" I was like, "What do you mean? Why wouldn't they ask you that in an interview? Have you not been around for the past two years?" That's a big thing that you should know how to speak to right now, at least like speak about it. And she was like, "I had to ask to pass on the question."

Angelina’s concerns echoed the comment from Charlotte when she described the hesitation about teachers discussing more than two genders in the classroom. Angelina said her peer stated, "That's not a teacher's business. That's not what teachers should be worried about.” Angelina then described her conversation by stating:

We got into a whole thing. But that's just one example and I feel like it speaks volumes about those who are in just the [Early Grades] program did not … She didn't go on like
any extracurricular things or get involved in anything else … just like straight through the program, graduated, and is now interviewing.

Ellen concurred with Angelina’s assertion of fellow teacher candidates stating:

… so many teacher candidates don't have an answer or anything like that. And for me at least, so much of like what being a teacher is…is like laid out in front of you. Like you're going to read this script. So it's like if you don't have those other tools, then a robot [could] do it, you know what I mean? The thing about being a teacher is having those tools.

Developing the tools requires examples from professionals in the field through mentor teachers/PK-12 educators. Ellen described a colleague in her building discussing students and their building quoting her as saying, "This neighborhood's going … [did not finish the sentence; implied a curse word]" Ellen described her fear that “people [who] hold those mindsets still get hired pretty easily and it feels very scary.” Angelina also referenced some alarming examples from her experiences where educators approach PK-12 students from marginalized groups from deficit-mindsets. She stated:

people think bringing social justice into your classroom is feeling bad for the black student in your classroom. Or they don't know how to keep the same expectation for those students and just not look at it at through such a pity lens for … And like this goes for any minority group.

Viewing community assets revisits this study’s framework of a community teacher with the drive to display explicit resistance to deficit perspectives and policies. Cipollone et al. (2021) argued “no amount of content and pedagogical knowledge will allow an educator to connect with, and thus teach children” (p. 177) without a deep understanding of community members as
contributors to cultural wealth and funds of knowledge and a levelling of power in symmetrical relationships. Those from privileged identities must “flip the script” on the traditional model of university/community relations by approaching their teaching from a position of humility to grasp the expertise embedded within the lived experiences of communities (Scaife & Zygmunt, 2021). An avoidance or absence of this approach connects to the conventional vibe within teacher education that perpetuates a gap between communities and schooling.

While Rose and Sarah (community immersive participants) raved about the examples set by their experience at Oren Elementary, they can contrast some of those examples with other mentor teachers/PK-12 educators within current fields. Sarah shared about her current practicum experience:

I've come to realize, having these mentor teachers, you spend a lot of time with them, and you really get to know them and stuff. But, I wouldn't say my mentor teacher isn't like making sure all the cultures are acknowledged and stuff.

Rose, Sarah, Ellen, and Angelina recognize when the critical vibe is absent. Angelina specifically sought co-curricular opportunities to build her critical consciousness.

**Civic Engagement Through Co-curriculars**

The experience of a teacher candidate is not solely framed by the classroom but included by other spaces across Harper University. Angelina’s co-curricular involvement described her international experiences stating:

I was able to go to Guatemala, Kenya, and [undecipherable location] through with the [Harper University], but I know I was a trip leader for Kenya and we went through like a training outside of the [Early Grades] program to then like bring that stuff into it too.
While these experiences were “endorsed activities” by her educator preparation program, there were “other hands in the pot that were helping make it like what it was.” While this involvement was described as “very outside of like the normal experience,” Angelina also acknowledged that not all teacher candidates can afford the cost of these opportunities. This casual reference to privilege leading toward opportunities was additionally explored through a discussion of family and upbringing.

**Raised with Good Intentions**

Charlotte shared an anecdote about her upbringing in a neighboring state outside of Pennsylvania where she “did not grow up that way [watching videos in the classroom], like my elementary classes are very like hands on interactive.” She described her elementary school as having “whole different classes, specifically for students that don't speak English” in comparison to her field experience with English Language Learners. She described how it was easier for them [her elementary school] to take them out of our classrooms where they're probably not going to learn as much and put them in a classroom that they're able to learn a lot easier surrounded with students in the same boat with them.

Charlotte discussed the few native-English speaking students in her field experience as compared her own elementary school experience, which was majority English-speaking. She described her field site as “majority Hispanic.”

Ellen also acknowledged her dominant identity from a religious influence. She was “raised very Christian, and then moving away from that I think has a really big part of being a teacher for me.” As part of her religious connection, her and her mother participated in “mission trips in the city.” Ellen stated:
we would go and do a soup kitchen or an after-school program for the week in a summer. But we worked with a lot of people of color that were impoverished in the city, like inner city communities. And I think now, looking back at it, that was probably problematic. A big part of why I wanted to get into urban teaching, is because that's like such an amazing community; but it wasn't until I got pushed by those professors of like why do you actually want to do this? Is it a white savior complex? Are you going in for the right reasons? And I think that really changed my answer to those questions of your identity, your upbringing, beliefs.

While Angelina did not comment specifically on any family connections, her own critical reflection related to her identities recognized the intersectionality from both positions of marginalization and privilege. Sarah and Rose spoke about their some of their families’ hesitations about their work at Oren Elementary rooted in bias toward the marginalized community. Sarah countered:

It's motivating in a way, because you want to be that person to make these other people [referring to family and her home community] kind of realize like it's not as bad as it seems, and I think that's kind of what [the Community Immersive experience] made me realize, because I was definitely scared of the beginning … I remember parking my car the first day there. It's like, oh, my God, I got laughed at like four times. But and then after week two, I'm like, all right, I'm excited to go in.

Sarah’s nervousness in taking the risk to venture out of her comfort zone, provoked some laughs from her peers, but she rose to the work by not avoiding her pull toward the conventional vibe. While Sarah had the chance to enter Oren Elementary in-person, Rose did not encounter the
same firsthand exposure due to her remote experience. However, it was Charlotte who spoke most often of the limits surrounding the global pandemic.

**Pandemic Woes**

With the COVID-19 global pandemic, Charlotte missed the chance to begin her Early Grades in the same way as the other participants. The data describe some challenges within the field of education to help teacher candidates develop critical consciousness and the easier option was to steer toward the conventional vibe. Charlotte offered a critique of her Mentor Teacher initially stating, “they just been showing videos for forever at this point” but hoped they would change their instruction once students returned to in-person learning. Charlotte further offered, “I think it's more beneficial when teachers are not doing like pandemic stuff because, obviously, no one likes [it]. I didn't mind being on zoom because it could help my GPA, but like I didn't learn anything.” She also described the loss of learning impact on the current-day kindergartners in her field placement. Charlotte said:

They lost the whole year, and so, any day they may have learned and that's even if they went to preschool. They may have learned something … just went out the window, especially again if their parents are talking to them at home in a different language. While the field experience at the kindergarten center is in-person, the fields from her first year were remote or more often through videos. Charlotte reflected on those differences stating:

… very different I mean online, you only watch their lesson, in person you're going through their entire school day with them. It gives you more of a glimpse of what you'll be doing in the future and it's definitely made me realize, [I’m] not meant to be a kindergarten teacher. If it was a video I wouldn't have realized that because I’m not
actually experiencing that because you always think watching the videos, that it can’t be that bad.

