Preparing Preservice Teachers To Be Critical Literacy Educators: Co-Constructing an Early Childhood Critical Literacy Junk Art Club

Angela F. Pack
Montclair State University

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PREPARING PRESERVICE TEACHERS TO BE
CRITICAL LITERACY EDUCATORS:
CO-CONSTRUCTING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD
CRITICAL LITERACY JUNK ART CLUB

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
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by

ANGELA F. PACK
Montclair State University
Upper Montclair, NJ
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Dissertation Chair: Dr. Monica Taylor
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation
PREPARING PRESERVICE TEACHERS TO BE
CRITICAL LITERACY EDUCATORS:
CO-CONSTRUCTING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD
CRITICAL LITERACY JUNK ART CLUB

of

Angela Pack
Candidate for the Degree:

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program:
Teacher Education and Teacher Development

Certified by:

Dr. M. Scott Helpern
Vice Provost for Research and
Dean of The Graduate School

Date
April 22, 2020

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Monica Taylor
Dissertation Chair

Dr. Jeremy Price

Dr. Kathryn Herr
This qualitative practitioner action research study examines the process of a teacher educator’s attempt to prepare three preservice teachers to be critical literacy educators. Prior to the study, the teacher educator and the three preservice teachers took part in a critical literacy workshop where they unpacked their relationship with literacy and power. The three preservice teachers then worked together to co-construct a Junk Art Club with the teacher educator for kindergarten, first-, and second-graders. Through the co-planning and co-constructing of a Junk Art Club, the study sought to answer the following questions: What happens when I, an early childhood teacher educator, scaffold the teaching of critical literacy with three preservice teachers as we facilitate a Junk Art Club with kindergarten, first-, and second-grade students and what evidence is there, if any, that the critical literacy conceptualizations previously constructed in their critical literacy workshop support their enactment of critical literacy teaching in the Junk Art Club? and: How does providing feedback, instruction, explanations, and questions for the preservice teachers support the enactment of critical literacy teaching as they increasingly facilitate the Junk Art Club (JAC)? The data, which consisted of participants’ journals, the teacher educator’s journal and field notes, artifacts from the workshop and JAC sessions, transcripts of JAC planning meetings, club sessions, and debriefing meetings, was coded using
the constant comparative method of analysis (Merriam, 2009). Initially data charts were created with open codes, then common codes, and finally themes. The findings suggest that critically unpacking the teacher educator’s and preservice teacher’s identity was essential in the process of becoming critically literate. During the critical literacy workshop the teacher educator and the preservice teachers utilized emotions as a learning tool and began to heal from the negative impact of literacy messages that had influenced their sense of self and others. The findings also suggested that the lived experience (Dewey, 1938) was integral to the process of the teacher educator’s and preservice teachers’ journey to becoming critical literacy educators. The lived experience of the critically literacy workshop and Junk Art Club provided the teacher educator and the preservice teachers the opportunity to learn through the experience of unpacking their relationship with literacy and power and co-constructing a Junk Art Club. Finally, the findings suggested that the preservice teachers process of becoming critical literacy educators was an individualized process. The implication of the study points to the importance of utilizing a pedagogy of critical vulnerability in preparing preservice teachers to be critical literacy educators. The pedagogy of critical vulnerability theorizes that preparing preservice teachers to be critically literate requires, teacher educator vulnerability, learning through emotions and healing, and utilizing the lived experience as a learn tool through co-planning and constructing critical literacy education for students. The implications reaffirmed the need to embed critical literacy education throughout teacher education programs and conduct future research investigating innovative approaches to prepare preservice teachers to be critical literacy educators.

*Keywords:* preservice teachers, early childhood, critical literacy, Junk Art Club, lived experience
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DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to my three children: Alex, Max, and Sydney. I am truly grateful for their love, patience, understanding, and support.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Education . . . is the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world”. (Freire, 1973, p. 34)

The field of education has been under immense scrutiny over the last two decades (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Schools have become places that focus on the academic bottom line. With the introduction of high stakes accountability, teachers and schools are under enormous pressure to have students achieve academically (Valli & Buese, 2007). The push is towards students learning a narrow set of skills, which will produce academic outcomes (Henry, 2007). This in turn has put pressure on teacher education programs.

Teacher education programs have been evaluated to determine whether they are preparing preservice teachers to produce the required student outcome (Kennedy, 2010). The National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ), established in 2000, is one organization that works tirelessly to evaluate teacher education programs and define teacher quality (National Council for Teacher Quality Reports, 2015).

Currently, there is a movement to not only evaluate teacher education programs, but also to utilize standardized assessment to assess teacher candidates for certification. Stanford University and the American Association for Colleges for Teacher Education partnered and created Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) (http://edtpa.aacte.org). EdTPA is a high stakes standardized portfolio assessment that is currently being used by thirty-four states to evaluate candidates for certification.

Literacy, one of the cornerstones to success in education and society, has become an important topic in the discussion of teacher quality. Specifically, the components of what
successful literacy education encompass and how teacher education programs prepare preservice teachers to produce highly literate students has been debated. There has been a movement to define literacy in terms of the skills needed to break the code (Dudley-Marling, 2015).

Specifically, NCTQ states that literacy instruction needs to focus on recognizing letters and sounds, and on reading comprehension in order to master the set of skills needed to successfully understand the written word (Walsh, Glaser, & Wilcox, 2006).

NCTQ is dedicated to ensuring that every child has an effective literacy teacher, and this is accomplished in part by having quality teacher education programs (National Council for Teacher Quality Mission, 2015). Numerous educators are rejecting NCTQ’s view of a quality teacher education program for literacy teachers. They reject NTCQ’s philosophy that teacher education programs’ sole purpose is to prepare teacher educators to enact reading research in the classroom (Dudley-Marling, 2007). Dudley-Marling (2015) takes this narrow view of reading to task and calls for educators to view reading as a complex science, which does not have a “one size fits all” program for all students. He also stresses that reading is more than a decoding skill, but rather a process of understanding and thinking critically about the text as well as other forms of literacy.

I agree with this perspective, and believe it is important to move past the narrow definition of literacy discussed above, and realize that literacy not only involves decoding and understanding, but also interrogating and making meaning of all texts in terms of power (Freire, 1972). These texts could be traditional fiction and non-fiction but could also include the Internet, advertisements, television, images, movement, music, and any other form of communication. They can be any or all of the different forms of literacy listed above. Reading is not simply mastering a set of skills, rather teachers should provide students with the tools needed to actively
engage in critically interrogating texts (Harste, 2014).

Critical literacy is reading more than the written word. It examines how power is constructed in society and is manifested (Freire, 1972). When people create texts, they narrate them from their personal perspectives, based upon their role in the socioeconomic, gender, and racial hierarchies that exist in society. Only through engaging in reflection and discussion can one begin to understand how literate acts demonstrate the author’s perspective and position in society. This is integral to developing an understanding of critical literacy (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013). Being able to look at texts through a critical lens is essential in society, which is filled with inequity, unheard voices, and stereotypes that are ingrained in the framework of the culture (Arthur, 2001). Preservice teachers need to be able to challenge the assumptions they have taken for granted and develop an understanding of the world and themselves through critical thought and discourse (Ciardiello, 2004). Only then can one can begin to become an agent of change in both the community and the classroom (Comber & Simpson, 2001).

It is important to understand that literacy can be used to oppress or liberate (Freire, 1972; Mosley, 2010). It can be used to oppress by silencing specific populations or sending messages as to their place in society. For example, Black males in society are frequently represented as criminals in various texts. This oppresses them in two ways. First, it can influence the ways in which people view and treat Black males. Secondly, it can change an Black male’s self-concept. Yet through critical literacy and its focus on social justice, those interpreting the text can also begin to understand the inaccurate messages in society and begin to speak up and work to liberate themselves. This can lead to the creation of texts that work to combat the effects of oppressive literacy.

The voices that are so often privileged in texts are the voices that possess power (Freire,
1972). Foucault (1980) theorized that power is everywhere. It is in discourse, knowledge, and our understanding of truth, and cannot be separated from a person or group. One’s position in society designates how much or how little power a person has and one’s power determines social order and conformity and is more influential than politics and further reaching. Power is a driving force that creates cultural expectations and control.

Power, for the purpose of this study, is defined as a force that transcends the individual and is part of the fabric of society and culture. Groups or individuals, who possess the needed resources to affect change in society or keep the status quo in place, use it. It is also used to define expectations and create social rules for groups and individuals. These actions are based upon personal and group perspectives of what is valued both personally and in society.