While the global pandemic added a further layer of complexity for most interactions, the learning experience of Charlotte seemed to greatly impact along with her perceptions of her Early Grades program. One of the factors mentioned earlier that makes the timing of this study unique and provides a basis for the rationale was the COVID-19 global pandemic. Referencing again, Howard (2021) described a societal “new normal” that demands a community-centered educational approach with a focus on hope and healing (p. ix). With this call for a “non-traditional method to teacher education,” the community immersive participants elect to engage in an intentional experience founded in a facilitation of critical consciousness (Howard, 2021, p. ix-xi).

Setting Teacher Candidates on a Path

The community immersion experience provides a roadmap and sets teacher candidates on a journey toward action. The hopes of a restructured society may not be fully envisioned by teacher candidates in a semester-long experience, but they get a flavor for the inner work and community accountability required for that project (Kaba, 2021). Kaba (2021) emphasized finding community with those who “aren’t going to avail themselves of the systems that currently exist” (p. 143). The teacher candidates who opt into the community immersive experience seek to analyze systems toward an anti-oppressive praxis (Solic & Riley, 2021). Simply, the community immersive experience centers the critical vibe from the point of advertising and promotion of the semester-long program, so teacher candidates recognize their commitment to this work at enrollment. During the remote semester in Fall 2020 due to the global pandemic, Rose commented on the structure of the community immersive experience:
It was kind of so refreshing during like the pandemic to have some friends … I wasn't making any other new friends. I'm like, I don't know, no one's really doing anything. We were just on Zoom hanging out in class all the time, but it was like, so cool to have just a couple of girls who were all doing the same workload.

Doing “the same work,” did not just mean assignments and activities, but the nature of the holistic experience of shared practice (Murrell, 2001). Often antiracist educators discuss the work as including vigilant critical reflection of power and privilege through group discussions, but also taking the risk and action to dismantle racist policies and practices within communities (CARE, 2021). Sarah also added the nature of the community immersive experience provided firsthand examples of the community as the “first teacher” through an interview with a community member (Zeichner, 2015, p. 119). That community member discussed her role in contributing to the learning of Oren Elementary PK-12 students. When I asked if Sarah and Rose would have been able to develop their critical consciousness as deeply through other aspects of their Early Grades program without the Community Immersive experience or their interaction with the Oren Elementary community, they both vigorously shook their heads. Sarah verbally echoed, “that's why I just immediately shook my head, because I don't think you would realize it's a thing until you really see it and experience it firsthand.” Just having one experience appears insufficient in stimulating critical action. However, Angelina conveyed:

I feel like it just takes one exposure or one reading, movie, whatever it might be. And then like everything changes after that. And then it just needs to be … you need to be exposed to it then continually, I think, to keep your engagement with it.

The reinforcement and continued engagement require constant effort on the part of the teacher candidate with the guidance of the EPP to fulfill Freire’s revolutionary praxis supporting the idea
of education as a practice of freedom. Therefore, the community immersive experience is only a start in facilitating the critical vibe toward critical consciousness. As this study demonstrates, particularly in terms of critical action, there are leaps and bounds more work to be done. Kaba (2021) emphasized “building all along” in her discussion of her practice of organizing (p. 165). Kaba further added, “we ought to be organizing steadily always. All of the time. When the protests and the uprisings happen, we can meet those moments …” (p. 165). This emphasis pulls on the strength of the collective both in the struggle and knowledge with a focus on relationships and “building bridges with new people” (p. 171). While Kaba (2021) argued “abolition forecasts a world not yet realized” (p. 136), there are opportunities to repair harm or reduce harm by engaging in sustained critical reflection on both the part of the teacher candidate and teacher educator while learning in PK-12 field experiences and university classrooms (Andrews et al., 2019). However, the next section integrates a key finding of this study on teacher candidates’ critical action.

**Integrated Results on Critical Action**

A critical vibe places the role of the teacher as an agent of change. However, critical reflection and critical motivation, and thereby a critical vibe, is not enough to lead to critical action. This study also previously referenced the critical consciousness construct described in the work of Jemal (2017) entrenched in community organizing. Jemal (2017) and Jemal and Bussey (2018) introduced a transformative action theoretical framework describing a person’s level of action (i.e., destructive, avoidant, and critical) and the progression from non-critical to critical action. Jemal and Bussey (2018) emphasized critical action, the highest level of action, is the deliberate and purposeful response to inequities underlying individual and/or societal problems as compared to other two non-critical actions. These concepts connect to the integrated results
(see Table 18), which may characterize some of Charlotte’s comments as destructive or avoidant action as compared to the other participants’ passages about pedagogical actions around discomfort and biases.

**Table 18**

Integrated Results Matrix for the Comparison of Critical Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Critical Action (Quantitative Means)</th>
<th>Challenging Biases (Qualitative Passages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Traditional Program (Angelina, Ellen, and Charlotte) | 1.41                                 | Leaning into Discomfort (Angelina and Ellen)  
|                                          |                                      | • ...knowing how to have that discourse is really important because the few people that were engaged weren't able to engage because so many did not have that uncomfortable discussion |
|                                          |                                      | Avoidance or Passivity (Charlotte)  
|                                          |                                      | • I don't think they should be like exposed to that kind of...because you don't want to be wrong |
| Community Immersive (Rose and Sarah)     | 1.85*                                | Societal Re(actions): Oren Elementary Principal - PK-12 Examples & Perceptions of Urban Teaching  
|                                          |                                      | • No way I'm doing that. I'm not treating my students like they're in jail, or treating them like an animal, or coloring their sneakers |
|                                          |                                      | • They [society; the city] need more people like that |

*Note. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data is a strength of mixed methods research and a contribution of this study.*

Despite the statistically significant difference between the traditional program participants and community immersive participants, the means of the critical action sub-scores on the ShoCCS are low in both. Both Angelina and Ellen decidedly engaged in the Urban Change minor despite the increase in credits of study which led to increased cost for their degrees and potentially a longer time to completion, such as in Angelina’s case. Similarly, both Rose and Sarah decidedly engaged in the community immersive experience knowing the program focused
on anti-oppressive praxis from a systemic foundation acknowledging their own biases and privileges. However, these quantitative results expose the finding for what it is—a vibe that neglects to encompass all components of critical consciousness. A critical program would directly propel teacher candidates into an action-oriented imperative. Jemal and Bussey (2018) suggested non-linear stages specific toward critical action development, which might be an opportunity for further examination. Although some scholars may view “this lack of actively combating injustice as an unintentionally propagation of injustice” (Jemal & Bussey, 2018, p. 51), however, I suggest we interpret this finding with more complexity. The critical vibe is not a complete absence of criticality but necessitates a desired path forward through the act of becoming. While this section provided a focus on the integration of critical action results, the next component of this chapter provides a broad, overarching view of the entire study.