Through contemplating critical literacy, one begins to reconsider and unpack his or her political and personal experiences. This process demands that a person questions, challenges, and explores texts and their relationship to the inequity of power in society (Comber & Simpson, 2001). Before teachers can embed critical literacy into the curricula, they need to unpack and explore their own relationship with literacy (Vasquez et al., 2013). Unpacking one’s relationship with literacy is defined as developing an understanding of how literacy has affected one’s own self-concept and understanding of the world. This process takes commitment, self-reflection, and the openness to engage in discussions (Comber & Simpson, 2001). It involves interrogating and deconstructing literate messages (Robertson & Hughes, 2011), as well as understanding that there is no such thing as a neutral text (Luke & Freebody, 1997).

Embedding critical literacy into preservice teacher education programs gives preservice teachers the opportunity to begin to contemplate inequity and power in society (Comber & Simpson, 2001) as they are developing their personal educational philosophy. This has the
potential to help preservice teachers develop an understanding of how to teach critical literacy in the classroom. Critical literacy then becomes a vehicle to explore social justice in the classroom.

The central question is not whether it is important to have critical literacy embedded into teacher education programs, but rather how can this be accomplished. Developing the ability to not only think critically but also bring critical literacy into the classroom is imperative for teachers (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Freire 1976). Therefore, it is logical that critical literacy should be built into teachers’ preservice education program to ensure that, upon entering the classroom, they will be able to embed critical literacy into their curricula. Below, I provide my personal background, which has led me to my research questions.

**My Background**

My research interest in critical literacy and the unheard voices in education became important to me at an early age. As an eight-year-old child who immigrated to the United States, I constantly felt that my immigrant status was not taken into consideration in the classroom. I remember having to recite the Pledge of Allegiance on my third day in the country, and being greeted with remarks centered on the importance of American pride. I was told that this country was the best place in the world; it was the only place where you could cross the road freely. This view did not represent the life I led in Scotland. I constantly felt like an outsider whose personal history was ignored in the classroom.

These conflicting experiences led me to realize that all events can be seen from multiple perspectives. While I was studying traditional history in high school, I began to research and contemplate marginalized populations in American society. I was particularly interested in Native American and Black experiences. These perspectives provided me with an understanding that a text or any literacy act reflects the point of view of the author rather than an objective lens.
It is harder to resist the messages embedded in literacy when they directly affect your self-concept. Even though I understood that texts are never neutral I still fell victim, as a female, to the flood of body expectations that inundated me on a daily basis. They greeted me at the supermarket, taunted me from television, and harassed me almost every waking moment of my life. I developed an understanding that my very existence was flawed. Through my personal struggle, I became aware of the power of all forms of literacy on the development of self-concept.

Flashing forward to my career as an educator, I have spent the majority of my career working with marginalized populations. I am currently an Assistant Professor of Education at an urban community college where the majority of my students are Black and Latinx of low economic status. Through hearing my preservice teachers’ stories, I have come to understand the ramifications of our current society, which reflects white middle-class male power. Students have told me of feeling unrepresented in the school curricula, being told that people who looked like them could never be president, being stereotyped by students and teachers based on their skin color, and being treated as inferior by teachers.

My experiences, as well as my students, have been the inspiration to devote myself to the stories of the unheard and fight against the stereotypes in society which effect a child’s sense of self (Vasquez et al., 2013). I never wanted any student to sit in a classroom and feel like an outsider, to not feel represented in the curriculum, or to believe the world’s preconceived understanding of their identity. This has been a defining issue in my career. I have worked to engage students in critical thought about the relationship between power and literacy in society and to contemplate the plight of marginalized populations in the United States. It is only through this work that preservice teachers may begin to unpack the current unequal distribution of power
in society and move towards becoming agents of change.

In a previous study, I worked with preservice teachers in a critical literacy workshop to unpack our relationship with literacy and power. I conducted a six-week critical literacy workshop with preservice teachers at Easton Community College (all the names of the educational institutions and participants in this study are pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of the preservice teachers). We worked together to understand and redefine our relationship with literacy and discover how literacy messages have influenced the way we view the world and ourselves. In every session we created and shared an artifact, which encouraged the preservice teachers and me to consider the relationship between our literacy and our power. Some examples of artifacts that were created are: *I am/ I am not* (Vasquez et al., 2013), redesigning the message from an advertisement (Vasquez et al., 2013), and *How am I privileged/ not privileged* (McIntosh, 1988). Both the preservice teachers and I wrote in a reflective journal at the end of the sessions and then at the beginning of each session we would respond to other peoples’ entries.

This was an enlightening experience for both the preservice teachers and myself. The preservice teachers learned the importance of reevaluating the messages that affected their sense of self. I discovered the importance of being an authentic contributor to the group. This caused me to wrestle with my own various identities. The study that I am documenting is a continuation of my previous critical literacy study. I continued my research by coenacting a critical literacy Junk Art Club with the preservice teachers who took part in the critical literacy workshop.

My research question was as follows: What happens when I, an early childhood teacher educator, scaffold the teaching of critical literacy with three preservice teachers as we facilitate a Junk Art Club with kindergarten, first- and second-grade students? All three preservice teachers
previously took part in a critical literacy workshop group that I facilitated, where they worked to unpack their own relationship with literacy and power. I am interested in fostering and documenting their continued growth as critical literacy educators. Specifically, I ask: What evidence is there that the critical literacy conceptualizations previously constructed in their critical literacy workshop support their enactment of critical literacy teaching in the Junk Art Club? How does providing feedback, instruction, explanations, and questions for the preservice teachers support their enactment of critical literacy instruction as they increasingly facilitate the Junk Art Club?
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I begin this chapter by discussing the key terms used in the study as well as the theoretical framework used to analyze the literature. I then discuss the literature review that was conducted prior to the study and during the analysis.

It is important, before discussing the literature review for this study, to define the key terms that are used in this study. Those are critical literacy, junk art, unpacking, scaffolding, and semiotics. Critical literacy is developing an understanding that a literate person is more than someone who can decode words on a page. The literate person must be able to understand that the written word is never neutral (Freire, 1972), it is embedded with political power (Freire, 1972, Janks, 2013), and it often reflects the perspective of the dominant group in society.

Junk art is utilizing recyclables or used items to create three-dimensional art (Junk art, n.d.). Those items are typically discarded and deemed worthless. Junk art materials are usually metal, cardboard, plastic, cloth, wood and other discarded or found materials. This form of expression was created to demonstrate that art could be made from any found or discarded materials (Junk art, n.d.). Using junk art as a mechanism to teach critical literacy provides students with the opportunity to express their understanding of the world through both art and literacy.

Unpacking is a process of looking closely and analyzing one’s experiences. The process of unpacking one’s experiences requires that people spend time contemplating the experiences they have had as well as the ideas they hold as truths in their lives (McIntosh, 1989). Through this process of reflecting and interrogating one can develop a new perspective on both his or her experiences and beliefs.

Scaffolding, a term that was developed by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), has been
defined in numerous ways. For the purpose of this study, I define scaffolding as the process of supporting learning by transferring responsibility of the task from the teacher to the student (Verenikina, 2003). This can be accomplished through feedback, instruction, explanation, and questioning (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

Finally, semiotic is the study of the way different groups of people make and express meaning through signs (Berghoff & Harste, 2002). Sign systems are the understanding that one can have multiple ways of knowing and expressing knowledge that transcend literacy (Short & Harste, 1996). Because every sign is a symbol that has meaning one does not to privilege written words above other signs (Berghoff & Harste, 2002).

I have provided these definitions in order to ensure clarity for my study. This chapter began with a discussion about my own experiences with critical literacy that led me to embark on this venture. Next I discuss the historical background and the theoretical framework used to analyze the literature for this study.

**Conceptual Framework**

Below I discuss the framework I used in creating this research study. Critical literacy and sign systems became the lens through which I analyzed the research in the literature review and designed my study.

**Critical Literacy**

There are four guiding principles in my critical literacy framework (Freire, 1972, Shor, 2008): (a) All texts are embedded with political power and are never neutral; (b) Critical literacy demands that the reader interrogates the text and reads the word and the world; (c) Critical literacy is a process of deconstructing and reframing; and (d) Critical literacy is central to empowerment, the unpacking of privilege, and social responsibility. Through these principles, I
sought to explain the importance for preservice teachers of not only becoming critically literate but also using this knowledge to develop a new understanding of self and others as well as becoming an agent of change both inside and outside the classroom.

**Texts Are Embedded with Political Power and Are Never Neutral.**

Literate texts represent the reader/writer’s personal perspective of the world (Shor, 2008). This is true in terms of how a constructed text becomes a representation of the author’s understanding and position in society through his background knowledge, experiences, and values. But this also manifests in how a reader interprets a text. Therefore, literacy acts can never be neutral or free from political power (Freire, 1972). Those in society who possess power and privilege often have access to the institutions that create the written word and are the acknowledged voices in society. They see themselves represented in texts.

Being literate is one way that a person constructs knowledge and makes meaning. It is paramount to understand that there is a connection between knowledge and power. Knowledge is not an absolute truth; it is a social construct. It is the way in which societal values and norms are understood (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). These norms and values are directly connected to the power relations in society (Freire, 1972).

**Critical Literacy Demands that the Reader Interrogates the Text and Reads the Word and the World.** It is imperative that one engages critically with texts. This demands more than decoding the word but rather reading the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). It involves interrogating the text for a deeper meaning. Reading the world is developing both an understanding of the political power entwined in literate acts as well as developing a critical consciousness (Freire, 1972). Critical consciousness is having an in-depth understanding of the oppression in society as well as taking action to overcome this oppression (Freire, 1972).
Through developing a critical consciousness one can begin to see the system of power embedded in texts. One needs to go beneath the surface and problematize the relationship between literacy and power (Shor, 2008) in order to understand how oppression is embedded into society. This is accomplished through the process of deconstructing and reframing literacy (Janks, 2013).

**Critical Literacy is a Process of Deconstructing and Reframing.** Deconstructing and reframing texts can lead to developing a critical consciousness (Freire, 1973; Janks, 2013). Deconstructing is the process of both disrupting the common place and interrogating multiple perspectives (Vasquez et al., 2013). This requires questioning the social construct of self and of others (Shor, 2008) and deconstructing the political messages that have been embedded in texts (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985) through examining, challenging, and exploring (Comber & Simpson, 2001). These messages tell society who has power, whose opinion is valued, and who has potential. This process demands that one looks at both the heard and unheard voices in narratives (Freire, 1972). Unheard voices are voices that are excluded from texts by non-representation or being silenced, while heard voices are the voices that are represented in the textbooks, curricula, and all other forms of texts.

In order to be critically literate, it is important to not only deconstruct texts but also reframe narratives. Reframing involves developing a new understanding of the world and how literacy influences our self-concept (Janks, 2013). Without reframing, it is difficult to move towards becoming critically literate. The process of reframing involves contemplating possibilities through self-correcting (Vasquez et al., 2013) and developing a new understanding of oneself, others, and the political nature of literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Reframing invites the creation of a counter narrative (Vasquez et al., 2013) and provides conceptual tools (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985) that facilitate work to end the injustices in society (Shor, 2008).
Critical Literacy is Central to Empowerment, the Unpacking of Privilege, and Social Responsibility. Deconstructing and reframing one’s understanding of the world facilitate a commitment to activism (Fennimore, 2000). This invites a new understanding of inequities in literacy and society. It may not change the unemployment rate however it can invite people to take action (Shor, 2008). Critical literacy encourages a perspective that all texts are political acts (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). This new understanding of the status quo invites activism for social justice and agency for change (Janks, 2013). Advocating for social justice is more than developing an understanding; it is a commitment to fighting the injustices in society. Advocating for social justice according to Freire (1972) must be led by the oppressed group in society. It is only through their dedication to liberation that society can change and they can become agents of change rather than victims (Vasquez et al., 2013). Agents of change work towards ending inequity in society through taking action inside and outside the classroom.

However, it is also important that privileged members of society develop an understanding of critical literacy. They need to unpack their privilege (McIntosh, 1989) and work towards supporting the oppressed fight towards liberation in order to create a society based upon the principals of social justice (Freire, 1972). This does not come without redefining their understanding of their privilege in society and acknowledging its unearned status (McIntosh, 1989). This is challenging, as it demands both a re-evaluation of their sense of self and others, as well as a reframing of how they achieved success in society. Through contemplating the political power embedded in literate acts, privileged members of society can begin to understand the importance of joining the oppressed in the fight towards liberation (Freire, 1972).

The process of contemplating and expressing how political power is embedded in literacy demands that a person understands that literacy encompasses a variety of sign systems (Siegel,
2006). Below I discuss how I conceptualize sign systems.

**Sign Systems**

Literacy is more than the written word (Siegel, 2006). It includes all forms of communication. Semiotics is the study of the way different groups of people make and express meaning (Berghoff & Harste, 2002). Sign systems are the understanding that one can have multiple ways of knowing and expressing knowledge that transcend literacy (Short & Harste, 1996). These varied forms of communication use different sign systems to express meaning (Short & Harste, 1996; Siegel, 2006). They include mathematics, drama, art, language, and music. These sign systems provide varied perspectives and different ways of knowing and expressing understanding. Each of these sign systems affords a person the potential to make meaning of the world and express different ideas (Leland & Harste, 1994). Traditionally communication is often defined as language-based and many of these other sign systems are forgotten (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988). Yet is imperative to acknowledge the importance of each of these sign systems and how they enable people to construct understanding and knowing in different ways (Graham & Benson, 2010).

**Critical Literacy Analysis of the Review of Literature**

The critical literacy framework discussed above is the lens through which I analyze the articles in the review of the literature, which will be discussed in the following section. Below I present a literature review on critical literacy and preservice teachers. This review was undertaken with the goal of examining what the current academic research literature reported about how preservice teachers develop an understanding of and ability to incorporate critical literacy in the classroom in order to situate my study in the current research.

The themes that emerged across the literature include: deconstructing literacy leads to the
development of a critical literacy stance; viewing the world through a critical literacy lens is a process that takes time and reflection; the importance of embedding critical literacy across teacher education programs; the barriers that preservice educators construct to avoid the unsettling process of thinking about and acting upon critical literacy; and the lack of critically literate mentors for preservice teachers.

**Preservice Teachers Need to Examine Their Own Literacy and Positions in Society Before Taking on a Critical Literacy Stance**

From a critical literacy perspective all texts, no matter their genres, represent a person or group of people’s beliefs, views of the world, and their personal biases (Freire, 1972; Luke & Freebody, 1997). In order for preservice teachers to understand their relationships with power, privilege, and the social injustices in society, they must first reflect on and deconstruct their relationship with the systems in society that keep the status quo of power in place (Vasquez et al., 2013; Wolfe, 2010). Personal critical reflection of society, power, and privilege is the first step toward critical literacy and will hopefully lead to preservice and inservice teachers engaging in teaching critical literacy in the classroom (Freire & Macedo, 1998). This encompasses developing an understanding of how literacy has affected the way a person sees the world and themselves. It is important that preservice teachers spend time contemplating and reflecting (Comber & Simpson, 2001) about themselves and the effect literacy has had on them. Preservice teachers have the potential to develop a new understanding of themselves and the importance of critical literacy in education.

Sluys et al. (2005), in their study, shared that when discussing texts, preservice teachers were not able to make connections to social justice topics or take a critical stance due to a lack of opportunity to unpack the concept of critical literacy. Their discussions about children’s
literature only focused on the obvious meanings of the text and the facts of the stories rather than examining deeper concepts of power and inequity. This, they believed, was because critical literacy was introduced quickly and preservice teachers were not given the opportunity to process and unpack the concept of critical literacy. They needed to undo and disrupt their own relationship with literacy and power in society (Comber & Simpson, 2001). They had to understand how their self-concept has been influenced by literacy experiences and how this image is related to the structures of power in society. The studies of Wolfe (2010) and Norris et al. (2012) also discussed the importance of brainstorming and engaging in discussions about critical literacy before enacting critical literacy curricula. The preservice teachers in their studies were not able to create critical literacy curricula because they had not developed a deep understanding of the relationship between literacy, language, and power. It is therefore important to consider giving preservice teachers the opportunity to engage in this deconstruction to understand their literacy perspective.