**Summary of the Study**

To encapsulate the study, this section provides a review of the research plan. This study utilized a convergent mixed method design where in the quantitative phase of the study I collected descriptive and inferential quantitative data to provide an overview of my first research question: Are there mean differences between the critical consciousness of elementary-level teacher candidates who participate in a semester-long community immersive experience at a PWI compared to those elementary-level teacher candidates who do not participate? During the qualitative phase, I collected focus group data to answer my second research questions: Does participation in a community immersive semester at a PWI facilitate teacher candidates’ critical consciousness? Using the information I gathered, I used descriptive and inferential statistics to answer my first research question, and a case study-informed approach to answer my second research question.
Differences in Critical Consciousness

As part of the quantitative phase of the study, 16 community immersive participants engaged in the critical consciousness survey consisting of the ShoCCS and the CCCMII while a total of 77 participants provided insight from the traditional program participants. While critical reflection and critical motivation means were relatively high (“slightly agree” and “mostly agree”), there were no statistically significant differences in means. However, when analyzing equal sized groups of 16, there was a statistically significant difference in critical action (traditional program participants’ M=1.41 and community immersive participants’ M=1.85).

Community Immersion and Critical Vibes

As part of the qualitative phase of the study, five teacher candidates participated in three focus group opportunities. Using theoretical coding advanced by Merritt (2021), I analyzed the qualitative data and identified the following themes using the literature: 1) Critical reflection with a self-analysis subtheme, 2) critical motivation, 3) critical action, 4) opportunity structures, and 5) opportunity constraints. While Merritt (2021) referred to “opportunity structures” and “opportunity constraints,” this study synthesized a discussion of the critical vibe through an exploration of various factors that facilitated the vibe. Conversely, factors that hindered a critical vibe perpetuated the conventional vibe by maintaining the status quo. Within these overarching themes, I was also able to identify several subthemes for the codes based on participants’ comments on their curriculum as well as using a micro-, meso-, and macro-schema for critical reflection and critical action. Finally, the community immersive experience provided participants with an intentional emphasize on anti-oppressive praxis leading to this study’s contribution of the critical vibe as a sense of becoming. From this concluding summary, I outline limitations, implications, and further research to advance this work.
Limitations of the Study

As with all research, this study had limitations that may have influenced the results, including: 1) Researcher bias, 2) methodology and the survey instruments, and 3) the generalizability of the sample. In the following section, I describe these limitations and their implications for the study.

Researcher Bias

I am a current university administrator with an avenue and privileged access for providing feedback and suggestions through the research site’s curricular development process. While not responsible for approving or developing curriculum content, I do have access to view proposals in the curriculum management software where proposal preparers submit course, policy, and program proposals. However, my role is not a decision-making authority as part of the governance structure. Discussions with committee members and peers as well as memoing about researcher identities and experiences were used throughout the study development, data collection, analysis, and reporting process to reflect on how they impacted the research (Heberle et al., 2020). Such strategies aim to reduce bias by enhancing my capacity to see how my perspectives affected the work. For example, I considered the impact social desirability bias within the survey responses, though the instruments accounted for that in their respective verification studies. Also, to minimize researcher bias and ensure the internal validity of this study, I triangulated three sources of data: (1) Survey responses, (2) transcribed focus groups, and (3) internal memos and field notes. Although research is value-laden, to establish trustworthiness and reliability, I utilized the skills developed through my doctoral program through memoing and personal reflectivity. Other limitations are further discussed in terms of this study’s procedural design.
Methodology

Given the scope and timeline of the project, I focused on a particular setting at Harper University through the community immersive experience. However, there is an opportunity for a multi-case study using the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Topical Action Group for community-engaged teacher education, which includes other community immersive-like experiences at various US-based institutions. With the authors’ consent, I was able to utilize two published, existing instruments with the ShoCCS and the CCCMII to help ensure the data’s validity and reliability. It is important to note that the ShoCCS is targeted for use with participants ages 13-19 as much of the research also focuses on critical consciousness development of those from marginalized identities. The quantitative instrument of this study, the critical consciousness survey, combined two instruments to provide a balanced survey approach into the construct of critical consciousness.

The focus groups provided rich data from participants, but also established the confounding factor of the Urban Change minor. Although there is a less than 5% chance that an Early Grades major is also an Urban Change minor, this factor impacted the results of the traditional program participants, which aligned their data more closely with the community immersive participants given the mission of their Urban Change minor. However, it allowed for continued contrasting of the data on critical consciousness.

Generalizability and Sampling

The focus of this study was on a particular institution’s Early Grades program which limits the degree to which the findings are generalizable to the larger population of teacher candidates. Although 67% of the community immersive participants participated in the study, sampling the Early Grades program’s traditional program participants required additional
outreach through the five undergraduate course sections to obtain around 10% engagement of the traditional program participant group with the critical consciousness survey.

One might question the participant who would be interested or drawn to a study to discuss an inquiry around critical consciousness. Traditional program participants without comfort in critical frameworks may not have been as willing to engage in a focus group on this topic but might have engaged more in a one-on-one interview setting. However, I wonder if that structure would have encouraged a “safe space” instead of a “brave space” (Jemal & Bussey, 2018). Jemal and Bussey (2018) countered “feelings of discomfort have been falsely equated with lack of safety, which impedes the educational process” (p. 54). This impact led to the confounding variable of those Traditional Program participants who held Urban Change minors. While only 1-2% of Early Grades majors are Urban Change minors (Harper University, 2021, link available at request of reader), nonetheless their responses impacted the traditional program participant data by aligning more closely with the community immersive participants.

Heberle et al. (2020) acknowledged families and students experiencing marginalization, such as teacher candidates of color, may hesitate to participate in research associated with institutions in which they have experiences or anticipate experiencing oppression. Tuck and Yang (2014) shared a series of “R words” describing a refusal to participate in research as an act of “resistance or reclaiming” (p. 244). Tuck and Yang (2014) conceptualized refusal in research as a way of humanizing researchers to consider refusal as more than a “no” but a “a redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned” (p. 239). Often, research seeks to determine “best practices” or “effective models” for replication, however Tuck and Yang cautioned the successful nature of “context-specific practices to be scaled up” (p. 245). With that in mind, the next section describes some implications of this study.
Implications for Practice

The findings of this study offer practical implications for EPPs, particularly those at PWIs, and teacher candidates. In this section, I discuss how my results could inform how EPPs might consider furthering the critical vibe toward critical consciousness.

Implications for Educator Preparation Programs

The EPP sets the stage to define the role of the teacher. The CR-SE competencies are a real asset that, if incorporated, can change the narrative about teaching away from a “settler colonial gaze of a binary society that continues to marginalize those from non-dominant identities” (Cole-Malott et al., 2021; Heberle et al., 2020). To “develop the tools” Angelina referenced to do that work, all educators can serve as models of criticality. Educators can be all employees at a university—faculty, staff, mentor teachers and PK-12 educators—as integral components of an EPP as well as an institution of higher education.

While the EPP is bound by the backdrop of its institution, programs are not isolated from movements such as the national battle of the integration of critical race theory (CRT) into aspects of education. This research cannot avoid the sociopolitical landscape surrounding the current hostility toward CRT in education. This movement may signal the depth of antiracism rather than a weakness or even the strength of any challenges. For example, a PA House bill banning CRT statewide in Pennsylvania has remained immobile in the House Education Committee since June 2021 (Teaching Racial and Universal Equality, 2021). However, EPPs cannot rely on the state to be critical of itself, therefore a critical vibe comes about and gets centered when professors strive to include criticality in the curriculum and encourage teacher candidates to seek co-curricular opportunities beyond the classroom structure. Despite the academy’s tendency to “describe itself as limitless,” Harper University and others tend to generate limits and boundaries
While I may want or hope the state could be critical of its standards and competencies and use evidence-based practices to refute racialized policies, such as standardized testing, I believe teachers candidates hold the greatest opportunity to influence community accountability toward critical consciousness.

**Implications for Teacher Candidates**

One of my favorite quotes by Margaret Mead embodies my hope for teacher candidates and a collective movement. Mead stated, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” (Shapiro & Epstein, 2006, p. 508). However, as Herrero (2016) contested, the quote is missing the key word of “organized” prior to “citizen.” At one point Sarah mentioned learning from Professor Emily about an anti-racist student organization. That group is evidence of a collective movement forming from teacher candidates who invest their time, energy, and hearts into the pursuit of the critical vibe toward a mission of action-oriented work.

Heberle et al. (2020) synthesized a systematic review of critical consciousness research which emphasized the impact of school and family context on critical consciousness development. School climate and classrooms can promote open dialogue about controversial issues and promoted positive interactions between students and adults (Heberle et al., 2020). Heberle et al. (2020) stated “parent and peer socialization is the strongest impact on critical reflection” (p. 543). By focusing on relationships, teacher candidates can organize to shift the narrative of teaching away from conceptions of technocratic requirements toward a revered profession that centers love and equity. However, to establish this narrative, teacher candidates must be prepared to act as change agents in their communities who “eliminate what is oppressive, not reform it, not reimagine it, but remove oppression from its roots” (B. Love,
personal communication, September 30, 2021). Although a narrative is only one piece, standing alone it is an insufficient piece, when the end goal necessitates changing the constraints that perpetuate injustice. In this manner, Kaba (2021) discussed repairing harm from a reconciliation of justice. Often repairing harm requires identifying “a different kind of space to be in,” then healing becomes more of a continual process not simply a destination (Kaba, 2021 p. 144). A “difference place” and critical action as healing in turn emphasizes one example in a serious of opportunities for further research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to previously mentioned exploration of multi-case studies in other community immersive-like settings, further research surrounding action would be beneficial. Furthering the concept of becoming as the path forward from the critical vibe, the goal of critical consciousness is to bring people into action in support of social change. Therefore, future work should center action-oriented imperatives (Diemer et al., 2021; Rapa et al., 2020). Diemer et al. (2021) claimed “reflection is likely a necessary but insufficient condition” for action, likening it to the analogy of “gathering wood but striking no matches” (p. 14). While there are encouraging practices that do “strike a match,” Diemer et al. (2021) describes future directions in critical action as including, 1) action among more privileged persons, 2) action as healing, 3) action with developmental outcomes, and d) centering youth participatory action research (p.15-16). Specially, the development of “allyship” or Love’s (2019) co-conspirators resounds in this research’s hope for upcoming work.

This research echoes Heberle et al.’s (2020) demand for continued research grounded in theories of intersectionality to advance critical consciousness scholarship. The critical vibe only skates around the exploration of intersectionality. Therefore, research that enhances the
understanding of how individuals grapple with positions of privilege as well as positions of oppression would be beneficial in advancing critical consciousness (Godfrey & Burson, 2018).

For if “liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership but a result of their conscientização” (Freire, 2018, p. 67), then an intersectional perspective recognizes “individuals may belong to both privileged and oppressed groups simultaneously and that these memberships impact and overlap with one another” (Seider et al., 2020, p. 25). When conversations about next steps or action items arise, educators can advocate toward organizing, altering, or dare I say abolishing, policies through direct action.

A final opportunity for further research includes considerations around the teacher shortage and pipeline initiatives. A 2019 finding from Harper University’s racial campus climate survey shared the recommendation that “equity initiatives on campus should focus on eliminating conditions on campus that harm marginalized students and students from marginalized communities, and not on ‘fixing’ these students” (Harper University, 2019, link available at request of reader). As EPPs consider recruitment, retention, and efforts geared toward the diversification of the teacher pipeline, educators should focus on asset-based approaches instead of default mode of operation found in the conventional vibe which fails to contest deficit-minded approaches (Harper University, 2019, link available at request of reader).

When reckoning with identities, if education in the truest form is intended to make people uncomfortable and challenge or critique opinions, then the preparation of teacher candidates can rise to this stage within their courses. Likewise, a consideration of processes examining agency may reconcile the connections to positive developmental outcomes, like self-regulation and management of emotions (Diemer et al., 2021). These recommendations go beyond the critical
vibe toward the fullest sense of Freire’s critical consciousness, which requires action. These opportunities for further research deeply connect to my own lens as an educator.

Reflecting on My Lens

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my own position of privilege and continued journey. I began this work with the words of James Baldwin, particularly resonating in the following passage, “The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk” (Baldwin, 1963). This research is part of my struggle, though inherent in academia is privilege, and varying risks depending on the marginalizing identities of the researcher. I acknowledge my silence and complicit behaviors as part of the problem as I often feel inadequate to comment or speak up. Part of my role can challenge the "compliance" regulations and practices in my professional work by advocating for an elimination of basic skills testing as an inequitable gatekeeper that screens out students of color and other "Tools of Whiteness" (Picower, 2011, 2021). From my position of privileged identities and occupation, I will not only recognize but also look to redress bias within our systems through an action-oriented imperative as part of my new community as our family moves to a predominately white school district with a contentious political atmosphere.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed my inquiry into teacher candidates’ critical consciousness by 1) discussing the findings through opportunity constraints and limitations, 2) applying my three theoretical framework—critical consciousness, humanizing pedagogy theorized through Abolitionist Teaching, and community-engaged teacher preparation—to the results, 3) recognizing limitations, 4) discussing applications for practice and curricula, 5) providing
suggestions for future research regarding teachers candidates’ critical consciousness, and 6) discussing my own lens. One of my intentions when constructing this study was to elevate alternative approaches to preparing teacher candidates to define their roles as educators in a society with deeply rooted inequalities. I believe learning about the critical vibe provides a landscape of teacher candidates’ journey in their development of critical consciousness. Overall, this study provided an avenue for candidates to explore the development of their critical consciousness with a focus on the Early Grades program. This study demands continued resistance and questioning.