*Nurturing a Safe Environment for Preservice Teachers and Teacher Educators*

In order to develop a critically literate lens, preservice teachers and teacher educators need a nurturing environment where they are encouraged to take risks. This requires that the teacher educator facilitates the opportunities but allows the learning and the discussion to be driven by the preservice teachers (Calderwood et al., 2010; Groenke, 2008; Jewett, 2007; Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Robertson & Hughes, 2011; Rozansky-Lyodd, 2006). Calderwood et al. (2010) found, through an organic and authentic email discussion, that preservice teachers were able to unpack the concept of critical literacy by analyzing literature collaboratively. Through questioning, affirming, and revealing personally, the preservice teachers were able to connect the text to themselves and the world. They were also able to discuss the text through a social justice
lens. The key factor in this study was that the preservice teachers rather than the teacher educator drove the dialogue. Through leading the discussion preservice teachers could engage in an authentic discussion of the concept of critical literacy and power through analyzing literature. One of the researchers shared his reflection of the email conversations. He described how the conversation changed when he stopped leading the discussion:

My early attempts to explicitly teach were not built upon by the students, while my contributions that were more authentic to the conversation such as affirmations and a mid-conversation personal revelation, were used to further develop the path of the conversation. (Calderwood et al., 2010, p. 5)

Preservice teachers, who were reflecting through a critical literacy lens, facilitated the emails organically. One student, for example, wrote:

Is it enough that we explore how people with disabilities are treated in “Gathering Blue” and why we think it is unfair or should we look for our own similarities in our own environment and address them? At what level are you engaging in rhetoric and at what level are you engaging in meaningful activity. (Calderwood et al., 2010, p. 11)

This student’s thoughts indicate that she is beginning to contemplate social justice issues and connect them to thinking about critical literacy. Through examining the text’s stance on how people with disabilities are treated, she was able to begin to develop the ability to think critically about literacy.

The class conversations in teacher education classes also have the power to raise the awareness of preservice teachers about both equitable and inequitable power in education and society (Rozansky-Lyodd, 2006). Preservice teachers, through unpacking their past as well as their student teaching experiences, can begin to develop an understanding of how individuals
experience society differently. To do this, they must see their role or lack of role in the power hierarchies of society (Comber & Simpson, 2001). By unpacking their personal “backpack of privilege” (McIntosh, 1989), students are able to begin to examine society through a critical literacy lens (Freire, 1972).

A personal understanding of the power that is embedded in language requires that preservice teachers reflect upon the current structures of oppression in society (Freire, 1972; Smith, 2001). This can be done through discourse analysis (Calderwood et al., 2010) or implicit instruction. Lee et al. (2011) described how preservice teachers in a class project were given the opportunity to engage in an activity where they created a new language and then, through “discussion, negotiation, contestation, compromise, and marginalization” (p. 6), worked to choose one of the languages as the new class language. This gave students firsthand experience of what it feels like to be in power or to be marginalized. One preservice teacher when reflecting on the process stated:

If I didn’t speak up to defend my language it could have easily been wiped out. As it was, I felt disappointed because it didn’t resemble my first language at all. I can see how the dominant part of the group controlled how the language was changed because they exerted more power and control. (Lee et al., 2011, p. 247)

Another student shared:

Many of my original ideas survived through the first three revisions, which was empowering. I felt included in the new language. When it came to the final version, few of my groups’ words survived. That was difficult. I began to disengage when my culture was largely ignored. (Lee et al., 2011, p. 247)

Both of these quotes point to the importance of giving students opportunities to
experience the feelings of being in power or being marginalized through literacy. This allowed
the students to develop an understanding of the power of language as well as how it feels to be
marginalized. They wrote about feelings of frustration as well as feelings of not being heard in
the conversation. These are examples of developing an understanding of critical literacy because
thinking critically about texts demands understanding how literacy is a vehicle of power and
oppression.

These studies speak to the value of providing varied learning experiences for preservice
teachers to engage in discussions and activities that allow them the space, freedom, and support
to create their own personal definition and understanding of critical literacy. Not only do
preservice teachers need a nurturing environment but also it is important that teacher educators
need to feel comfortable engaging in hard conversations with their students (Calderwood et al.,
2010; Freire, 1972; Smith, 2001; Vasquez et al., 2013). Only through this comfortable
environment can a teacher educator be prepared to facilitate productive discourse. The studies of
Smith (2001) and Calderwood et al. (2010) demonstrated the importance of having the teacher
educator develop an understanding of the concept as well as a comfort with facilitating critical
literacy discussions. Without this, teacher educators will either end conversations by lecturing or
changing the topic due to their inability to manage controversial discussions. These lost
opportunities create an experience where preservice teachers are unable to unpack their own
understanding of critical literacy and social justice.

**Developing Critical Literacy Is an Ongoing Process**

Developing an understanding of critical literacy as well as the ability to integrate it into
classroom curricula entails taking a reflective introspective journey (Comber & Simpson, 2001).
Unlike facts to be memorized this journey involves deep contemplation and soul searching where
preservice teachers have the opportunity to interrogate literacy and read the word and the world (Freire, 1972). It is therefore important that teacher educators understand that the process is individually driven and valuable (Groenke, 2008; Jewett, 2007; Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Lee et al., 2011; Mosley, 2010; Robertson & Hughes, 2011; Rozansky-Lyodd, 2006; Wolfe, 2010). This is not a process that can be rushed but rather preservice teachers need the time and support to engage fully in the experience to develop a deep understanding of critical literacy.

The ability to think critically about the relationship between power and literacy in society is a new concept to many preservice teachers. As students they were taught to read, digest, and retain information. Texts were considered valid simply because they were printed. When preservice teachers are then asked to read and begin to teach critically, teacher educators are asking them to go against their basic and at times implicit theory of reading and even learning, that has been imparted to them during their previous educational career (Freire & Macedo, 1998). Therefore, it is important to realize that if preservice teachers have learned how to read and understand literature over their lifetime than they cannot expect to completely develop a new way of thinking in a brief period.

This correlates with the findings of Mosley’s (2010) study in which she examined the individual reflections of preservice teachers over two semesters. They used a critical literacy lens with children they were tutoring in a weekly reading lab. She found that the participants did not consistently exhibit the ability to engage in critical dialogue with students. Instead, the preservice teachers would skirt the issue by not asking probing questions or engaging in difficult conversation. As they continued to tutor their reflections began to show a marked difference in their perceptions of themselves as critical thinkers and teachers. The preservice teachers began to be able to reflect on the relationship between power and literacy in their lives and the lives of the
students.

Mosley (2010) deemed this as a study of approximations of critical literacy, in that the findings showed varied attempts at critical discussion that were considered part of the process of developing critical literacy skills. Approximations of critical literacy are attempts to begin to teach critical literacy. Preservice teachers may engage in critical literacy, analyze texts, and briefly lead critical discussions in a classroom on occasion, however they are unable to incorporate these practices into the daily life of the classroom. For example, one student teacher planned and hoped to engage in a critical discussion with students, yet was unable to engage in the discussion during the lesson. These attempts are valued as steps towards becoming critically literate because it gives preservice teachers the needed experience in order to feel comfortable and prepared to embed this lens into the fabric of a classroom.

The studies of Norris et al. (2012) and Robertson and Hughes (2011) also spoke to the importance of valuing the process of developing critical literacy. Norris et al. (2012), through introducing critical literacy as a reading strategy to preservice teachers, found that many of the participants began to understand the topic but needed more time and support to develop a deep understanding. Robertson and Hughes (2011) discussed the importance of first having preservice teachers become aware of critical literacy. Most of the preservice teachers, in their semester-long study, were beginning to develop an emergent understanding of the impact of literacy on their lives and their students’ lives. In interviews, several preservice teachers discussed the need for social justice books in the classroom and the need to teach critical literacy so students would not be “suckers” for media messages. The teacher educators supported them in their attempts, which varied greatly in their outcome. Rather than expecting everyone to be able to create a media literacy lesson, the value was placed on initiating the conversation and commencing the journey.
Teacher educators need to develop an understanding of the process of developing a critical literacy stance and an awareness of the fact that different preservice teachers experience this process at their own pace depending on their motivation. This motivation is based upon the background experiences of the preservice teachers as well as the amount of privilege they possess (Smith, 2001). Without valuing the process, the teacher educator will not be able to facilitate a critical literacy discussion. The process then becomes the central focus of critical literacy development rather than seeking an immediate finished product. This parallels the field of education in general, where it is widely accepted that preservice teachers do not enter their first classrooms as finished products but rather as works in process. They will develop and refine their teaching craft over their teaching career (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

**Critical Literacy Needs to Be Embedded in Various Components of Teacher Education Programs**

Lack of classroom time was a barrier to preservice teachers’ ability to develop an understanding of critical literacy. Many of the research studies were conducted over a brief period of time and students were not given the needed time and support to develop a new way of understanding and interacting with literacy. The study conducted by Sluys et al. (2005) is a perfect example. During a six-week intensive semester, the participants were introduced to critical literacy in an introduction to a preservice reading class. The instructor chose the texts and facilitated various activities that gave students the opportunity to delve into social justice issues. Data was collected from researchers’ observations as well as students’ reflections. The findings concluded that students were not able to engage in critical conversations because of their limited experience with critical literacy. The researchers assumed that given the opportunities to engage in critical conversation preservice teachers would have more substantially developed their
critical literacy stances. Instead they used various defense mechanisms against engaging in
critical literacy work that I discuss in future sections of this review. Upon reporting their
findings, the researchers theorized that the six-week time limit was a major factor in the inability
to facilitate critical literacy among the preservice teachers.