I close this dissertation with much left unsaid and unwritten in that I come to draw more questions. However, perhaps part of the facilitation of critical consciousness’ true intention, and that of research, is to continually question our roles, positionalities, and society. As I continue my own journey as a mother, scholar, and practitioner, I hold more questions about my world. When Love (2021) virtually visited our campus in September 2021, I asked her what suggestions she had for teacher candidates to develop or build critical consciousness. Her recommendation was to continue to be curious as there is no one way to be an abolitionist teacher (B. Love, personal communication, September 30, 2021).
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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letters – Initial and Modification

Aug 13, 2021 10:50:23 AM EDT

To: Ashley Rowe
Col of Education & Social Work, Educational Found. & Policy St

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - IRB-FY2021-217 Teacher Candidates' Critical Consciousness

Dear Ashley Rowe:

Thank you for your submitted application to the WCUPA Institutional Review Board. Since it was deemed expedited, it was required that two reviewers evaluated the submission. We have had the opportunity to review your application and have rendered the decision below for Teacher Candidates' Critical Consciousness.

Decision: Approved

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,

WCUPA Institutional Review Board

IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155
To: Ashley Rowe  
Col of Education & Social Work, Educational Found. & Policy St  

Re: Modification - IRB-FY2021-217 Teacher Candidates' Critical Consciousness  

Dear Ashley Rowe:  

Thank you for your submitted modification to your WCUPA Institutional Review Board approved project Teacher Candidates' Critical Consciousness. We have had the opportunity to review your modification and have rendered the decision below effective November 17, 2021.  

Decision: Exempt  

Sincerely,  
WCUPA Human Subjects Review Board  

IORG#: IORG0004242  
IRB#: IRB00005030  
FWA#: FWA00014155
Appendix B

Critical Consciousness Measures and Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Consciousness Inventory (Thomas et al., 2014)</td>
<td>1. Sociopolitical development</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>206 participants ages 18-25 (mean age 19.98); mainly freshman at two Midwest universities; youth of Color</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Social perspective-taking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociopolitical Consciousness Scale (Backer &amp; Brookins, 2014)</td>
<td>1. Perceptions of one’s apolitical and knowledge of sociopolitical development</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>692 participants Salvadorian youth ages 11-14</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Beliefs about collective and structural aspects of sociopolitical development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure of Adolescent Critical Consciousness (McWhiter &amp; McWhiter, 2016)</td>
<td>1. Critical awareness of inequality</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>476 participants of Latina/Latino youth ages 14-19</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Political efficacy or agency to respond to injustice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Engagement in behaviors to transform unjust conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure (Shin et al., 2016)</td>
<td>1. Classism</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>EFA: 210 adult participants (average age 33.9)</td>
<td>Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Racism</td>
<td></td>
<td>CFA: 406 participants (average age 33.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Heterosexism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2017)</td>
<td>1. Critical Reflection</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>326 participants ages 13-19; majority students of color; only 7.7% White</td>
<td>Psychology &amp; Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Egalitarianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Perceived Inequality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Critical Action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure II (Shin et al., 2018)</td>
<td>1. Sexism</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>EFA: 270 adult participants CFA: 299 participants</td>
<td>Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Cissexism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Ableism</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Items</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Journal</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Critical Consciousness of Educators Scale (Schneider, 2019)          | 1. Critical Awareness  
2. Critical Reflection  
3. Critical Action                                                 | 25   | 988 public educators in a School District in Colorado                      | Education                      |
| Shortened Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer et al., 2020)         | 1. Critical Reflection  
2. Critical Motivation  
3. Critical Action                                                 | 13   | Study 1: 237 participants  
Study 2: 290 participants                                                | Psychology & Education          |
### Appendix C

**Critical Consciousness Survey**

**ShoCCS (13-items)**

**Short Critical Consciousness Scale (ShoCCS)**

Diemer et al., 2020

**Instructions:** Please respond to the following statements by circling how much you agree or disagree with each statement. For each statement, choose “Strongly Disagree,” “Mostly Disagree,” “Slightly Disagree,” “Slightly Agree,” “Mostly Agree,” or “Strongly Agree.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get good jobs

1 2 3 4 5 6

2. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get ahead

1 2 3 4 5 6

3. Women have fewer chances to get ahead

1 2 3 4 5 6

4. Poor people have fewer chances to get ahead

1 2 3 4 5 6

5. It is important for young people to know what is going on in the world

1 2 3 4 5 6
6. It is important to correct social and economic inequality

1 2 3 4 5 6

7. It is my responsibility to get involved and make things better for society

1 2 3 4 5 6

8. People like me should participate in the political activity and decision making of our country

1 2 3 4 5 6

**Instructions:** Please respond to the following statements by circling how often you were involved in each activity in the last year. For each statement, choose “Never did this,” “Once or twice last year,” “Once every few months,” “At least once a month,” or “At least once a week.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never did this</th>
<th>Once or twice last year</th>
<th>Once every few months</th>
<th>At least once a month</th>
<th>At least once a week</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Participated in a civil rights group or organization

1 2 3 4 5

10. Participated in a political party, club, or organization

1 2 3 4 5

11. Contacted a public official by phone, mail, or email to tell him/her how you felt about a particular social or political issue

1 2 3 4 5
12. Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting

13. Participated in a human rights, gay rights, or women’s rights organization or group

**Open-ended Curricular Question**

Within your academic context as a teacher candidate, what types of activities or assignments have you engaged with to reflect on your identity groups (i.e., race, skin color, ethnicity, gender identity, age, nationality, language, class, economic status, ability, sexual orientation, religion)?
**Demographic Questions:**

What is your age?
18-24
25-30
31-40
41-50
51-60
61 and over

Current WCU Role:
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Other

Did you transfer to WCU with 30 or more credits?
Yes
No

How do you currently describe you gender identity? Select all that apply.
Woman
Man
Non-Binary / Genderqueer / Gender Fluid
Third gender
Agender
Cisgender
Transgender
A gender not listed
Unsure
Prefer not to say
Prefer to self-describe

Do you consider yourself. Select all that apply.
Asexual
Bisexual
Demisexual
Gay
Fluid
Lesbian
Pansexual
Queer
Questioning
Straight/Heterosexual
Prefer not to say
Prefer to self-describe

Which categories describe your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply.
First Nation/American Indian/Alaskan Native/Indigenous Person
Asian
Black/African American
Hispanic, Latino/Latina/Latinx or Spanish origin
Multiracial
Middle Eastern
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
White
Prefer not to say
Prefer to self-describe

Questions ONLY included for Community Immersive participants:

Which semester did you engage in the Community Immersive semester?

1. Fall 2019
2. Fall 2020
3. Fall 2021

Current WCU Role (status based on credits):

1. Sophomore
2. Junior
3. Senior
4. Previous Graduate / Alumni. Please provide graduation year: INSERT
CCCMII (37-items)

Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure II (CCCMII)

Shin et al., 2018

Instructions

Read each of the following statements. Using the 1–7 scale below, please rate your level of agreement with each statement.