This compares with Wolfe’s (2010) study, which was conducted over a much longer
period of time of two semesters. Wolfe’s study had a slightly higher success rate when compared
to other studies in this review. It was conducted in a school where preservice teachers were
enrolled in a program that embedded social justice into the entire program. Students were able to
learn and work through the concept of social justice in all their classes rather than focusing on it
in one section of their program. The findings show that these preservice teachers were able to
engage in critical literacy at a higher rate during their second semester of critical literacy
instruction.

The research findings supported the assumption that developing critical literacy skills in
an isolated class is not conducive to nurturing preservice teachers’ critical literacy skills. It is
therefore imperative that social justice and critical literacy are embedded into the entire teacher
education program. Isolation, however, is not the only barrier. There are numerous other barriers,
which impede the development of the ability to engage in discussions and implementation of a
critical literacy curriculum in the classroom.

**Individual Barriers to a Critical Literacy Curriculum**

The ability to develop a critical literacy curriculum demands that preservice teachers not
only create their own definition of critical literacy, but also can plan and implement it in their
classroom. This is an individual journey, requiring that the preservice teachers question, reflect,
and assess themselves and the world around them, and can be meet with resistance (Dedeoglu,
Preservice teachers enter the classroom with varied levels of cultural and social capital. It is essential that preservice teachers begin to contemplate and unpack their backpack of privilege (McIntosh, 1989). Through looking at the ways in which they personally hold privilege and ways they do not, preservice teachers begin to develop a new perspective of their place and role in society. This process can be unsettling and cause disequilibrium for individuals who possess a large amount of social and cultural capital.

In turn, this disequilibrium can cause preservice teachers to resist and avoid contemplating their unearned privilege. A study conducted by Smith (2001) reported that preservice teachers who possessed white privilege were resistant to discussing books that documented the Native American and Latinx experience. This caused tension in the classroom as the White preservice teachers avoided discussing issues of inequity in society. Unless preservice teachers who possess white privilege are willing to acknowledge that the privilege they possess was not earned or deserved, they will not be able to engage in discussions or classroom units of study focused on social justice and critical literacy.

Protecting their unearned privilege is not the only way preservice teachers avoid controversial issues. In the process of developing a new understanding of themselves and the society in which they live, they use numerous strategies to avoid discussing and teaching topics that cause discomfort. The research has documented many of these defense mechanisms: viewing the topic through a single perspective, avoiding critical discussions by using conversational avoidance techniques, protecting the innocence of childhood, and using parents’ possible objections to sideline controversial issues.
May et al. (2014) conducted a study where preservice teachers avoided a controversial topic by examining the issue through a single perspective. During the study the preservice teachers were charged with planning a critical literacy unit of study that focused on President Obama. The preservice teachers were only able to look at President Obama through only one perspective. They saw him as a Black man, but were not willing to see him as a man who enjoyed educational privilege and opportunity. Looking at his privilege was uncomfortable. The preservice teachers were not able to look at the complexities of identity in society. Instead, they were comfortable connecting to the image of the president that was the most comfortable.

Critical literacy is the process of reading knee deep (Jewett, 2007). In order to read knee deep, one must be able to delve into texts and fully entrench oneself in all aspects of the piece or issue. This entails asking the hard questions that are not part of typical reading comprehension. It is asking whose voice is heard, whose is missing, what is the purpose of the piece, who receives power from the information, and how does the piece reflect the current status quo of power in place (Freire & Macedo, 1998). In order to do that one must move past dealing with the visible layer and unpack the various hidden layers that are embedded. This becomes an unsettling process at best. Preservice teachers also can avoid critical discussion by using several conversational avoidance techniques. The study conducted by Schmidt, Armstrong, and Everett (2007) researched teachers’ resistance to critical conversations in the classroom. The study was conducted with both preservice and practicing teachers. However, for the interest of this discussion, I focus only on the preservice teachers. Through data collection (discussions, transcripts, effective writing, written responses, and field notes), researchers found that participants avoided critical discussions using numerous techniques such as avoiding controversy, literal responses, distancing, and speaking in the third person. These avoidance
techniques were detrimental to the process of developing a social justice perspective.

Preservice teachers use various conversational defense mechanisms to avoid this disequilibrium. The one used the most often was literal and text-based responses. Two studies (Sluys et al., 2005; Wolfe, 2010) found that critical conversations are avoided by engaging in text-based and literal responses when discussing literature. Literal and text-based responses are interactions with the text, which are based solely on the text of the reading with no connection to background knowledge, the relationship of power in our society, or social justice issues. Sluys et al. (2005) found several examples of literal and text-based responses. When reading a book about homelessness, preservice teachers avoided the topic completely by discussing how the main character could be Santa Claus, instead of a homeless man. At one point they began to argue when a member of the literature circle suggested that, rather than Santa Claus, the person was homeless. Instead of delving into the social issue of homelessness, they focused on how the character possibly could be make-believe. It was apparent that they were more comfortable discussing a fictitious character than an important social issue. The preservice teachers asked questions of the literature circle that skimmed the surface, such as the group’s favorite characters. This strategy allowed the reader to avoid the emotional discomfort that arises when looking into issues of inequity and social justice in society.

Kelly and Brooks (2009) discovered that several preservice teachers used the desire to protect childhood innocence as a justification for avoiding controversial issues. The greater the preservice teachers’ belief in childhood innocence, the more they avoided discussing or implementing a curriculum in the classroom that dealt with social justice and critical literacy issues. These findings correlated with a study that was conducted in a Turkish university by Dedeoglu et al. (2012). Preservice teachers were read children’s books that dealt with lesbian,
gay, bisexual, and transgender issues. Fifty two percent of preservice teachers reported in a survey that they would not use the children’s books in a classroom. Over fifty percent of those who answered negatively stated that their reason was because the topic was not appropriate for children. In both studies, the preservice teachers avoided difficult issues by claiming the need to protect children’s innocence.

**Lack of Critical Literacy Field-Based Mentors**

One of the barriers to enacting critical literacy for preservice teachers is the lack of critical literacy mentors in the classroom (Rozansky-Lyodd, 2006; Sluys et al., 2005; Smith, 2001). Two studies (Robertson & Hughes, 2011; Rozansky-Lyodd, 2006) reported that preservice teachers found it hard to envision, plan, and implement critical literacy in their student teaching classroom because their cooperative teachers were not role modeling how to accomplish this. Research has shown the importance of a quality student teacher experience, its influence of how teachers develop (Darling-Hammond, 2000), and its influence on the development of the ability to think and teach critical literacy (Vasquez et al., 2013). It provides preservice teachers with the hands-on experience and foundation needed to become successful in the classroom. Therefore, if the goal is to create future teachers who are agents of change and critically literate in the classroom, it is imperative that they are able to experience it firsthand. Without this experience preservice teachers face an uphill battle.

Not only is there a lack of role models during the student teaching experience, there are also numerous examples where mentor teachers are actively working to continue the educational inequity that marginalizes children’s experience in the classroom. During a research study conducted by Rozansky-Lyodd (2006), preservice teachers shared numerous examples of how the students in their student teaching placements were marginalized in the classroom. One
preservice teacher’s cooperative teacher, when asked why she did not have the children write their name on their paper, responded that she believed they could not do it. This class, made up of mostly Black students of low socioeconomic status, was denied the opportunity to begin to write because the teacher had preconceived ideas of their abilities. This teacher was furthering the current inequity in education and society. Exposure to these beliefs and practices, if considered quality teaching by the preservice teachers, can facilitate the creation of future teachers who continue to marginalize specific populations.

**Post-Study Literature**

Upon analyzing the data of the study, it came apparent that emotions and the connection between race, gender, and critical literacy are integral parts of the process of becoming a critical literacy educator. Therefore, I find that it is essential to include a discussion of the literature concerning emotions and the learning process and race, gender, and critical literacy in this chapter.