1 - Strongly Disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Slightly Disagree
4 - Neither Agree Nor Disagree
5 - Slightly Agree
6 - Agree
7 - Strongly Agree

Items

1. It is appropriate for elementary school curriculum to teach children that there are more gender identities than man and woman.

2. Buildings that only have “male” and “female” bathrooms are a form of discrimination against transgender persons.

3. Health insurance should cover sex re-assignment surgeries for those who desire them.

4. There are many unnecessary social, psychological, and legal barriers that a person must negotiate during the sex reassignment process.

5. Discrimination against transgender persons in our society is severe.

6. The United States needs better laws to make it easier to change one’s gender.

7. Limiting our pronouns to “he” and “she” is harmful to those who do not conform to traditional gender identities.
8. People who identify as cisgender (those who continue to identify with the sex they were assigned at birth) receive unearned privileges and advantages within U.S. society.

9. Information forms that only allow a person to check “male” or “female” discriminate against transgender persons.

10. Schools and colleges should ask students to inform them of which pronouns (e.g. “he”, “she”, “they”) most accurately describes their gender identity.

11. More laws are needed to make it easier for transgender persons to obtain medical or mental health treatment.

12. The government should make it easier for transgender persons to get identity documents (e.g., drivers licenses) that match their gender identity.

13. There is a need for laws which protect transgender persons from housing discrimination.

14. Gender identity needs to be added to nondiscrimination laws to protect transgender persons in the workplace.

15. If you are not actively working against cissexism (discrimination against transgender persons) then you are partially responsible for allowing it to exist.

16. Discrimination against people with physical disabilities is a major problem in U.S. society.

17. Focusing on helping people with disabilities adjust to the barriers in our society, instead of breaking down barriers themselves, maintains ableism.

18. Discrimination against individuals with disabilities is supported by our society’s idea that there is such a thing as a “normal” human being.

19. People contribute to the discrimination against individuals with disabilities whether they intend to or not.

20. Our society should be transformed to better accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.

21. Lack of funding to support people with disabilities is just a symptom of ableism.

22. Employment discrimination towards persons with disabilities is a significant problem within the United States.
23. Laws requiring universal design (e.g., replacing stairs with ramps, websites that are accessible for those who are blind) in all major institutions would go a long way toward building a more equal society for persons with disabilities.

24. Societal barriers are the cause of many of the problems from which people with intellectual disabilities suffer.

25. Psychological disorders are simply a reflection of what society deems “abnormal” at the time the categories are created.

26. The notion that people with mental illness are more prone to violence is a lie promoted in U.S. society.

27. When considering the limited amount of resources devoted to treating mental illness, it is easy to conclude that U.S. society does not care about this issue.

28. People with disabilities are generally treated more poorly in U.S. society than those without disabilities.

29. There have not been enough governmental efforts in favor of people with disabilities.

30. Discrimination against women is still a significant problem in the United States.

31. Some women choosing to have babies is not the cause of income inequality between men and women in the United States.

32. The fact that we have not yet had a female president in the United States is due to patriarchy (systems where men have a disproportionate share of power).

33. Men receive many unearned privileges within U.S. society.

34. The pressure on women to be physically attractive is stronger than for men.

35. Whether or not they realize it, all women have been negatively affected by sexism.

36. Women often miss out on leadership positions due to sex discrimination.

37. U.S. society has yet to reach a point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement.
Appendix D

Focus Group Consent & Participation Questionnaire

Traditional Program participants

Informed Consent

1. First and Last Name

2. Email

3. Phone

4. Current WCU Role
   Sophomore
   Junior
   Senior
   Other

5. Click on the Doodle link to share your availability (check off box when completed):

Thank you! I'll send a Zoom invite via email as to what time works best for the majority of those interested. Any questions or concerns? Please contact me!

Ashley Rowe, Principal Investigator
arowe@wcupa.edu
Approved WCU IRB Protocol #FY2021-217
Community Immersive participants

Informed Consent

1. Why did you decide to apply and participate in the community immersive semester?

2. Describe your experience in the community immersive semester in one word. Please remember your word as we will discuss them in the focus groups!

3. First and Last Name

4. Email

5. Phone

6. Current WCU Role
   Sophomore
   Junior
   Senior
   Alumni
   Other:

7. If an alumni, please include your current role. (example, 2nd grade teacher in Upper Darby School District)

8. Click on the Doodle link to share your availability (check off box when completed):

Thank you! I’ll send a Zoom invite via email as to what time works best for the majority of those interested. Any questions or concerns? Please contact me!

Ashley Rowe, Principal Investigator
arowe@wcupa.edu
Approved WCU IRB Protocol #FY2021-217
Appendix E

Focus Group Questions

Introduction to Focus Groups

Good morning/afternoon!

My name is Ashley Rowe and I am currently a candidate in the Ed.D. Program. I am conducting a research study regarding critical consciousness as part of your curriculum in an elementary-level (Grades PK-4) preparation program. With study is part of my dissertation and fulfills a requirement for my anticipated program completion in May 2022.

I will ask you a series of questions and the focus group will last approximately 1 hour. Please note that I will be recording your responses to each of the questions. Your responses will be kept in confidence. Your name will not be included in my data analysis and will be kept in the strictest of confidence. Responses will be kept in a locked office in Recitation Hall 302 and will be documented in a password-protected file on my computer. All responses and records will be destroyed within three years following the completion of this dissertation research.
Traditional Program participants

Thanks for completing the Focus Group Participation Questionnaire!

Why did you decide to pursue teaching at the elementary-level?

Curricular Experiences

1. This next set of questions asks you to consider experiences as part of your required coursework as a teacher candidate in the Early Grades major.

   a. Tell me about an activity, assignment, or class discussion where the various aspects of your identity, upbringing, beliefs, and values, were discussed.

   b. Tell me about an activity, assignment, or class discussion, related to the role of the teacher as an agent of change (one who believes they have the capacity to challenge oppressive systems).

   c. Tell me about an action you have taken to disrupt policies, practices, procedures, and norms that disadvantaged learners as defined by race, ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and gender.

2. Have you heard of the community immersive semester for Early Grades majors with the Add B. Anderson School in Philadelphia? If “yes”, what do you know about it? Would you be interested in participating in it in the future, why or why not?

3. What are some ways that you can bring your own story into your educational space (classroom) in a way that contributes to your own critical reflection?

4. What specific actions do you plan to take to increase your ability to identify, deepen your understanding of, and address bias (both your own bias and at the interpersonal and institution levels of the system)?
Community Immersive participants

Thanks for completing the Focus Group Participation Questionnaire!

You all chose one word to describe your experience in the community immersive semester.