**Emotions**

Emotions have traditionally been viewed as a barrier to learning and separate from cognitive processes and the developing cognitive understanding (Winans, 2012). Managing emotions is often framed as something that occurs outside of classroom learning (Hochschild, 1979). However current researchers have developed a deeper understanding of the connections between emotions and learning. Emotions are a way of knowing oneself and the world in which we live (Dirkx, 2008). They frequently manifest as embodied memories of one’s experiences and understandings of one’s self, others, and the world (Denzin, 1985). Emotions can be a part of meaning making, knowledge construction, and the learning process (Forgasz & Clemans, 2014; Taylor, 1988).
Becoming a teacher educator is an emotional experience (Zembylas, 2003). As the preservice teachers move through their program, they are reconstructing their identity from student to preservice teacher to teacher educator (Hamman et al., 2010). The same can be said of the journey to becoming a critical literacy educator. It is the process of reevaluating and reconstructing one’s understanding of self and others which requires unpacking one’s emotions (Vasquez et al., 2013). Emotions are essential to the process. It is through emotions, and using them as an alternate way of knowing, that preservice teachers develop an understanding of critical literacy.

**Critical Literacy Race and Gender**

People of color and women have systematically been marginalized in texts. Through stereotypes, misrepresentation, and silence, both of these groups have been continually traumatized by texts and the media. People of color are continually represented in texts through a negative lens. The negative lens through which they are portrayed is not without consequences; leading to implicit bias (Robinson, 2015) and negative perception of self (hooks, 1992). Women, through the media and texts, have also been boxed into a limited understanding of who they are and what they can achieve. One message that is pervasive throughout texts is that a women’s role is to be good, faithful, gentle, and subordinate to men. When a woman does not fit this stereotype, she is considered to be abusing power and selfish (Fixmer-Oraiz & Woods, 2019). Both people of color and women are marginalized in texts. It is important to interrogate texts not only to disrupt white male privilege but to also heal the wounds caused by texts and in particular media texts (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Using critical literacy strategies is imperative for marginalized populations in the struggle for social and educational justice. It is an essential part of a healing pedagogy. Baker-Bell,
Stanbrough, and Everett (2017) discussed two important components to the healing pedagogy: acknowledging and transforming. First, one must acknowledge the wound and identify the culprit, and then one transforms the conditions that caused the wound. Therefore, it is important that marginalized groups are not only able to understand how their self-concepts have been affected by texts, but also transform the messages and heal the wounds.

This chapter documents my critical literacy framework prior to beginning my research study, and discusses the literature about preparing preservice teachers to enact critical literacy in the classroom. The research documented the numerous barriers that teacher educators have faced. In my study, of which I document the methodology in the next chapter, I attempt to build on the prior research and create an innovative approach to preparing preservice teachers to becoming critical literacy educators.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The process of preparing preservice teachers to teach critical literacy in their classrooms is fraught with barriers. One of the most salient barriers is the lack of time devoted to the subject in teacher education programs. I began my research by conducting a critical literacy workshop with preservice teachers where we had the opportunity to unpack our relationship with literacy and power. I designed this study to build upon the previous study. The previous teachers from the first study and I worked together to plan and implement Junk Art Club (JAC) with kindergarten, first-, and second-graders. I sought to answer the following three research questions: (a) What happens when I, an early childhood teacher educator, scaffold the teaching of critical literacy with three preservice teachers as we facilitate a Junk Art Club with kindergarten, first-, and second-grade students? and (b) What evidence is there that the critical literacy conceptualizations previously constructed in their critical literacy workshop support their enactment of critical literacy teaching in the Junk Art Club? and (c) How does providing feedback, instruction, explanations, and questions for the preservice teachers support the enactment of critical literacy teaching as they increasingly facilitate the Junk Art Club?

In the following chapter, I begin by explaining my understanding of the purpose of research with teacher education. I then discuss practitioner action research. Finally, I share the components of my research: context, participants, study, data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness.

Before discussing the methodology of my study, here I explain my understanding of the purpose of research within teacher education. Teacher education programs are the cornerstones of creating quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000). They provide preservice teachers with the academic and practical knowledge as well as the mentoring needed to start their teaching
career. It is imperative that teacher educators like me, given the importance of their task, continue to question and grow as practitioners. Without research, I would not have the opportunity to examine, evaluate, and develop my practice. Research is a window into the inner workings of my college classroom. The process of collecting data and examining it afforded me the opportunity to look at my practice, curriculum, and classroom through new eyes. Throughout my doctoral career, I have developed new understandings of the benefits of researching my practice and am dedicated to continuing this as I grow as an academic.

**Practitioner Action Research**

Practitioner action research allowed me the opportunity to engage in research, which expanded my understanding of my practice, myself as an educator, and my participants’ experiences in an educational setting. This framework differs from traditional research in that I as the principal investigator was an active participant in the study. I did not plan to conduct participatory action research, which would involve the participants in the research process throughout the entire study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Instead in practitioner action research, the researcher is both a practitioner and a researcher. Participants are invited to take part in the study however for my study I as the researcher was solely responsible for facilitating the process, posing questions, and gathering and analyzing data (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). As the researcher, I collected data and reflecting on the participants’ learning and their interactions with one another as well as with me. This allowed me as researcher the opportunity to develop a deeper more complex understanding of the preservice teachers’ learning process, which potentially led to me taking action (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007).

Practitioner action research invited me to reflect on the research process, my assumptions, practices, and eventually my findings. Through this process, I was able to develop a
deeper understanding of my teaching practice and myself as a teacher educator (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Using this research methodology helped me grow as a reflective educator and investigate how to support preservice teachers integrating critical literacy in their future classrooms as well as contributing to the literature on critical literacy for preservice teachers in teacher education programs.

This methodology was suited for my study for several reasons. First, practitioner action research afforded me the opportunity to be both a practitioner and a researcher in my study. Through these dual roles, I had the opportunity to continually evaluate my practice, and analyze and take action in the study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This would not be achievable if I were an outsider to the study, as I would be limited to the role of observer. Secondly, practitioner action research is described as a cyclic process where I constantly was engaged in brainstorming actions, putting those actions into place, observing, reflecting, and then beginning the process again (Anderson et. al, 2007). Throughout my study, I needed to constantly be engaged in the cyclic process described above to support my participants as well as develop an understanding of the research question. This was accomplished by facilitating the planning of the critical literacy workshop, reflecting on the planning meetings, developing a plan to scaffold the teaching experiences of preservice teachers during the planning and facilitation of the Junk Art Club session, reflecting and evaluating the club session, and then beginning the process again. The process of continually evaluating and questioning my practice and my preservice teachers’ practice allowed me the opportunity to look closely at the process of guiding preservice teachers as they work to enact critical literacy in the Junk Art Club.

Lastly, enacting critical literacy within the preservice teacher education program is a political act that seeks to move past the confines of the current status quo in teacher education,
which is discussed in detail above. Using practitioner action research as a vehicle aligns with this goal because it is by its very nature a political act. Practitioner action research is political because practitioners through investigation and contemplation challenge the understanding of the limited role of teachers and working to take social action in the classroom (Anderson et al., 2007).

Context

I conducted my practitioner action research study in an urban northeastern community college, where I am an assistant professor of Education. Easton Community College is a public institution which was established in September 1974 and is located in a bustling urban neighborhood that is currently experiencing gentrification. The mission of the institution is “to provide high quality educational opportunities that promote student success and are accessible, comprehensive, and learning centered” (“Mission of the College”, n.d.). The college is devoted to providing quality education as the foundation needed to either successfully transfer or enter into the work force.

The college is moving towards using guided pathways in order to ensure students are able to successfully complete their degree as quickly as possible while ensuring the integrity of the degree. Guided pathways are a method of structuring curriculum maps that limits students’ choices in order to ensure students’ success (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). These are being introduced to the college and used in the curricula to increase retention and graduation rates.

The college currently has a diverse student population of approximately 9,000 students. As of the fall of 2017, the institution was 55%, Latinx 14% Black, 12% White, and 8% Asian. Over 90% of the student population received financial aid. The college has a hundred full-time faculty members and several hundred adjuncts.
The Education department in which I work is made up of three full-time faculty members. Two of the faculty members are currently working on their Ph.D.’s, while the third just completed her Ed.D.. The department is dedicated to creating a quality teacher education program that prepares preservice teachers to transfer to a four-year institution.

The education program has just entered into a dual admission agreement with a local four-year university. Preservice teachers will be able to enroll at both institutions concurrently and, after finishing their associate degree, seamlessly continue their studies at the four-year institution where they will earn a bachelor’s degree. They will also have access to the facilities at the university while they are working on their associate degree.