1. Please share your word and why you selected it with the group.

Curricular Experiences

2. This next set of questions asks you to consider experiences as part of your required coursework as a teacher candidate in the Early Grades major and a participant in the community immersive semester.
   
   a. Tell me about an activity, assignment, or class discussion where the various aspects of your identity, upbringing, beliefs, and values, were discussed.

   b. Tell me about an activity, assignment, or class discussion, related to the role of the teacher as an agent of change (one who believes they have the capacity to challenge oppressive systems).

   c. Tell me about an action you have taken to disrupt policies, practices, procedures, and norms that disadvantaged learners as defined by race, ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and gender.

3. How has the community immersive semester differed or aligned with other course content in your major?

4. What are some ways that you can bring your own story into your educational space (classroom) in a way that contributes to your own critical reflection?

5. What specific actions do you plan to take to increase your ability to identify, deepen your understanding of, and address bias (both your own bias and at the interpersonal and institution levels of the system)?

6. What do you feel was the most beneficial part of the community immersive semester? At this point in time during your current community immersive semester, what do you feel has been the most beneficial to your learning?
Appendix F

Informed Consent

Informed Consent for Quantitative Phase as Part of the Critical Consciousness Survey

Project Title: Teacher Candidates’ Critical Consciousness

Investigator(s): Ashley Rowe; David Backer; Cheryl Neale-McFall

Project Overview:

Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Ashley Rowe as part of their Doctoral Dissertation to investigate teacher candidates’ CC as part of the curriculum in an elementary-level program at a predominately White institution. Your participation will take about 15 minutes to take the Critical Consciousness Survey. The risks to participating in the study are minimal. There is a chance that when discussing topics of identity, biases, and beliefs, that participants may experience some discomfort. It is possible that some curricular experiences have not been positive or could lead to an emotional response. However, this discomfort could also arise as part of the social analysis within class activities already present. The benefits to participants outweigh the risks. Participants will benefit from further reflection on their social analysis, critical motivation, and social action that helps contribute to learning. The knowledge gained from participation will help benefit their education preparation programs and the professional development of other teacher candidates. This study occurs at an important time for Teacher Education in Pennsylvania where culturally relevant and sustaining education competencies were recently developed in April 2021 by the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium. These competencies connect to critical consciousness and warrant further incorporation into the curriculum.

If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Ashley Rowe any questions to help you understand this study. If you don’t want to be a part of this study, it won’t affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. What is the purpose of this study?
   - investigate teacher candidates’ CC as part of the curriculum in an elementary-level program at a predominately White institution.

2. If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:
   - take Critical Consciousness Survey
   - This study will take 15 minutes of your time.
   - Have the opportunity to participate in a 60-minute focus group

3. Are there any experimental medical treatments?
   - No
4. **Is there any risk to me?**
   - Possible risks or sources of discomfort include: The risks to participating in the study are minimal. There is a chance that when discussing topics of identity, biases, and beliefs, that participants may experience some discomfort. It is possible that some curricular experiences have not been positive or could lead to an emotional response. However, this discomfort could also arise as part of the social analysis within class activities already present since teacher candidates are expected to challenge deficit perspectives in education.
   - If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with Ashley Rowe.
   - If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.

5. **Is there any benefit to me?**
   - Benefits to you may include: The benefits to participants outweigh the risks. Participants will benefit from further reflection on their social analysis, critical motivation, and social action that helps contribute to learning. The knowledge gained from their participation will help benefit their education preparation programs and the professional development of other teacher candidates. Benefits may include participants sharing feedback that improves or shapes curriculum considerations within their program where they are currently matriculated.
   - Other benefits may include: This study occurs at an important time for Teacher Education in Pennsylvania where culturally relevant and sustaining education competencies were recently developed in April 2021 by the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium. These competencies connect to critical consciousness and warrant further incorporation into the curriculum.

6. **How will you protect my privacy?**
   - Your records will be private. Only Ashley Rowe, David Backer, Cheryl Neale-McFall and the IRB will have access to your responses.
   - Your name will not be used in any reports nor will it be collected in the survey.
   - Records will be stored:
     - Password Protected File/Computer behind a locked door
     - The survey data will be maintained through university-supported software and password-protected online storage. Teacher candidates may opt-in or -out at any time. This participation is voluntary and not required.
   - Records will be destroyed Three Years After Study Completion

7. **Do I get paid to take part in this study?**
   - No

8. **Who do I contact in case of research related injury?**
   - For any questions with this study, contact:
     - **Primary Investigator:** Ashley Rowe at 570-850-0327 or arowe@wcupa.edu
     - **Secondary Investigator:** David Backer at 610-436-2326 or dbacker@wcupa.edu

9. **What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?**
   - Not applicable.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, ________________________________ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time.
know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

Subject/Participant Signature       Date:______________

Witness Signature                  Date:______________
Informed Consent for Qualitative Phase As Part of the:

Focus Group Consent & Participation Questionnaire: Traditional Program participants
Focus Group Consent & Participation Questionnaire: Community Immersive participants

Project Title: Teacher Candidates’ Critical Consciousness

Investigator(s): Ashley Rowe; David Backer; Cheryl Neale-McFall

Project Overview:

Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Ashley Rowe as part of their Doctoral Dissertation to investigate teacher candidates’ CC as part of the curriculum in an elementary-level program at a predominately White institution. Your participation will take about 65-minutes to engage in a participation questionnaire and then participate in a focus group with other peers. The risks to participating in the study are minimal. There is a chance that when discussing topics of identity, biases, and beliefs, that participants may experience some discomfort. It is possible that some curricular experiences have not been positive or could lead to an emotional response. However, this discomfort could also arise as part of the social analysis within class activities already present. The benefits to participants outweigh the risks. Participants will benefit from further reflection on their social analysis, critical motivation, and social action that helps contribute to learning. The knowledge gained from participation will help benefit their education preparation programs and the professional development of other teacher candidates. This study occurs at an important time for Teacher Education in Pennsylvania where culturally relevant and sustaining education competencies were recently developed in April 2021 by the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium. These competencies connect to critical consciousness and warrant further incorporation into the curriculum. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Ashley Rowe any questions to help you understand this study. If you don’t want to be a part of this study, it won’t affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**
   - investigate teacher candidates’ CC as part of the curriculum in an elementary-level program at a predominately White institution.

2. **If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**
   - engage in a participation questionnaire
   - participate in a focus group with other peers
   - This study will take 65-minutes of your time.

3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
4. **Is there any risk to me?**
   - Possible risks or sources of discomfort include: The risks to participating in the study are minimal. There is a chance that when discussing topics of identity, biases, and beliefs, that participants may experience some discomfort. It is possible that some curricular experiences have not been positive or could lead to an emotional response. However, this discomfort could also arise as part of the social analysis within class activities already present since teacher candidates are expected to challenge deficit perspectives in education.
   - If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with Ashley Rowe.
   - If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.

5. **Is there any benefit to me?**
   - Benefits to you may include: The benefits to participants outweigh the risks. Participants will benefit from further reflection on their social analysis, critical motivation, and social action that helps contribute to learning. The knowledge gained from their participation will help benefit their education preparation programs and the professional development of other teacher candidates. Benefits may include participants sharing feedback that improves or shapes curriculum considerations within their program where they are currently matriculated. For participation in the focus group, $25 Amazon gift cards will be sent electronically to participants after the completion of the respective focus group.
   - Other benefits may include: This study occurs at an important time for Teacher Education in Pennsylvania where culturally relevant and sustaining education competencies were recently developed in April 2021 by the Pennsylvania Educator Diversity Consortium. These competencies connect to critical consciousness and warrant further incorporation into the curriculum.

6. **How will you protect my privacy?**
   - The session will be recorded.
   - Focus group sessions will be recorded via Zoom as well as the Rev, a transcription app & voice recorder, to assist with data analysis.
   - Your records will be private. Only Ashley Rowe, David Backer, Cheryl Neale-McFall and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.
   - Your name will not be used in any reports.
   - Records will be stored:
     - Password Protected File/Computer behind a locked door
   - The survey data will be maintained through university-supported software and password-protected online storage. Teacher candidates may opt-in or -out at any time. This participation is voluntary and not required. Your identity will remain confidential. The recordings will be secured on university-supported and password-protected online storage.
   - Records will be destroyed Three Years After Study Completion

7. **Do I get paid to take part in this study?**
   - No

8. **Who do I contact in case of research related injury?**
   - For any questions with this study, contact:
     - **Primary Investigator:** Ashley Rowe at 570-850-0327 or arowe@wcupa.edu
     - **Secondary Investigator:** David Backer at 610-436-2326 or dbacker@wcupa.edu

9. **What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?**
   - Not applicable.
For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, _________________________________ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

_________________________________  
Subject/Participant Signature Date:__________________________

_________________________________ 
Witness Signature Date:__________________________
Appendix G

CCCMII Subscale Means

The 7-point Likert scale required each participant to rate their level of agreement with each statement: 1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Slightly Disagree, 4 - Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 5 - Slightly Agree, 6 - Agree, 7 - Strongly Agree

**Cissexism Comparison**

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<td>5.81</td>
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</table>

**Ableism Comparison**

| Q16  | Q17  | Q18  | Q19  | Q20  | Q21  | Q22  | Q23  | Q24  | Q25  | Q26  | Q27  | Q28  | Q29  |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 5.51 | 5.16 | 5.44 | 5.09 | 6.04 | 5.29 | 5.56 | 6.07 | 5.64 | 5.11 | 5.13 | 4.91 | 5.58 | 5.33 |
| 5.94 | 5.94 | 5.50 | 5.00 | 6.38 | 5.31 | 5.56 | 6.31 | 5.88 | 5.25 | 4.88 | 5.69 | 6.06 | 5.25 |

**Sexism Comparison - CCCMII**

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<td>5.94</td>
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<td>6.25</td>
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## Appendix H

**Themes and Subthemes or Thematic Analysis**

*Based on Merritt (2021)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Active acknowledgement recognition of one's own identity, beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and biases; encompasses critical awareness of the relationship between self and U.S. society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection</td>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Cognitive ability to address pluralities within a specific classroom/class; reflecting on activities, events, class discussions, or interactions in which systemic oppression/privilege is playing a role; teacher candidates may or may not directly acknowledge their role in oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meso</td>
<td>Cognitive ability to address pluralities within the EGP major/EPP; reflecting on activities, events, class discussions, or interactions in which systemic oppression/privilege is playing a role; teacher candidates may or may not directly acknowledge their role in oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Cognitive ability to address pluralities within the whole education system, state, or broader sociopolitical context; reflecting on activities, events, class discussions, or interactions in which systemic oppression/privilege is playing a role; teacher candidates may or may not directly acknowledge their role in oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Motivation</td>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>Attitudinal ability to effectively make and create change as part of their curriculum and teaching practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire</td>
<td>Attitudinal ability representing a desire for or willingness to engage in critical action within their curriculum and teaching practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Action</td>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Behavioral action they performed or were part of, include reflection on potential action; doing in the classroom; do not extend beyond classroom setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meso</td>
<td>Behavioral action they performed or were part of, include reflection on potential action; doing in within the major/EPP; do not extend beyond University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macro</td>
<td>Behavioral action they performed or were part of, include reflection and specific action; mitigating inequity in education more broadly at the state or federal level; targeting policy or widespread changes to practice</td>
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<td><strong>Opportunity Structures (9)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Faculty/Curriculum Inside Major</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped facilitate participants' Critical Consciousness as part of learning from their Early Grades faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>University Faculty/Curriculum Outside of Major</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped facilitate participants' Critical Consciousness as part of learning from their faculty outside of their Early Grades major; specific reference to other majors, minors, academic programs</td>
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<td>Community Immersive program</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped facilitate participants' Critical Consciousness as part of learning specifically from their engagement with the Community Immersive programmatic intervention</td>
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<td>PK-12 Students</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped participants development their Critical Consciousness that are part of learning specifically from their PK-12 students</td>
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<tr>
<td>PK-12 Communities / Families</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped participants development their Critical Consciousness that are part of learning specifically from their PK-12 communities in which their school exist</td>
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<td>Mentor Teachers / PK-12 Educators</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped facilitate participants' Critical Consciousness as part of their interactions with K-12 educators in field experiences or observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peers/Teacher Candidates</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped participants development their Critical Consciousness that are part of learning specifically from their interactions with their peers in their Early Grades program / fellow teacher candidates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-curricular Involvement</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped facilitate participants' Critical Consciousness through their engagement with student organizations/clubs, civic engagement, internships, service-learning, international involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family/Upbringing</td>
<td>Any mention of things that helped facilitate participants' Critical Consciousness as part of their home life, personal life, relationship with family.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunity Constraints</strong></td>
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<td>COVID-19 Impact/Pandemic learning</td>
<td>Any mention of things that hindered/restricted/limited participants' development their Critical Consciousness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Faculty/Curriculum Inside Major</td>
<td>Any mention of things that hindered/restricted/limited participants' development their Critical Consciousness due to Faculty expectations, structure of learning and teaching within EMG major/EPP</td>
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<td>Mentor Teachers / PK-12 Educators</td>
<td>Any mention of things that hindered/restricted/limited participants' development their Critical Consciousness due to part of their interactions with PK-12 educators in field experiences or observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peers/Teacher Candidates</td>
<td>Any mention of things that hindered/restricted/limited participants' development their Critical Consciousness due to interactions with their peers in their EGP major/EPP (also known as their fellow teacher candidates)</td>
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<td>Any mention of things that hindered/restricted/limited participants' development their Critical Consciousness that are part of their home life, personal life, relationship with family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception of Teaching / Narrative of Education</td>
<td>Any mention of things that hindered/restricted/limited participants' development their Critical Consciousness related to the perception of what teaching is as a discipline; narrative around the role of an educator and participants' perception of what that should be in U.S. society</td>
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## Appendix I

### Code Frequencies

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<th>Charlotte (Trad)</th>
<th>Sarah (CI)</th>
<th>Rose (CI)</th>
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