The Junk Art Club was run for six weeks at Easton Community College on Saturday afternoons. I advertised the club through flyers and word of mouth, which was open to the children of faculty, staff, and students. It was held in the teacher education lab at the college, which is a college classroom partially designed to replicate an early childhood classroom. It contains a wide variety of art supplies, manipulatives, blocks, science equipment, dramatic play props, and books. The lab provided me the needed supplies and space to host the Junk Art Club.

The initial planning session was held in the conference room, which connected to my office, for about two hours. I started by asking the preservice teachers about their understanding of critical literacy. I then facilitated their creation of goals for the JAC and finally we made lesson plans for each JAC session. I typed the lesson plan as the preservice teachers and I planned, then read back each lesson plan section to check for accuracy. We finished by writing in our journals.

For the first three weeks, the subsequent planning sessions were an hour before the start of the JAC. All PowerPoints were created in the classroom prior to the JAC. We all gathered
around a computer and contributed to the process.

For each JAC, the preservice teachers and I greeted the children at the door of the classroom. The number of children depended on the week. The first week we had 7 children, the second week 5, the third week 12, the fourth week 7, the fifth week 8, and the last week 6. The JAC was led each week by myself and the three preservice teachers.

My role in the JAC was that of an active participant. I helped set up the classroom, greeted the children, and worked alongside the preservice teachers as we enacted the lesson. In the first two sessions, I lead the introduction and sharing component and after that supported the preservice teachers as they ran the discussion. I also worked one on one with children as they created the art. After the session, I ran the debriefing and helped the preservice teachers put the room back together. During the debriefing, I began the conversation by asking the preservice teachers questions concerning what went well and what they thought we would change. I then handed out the journals and we wrote. Following the JAC, I answered each of the preservice teachers’ journal entries.

My Positionality

As both the researcher and the facilitator of the CLW and JAC, I had dual roles. The duality of my roles was complex and caused tension. As the facilitator, I wanted to make sure that the preservice teachers were prepared to enact critical literacy and was dedicated to facilitating the process. In fact, I was emotionally invested in the success of the JAC. As the researcher, however, I needed to gather data and look at the experience through an analytical lens. As in all practitioner action research, this caused tension. I wrestled with balancing my emotions and being true to the research. In the CLW, I struggled with the tension between collecting data about my experience as an active participant and wanting to protect my
professional and personal identities. In the JAC, I experienced tension as I struggled with co-constructing as a teacher educator and being invested as a researcher. As a teacher educator, I wanted to protect my teacher identity and therefore resisted the process of co-constructing. While as the researcher I wanted to be invested in the process.

In this study, it was also imperative to acknowledge that I had prior relationships with my participants - they were all my former students. Through my prior experiences as their professor, I had numerous interactions with them, through which I developed an understanding of the preservice teachers as students and future teachers. It was therefore essential to the research that I was transparent with my positionality in relation to the study, and continually interrogated my preconceived understanding of my participants. I discovered that both my identity as a teacher educator and my personal identity influenced my positionality during the study. I discuss this in detail in the Findings Chapter.

Participants

The participants in the study were three preservice teachers who were enrolled at Easton Community College where I am an assistant professor of Education. They all participated in a critical literacy workshop in the fall of 2016 where we unpacked our relationship between literacy and power. It was essential to have participants who had taken part in the critical literacy workshop (CLW) for this study because my research was designed to build upon previous experiences where preservice teachers conceptualized critical literacy and unpacked their relationship between literacy and power. All three participants are women, between the ages of twenty and twenty-three, who majored in early childhood education at Easton Community College. Two of the women are Latinx and one is both Latinx and White. Two are attending an urban university a few miles away, while the third is currently taking a break from school as she
focuses on building an internet business.

More specifically, Rose is a twenty-three-year-old Latinx woman. She is an honors student who is also a swimming coach for children ages five to eighteen. Bianca is a thirty-three-year-old woman. She is also an honors student who is constantly traveling during her free time. She has a Latinx mother and White father, and identifies as Latinx. Dora is a Latinx twenty-four-year-old woman whose passion is music, playing over six instruments, yet studies English as her content area for her bachelor’s degree.

Study

The study was a practitioner action research study, where as the principal investigator, I actively participated in the study and was the sole researcher. I scaffolded the planning and teaching of lessons for a six-week junk art critical literacy club for three preservice teachers with kindergarten, first-, and second-grade students. I attempted to support their development as critical literacy educators through providing feedback, instruction, explanation, and questioning as we planned and implemented a curriculum that introduced the children to critical literacy. Through scaffolding, I attempted to slowly turn over responsibility to the preservice teachers.

The study is considered practitioner action research because it is modeled after the action research cycle. I facilitated the development and implementation of the curriculum with the preservice teachers. I provided them feedback, instruction, explanations, and questions. It was then imperative to the process that I record and reflect on the learning that was taking place in the Junk Art Club. Finally, we met and began the process again (Kemmis, 1982).

The Junk Art Club lasted 90 minutes and met once a week for six weeks. The club used glue guns and materials such as boxes, fabric, paper, magazines, and knick-knacks to create junk art. I scaffolded the lesson and curriculum planning for the preservice teachers as we planned the
curriculum of the club together in our planning meetings. I documented the meetings by keeping field notes and digitally recording them.

I chose to use a Junk Art Club as the setting for the study because as discussed above literacy is more than the written word, it involves multiple sign systems (Siegel, 2006). Traditional conceptions of literacy are only one part of our culture’s literacy systems (Leland & Harste, 1994). As Suhor (1992) wrote, “A constellation of cognitive, aesthetic, and psychomotor skills is brought to the surface when we consider students’ abilities to understand and perform in numerous sign systems” (p. 229). Art is an integral sign system used to introduce critical literacy to early childhood children for two reasons. First, it is a sign system that facilitates the understanding and expression of both thinking and feeling (Leland & Harste, 1994). Through accessing both their cognitive and emotional intelligences, children are able to develop a deeper understanding of critical literacy as critical literacy is comprehending how our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by literacy. Secondly, most literacy messages that early childhood students receive and create are a combination of both pictures and words. Teaching critical literacy through these two sign systems gives children the ability to express their understanding of the world through sign systems that facilitate their making meaning of literacy messages (Leland & Harste, 1994).

Data Collection Methods

The study included various forms of data. The data consisted of planning documents, my journals as well as the preservice teachers’, correspondence with my critical friend, field notes, recordings from planning, debriefing, and club meetings, artifacts from the club sessions, and a follow-up questionnaire. Following is a table detailing the data that I collected as well as a timeline.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week /Date</th>
<th>Type of Meeting</th>
<th>Materials Produced</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/7/17</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Prior Learning Chart</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>JAC</td>
<td>Junk Art</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/14/17</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Went Well/Change Chart</td>
<td>Recording Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Lesson Plan</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/21/17</td>
<td>JAC</td>
<td>Junk Art</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Went Well/Change Chart</td>
<td>Recording Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Lesson Plan</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/28/17</td>
<td>JAC</td>
<td>Junk Art</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Went Well/Change Chart</td>
<td>Recording Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Lesson Plan</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/11/17</td>
<td>JAC</td>
<td>Junk Art</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Went Well/Change Chart</td>
<td>Recording Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Lesson Plan</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/18/17</td>
<td>JAC</td>
<td>Junk Art</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Went Well/Change Chart</td>
<td>Recording Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Lesson Plan</td>
<td>Recording Field Notes Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For this study, I attempted to identify ways in which I scaffolded planning and implementing critical literacy lessons in the Junk Art Club for the preservice teachers. It was therefore important to look closely at the planning documents we used. Aiming to support the preservice teachers as they enacted critical literacy in the classroom through providing feedback, instructing, explaining, and questioning, together we brainstormed and decided what graphic representations worked best for both the curriculum for the Junk Art Club as well as the individual lessons. I offered suggestions such as curriculum mapping, but instead as a group we decided to use a basic lesson plan format. This lesson format consisted of three sections: the objectives, the procedure, and the assessments. Below is an example of a lesson plan:

*Figure 1: Thanksgiving Lesson Plan*

**Objective**
- Have the students consider and look at multiple perspectives of the Thanksgiving story

**Materials**
- PowerPoint documenting a Native American child’s perspective of Thanksgiving
- Book: The Thanksgiving Story

**Assessment**
- Observational notes
- Mural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Planning Session - PS</th>
<th>Junk Art Club - JAC</th>
<th>Debriefing - DB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 6 12/16/17</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Went Well/Change</td>
<td>Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Journal Entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/13/18</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Final Debriefing</td>
<td>Recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2/19</td>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Follow Up Questionnaire</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was imperative to the process that the planning document reflected the preservice teachers’ preferred planning styles. I used these documents to develop an understanding of how a teacher educator can provide scaffolding for preservice teachers as they plan critical literacy lessons for the Junk Art Club. It documented the ways that the preservice teachers designed critical literacy lessons and implemented them in the club.

During the first planning session, we worked together to outline the curriculum for the entire six weeks. We created our overall club goals as well as the individual lessons. I scaffolded for the preservice teachers by giving them feedback, instructions, explanations, and questions. We began by defining our goals and objectives for the club. Specifically, we focused on with what knowledge and understanding we would like the children to leave the club. We then planned backwards to ensure that our lessons matched our goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

During the rest of the planning sessions, we worked to clarify and edit the lesson plan for the next session. The planning sessions occurred in various ways. We either planned after the JAC session, via Google Docs, or met an hour before the club. I scaffolded for the preservice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and Time Frame</th>
<th>Children will……</th>
<th>Teachers will……</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rug</td>
<td>Take part in the discussion and participate in the reading of the story</td>
<td>Introduce the PowerPoint and read the book. Ask children open-ended questions to facilitate their connection to the emotional experience of Native Americans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Tables</td>
<td>Create a mural with pictures and words documenting their understanding of Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Support the children through providing materials, asking scaffolding questions as they create the mural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rug</td>
<td>Children will come to the rug and share their art work</td>
<td>Support children as they present their art to the group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teachers as we discussed, clarified, and edited the plan.

**Recording of the Planning, Debriefing, and Junk Art Club Sessions**

Recording the planning, debriefing, and Junk Art Club meetings provided me a wealth of information. As in any study, one must work to eliminate bias (Merriam, 2009). By audio recording and transcribing the sessions, I was able to compile data that represented the sessions rather than relying solely on our journals and my field notes, documents which could be clouded by our perspective. I recorded and transcribed all the planning, debriefing, JAC activity introduction, and JAC sharing. There were seven planning sessions. The first planning session lasted 83 minutes while the other six averaged about ten minutes each. There were seven debriefing sessions. The first six sessions were held after each JAC and lasted between seven and ten minutes. The final debriefing was held a month after the JAC ended and lasted one hour. There were six JAC introductions and JAC sharing sessions. Each lasted between seven to thirteen minutes.

**Journals of Participants and Researcher**

Engaging in reflective practice is an integral component in quality teaching (Biggs, 2001). A journal is an excellent mechanism for reflective practice. The journals of the preservice teachers as well as my own documented our learning, thoughts, questions, and feelings.

The preservice teachers were instructed to use the journals to answer specific open-ended prompts as well as share their insights and observations. The following three prompt questions were given to the preservice teachers after the initial planning session and every JAC debriefings: (a) How is what you learned in the critical literacy workshop related to the planning and execution of the Junk Art Club?; (b) What did you find challenging?; and (c) How have you grown as a critical literacy educator? I also gave them the option of also sharing any other
feelings, thoughts, or observations.

The preservice teachers wrote in their journals on eight occasions. They wrote after the initial planning session, each JAC debriefing, and the final debriefing meeting. The entries from the preservice teachers were between one and two paragraphs depending on the day. The preservice teachers tended to write more in the beginning, and when they were voicing frustrations. I collected the completed journals, took them to my office, and answered their responses before the next JAC session.

My journal entries were free writes, me writing whatever I was thinking and feeling at the moment. When the preservice teachers were writing in their journals, I used the time to reflect on the JAC. I also wrote in my journal whenever I sat down to think about the JAC, after the preservice teachers had left ever JAC meeting, and before ever JAC session. On average, I had between three to five entries a week, one paragraph to two pages in length.

In this study, I developed a deeper understanding of the preservice teachers’ ability to enact critical literacy lessons with students and my ability to scaffold them as they enact critical literacy in the Junk Art Club. The goal of the preservice teachers’ journals was to create a space where the preservice teachers and myself could think, reflect, and write about our insights into teaching critical literacy in the Junk Art Club.

Field Notes

Field notes provide insight into and documentation of the events that occur during a study. They are highly descriptive and reflective accounts of the events that happened during the study (Merriam, 2009). I took field notes during and after every planning session, debriefing, and club meeting. I wrote brief bullet points in my notebook during each session and then sat down and expanded on them in my notebook after the session ended. I had field note entries for seven
planning sessions, six JAC clubs, and seven debriefing sessions. Each expanded entry was between two to four pages. The field notes documented my observations of the planning sessions, debriefings, and the club meetings. I used them in conjunction with the other data to understand and document my teaching process as well as the preservice teachers’ learning. The field notes provide me the opportunity to gain a new perspective of the strategies I used to scaffold the preservice teachers as they learned to implement critical literacy lessons in a Junk Art Club.

Correspondence with a Critical Friend

As both the researcher and a participant in the study, I was completely invested in the study on every level (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Therefore, working with a critical friend was integral to the process. A critical friend is a person who facilitates personal reflection and collaborative dialogue (Whitehead, 1989) and ensures the trustworthiness of the study. My critical friend supported me through asking provocative questions to help me develop a deeper understanding of the study and myself through both the planning and club sessions as well as during the data analysis.

My critical friend was a doctoral professor in my program and a member of my committee. She has been my critical friend for numerous studies that I have conducted. Through writing four emails, and then discussing them with her in one 45-minute phone call, I worked to expand my understanding and push myself to reconsider my interactions with and expectations of the preservice teachers. I worked with my critical friend as someone to discuss, analyze, and brainstorm with during the study. Communicating with my critical friend gave me clarity and the ability to delve deeper into the work.

Artifacts from the Club Sessions
Collecting artifacts from the study provided information into the children’s learning. Theses artifacts were physical evidence that was separate from the participants’ voices (Merriam, 2009). They documented the children’s development and gave me insight into their understanding of critical literacy. The artifacts consisted of photographs of the children’s junk art. The children created a new piece of art every session. The preservice teachers and I examined the artifacts, discussed them, and I documented the analysis through audio recording the debriefing sessions as well as taking field notes.

During the process of analyzing the data, I found that I had unanswered questions. I needed more information about their prior relationship with literacy. The answers to the questions provided me with a clearer view of the preservice teachers’ understanding and experiences prior to the CLW. I sent a clarification email requesting that the preservice teachers fill out the attached questionnaire. I sent a clarifying email because it was the most efficient way to get the information as all of the preservice teachers had graduated and therefore did not come to campus and were balancing numerous responsibilities such as work and school. The questionnaire had the following questions:

1. Please write a brief biography.

2. What was your perception of self as teenager?

3. What is your perception of self now?

4. How did you interact with literacy during high school and up until you went back to school?

5. How do you feel your self-esteem was damaged by literacy messages?

6. How did you heal from this (if you have)?

7. What was your first language?

8. What did you do after high school?
9. Why did you decide to attend our institution?

10. How did literacy affect your self-esteem?

11. What experiences did you have that helped you understand the power of stereotypes?

The follow-up questionnaire aiding me in clarifying the data I already had and gaining a deeper understanding of the preservice teachers. The data I received was informative. The preservice teachers wrote thoughtful answers to the questions.

**Data Analysis**

Data were constantly reviewed and analyzed as part of the practitioner action research study (Kemmis, 1982). They were used to inform me during the planning and implementing of the Junk Art Club sessions. After each session, I looked at the artifacts, field notes, and journals to assess the preservice teachers’ ability to enact critical literacy. I used this knowledge to shape the ways in which I supported the preservice teachers during the next planning and JAC session.

After completion of the study, I analyzed the data using the constant comparative method of data analysis. The constant comparative method is the process of finding and identifying patterns in the data. It requires that the researcher identify the initial codes and then work to narrow the codes by looking for commonalities among the initial codes. Through the coding process, I was able to document the preservice teachers’ and my own experiences in the CLW and the JAC (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Through the process of creating codes, I worked to synthesize the data with codes that articulated the data (Anderson et al., 2007). I used open codes to categorize the data. I created a chart with three columns, each column having one research question. The three questions were:

(a) What happens when I, an early childhood teacher educator, scaffold the teaching of critical literacy with three preservice teachers as we facilitate a Junk Art Club with kindergarten, first-
and second-grade students?; (b) What evidence is there, if any, that the critical literacy conceptualizations previously constructed in their critical literacy workshop support their enactment of critical literacy teaching in the Junk Art Club?; and (c) How does providing feedback, instructions, explanations, and questions for the preservice teachers support their enactment of critical literacy instruction as they increasingly facilitate the Junk Art Club? I began by putting data under the three columns, and sorting it into the three columns of open codes.

Using the questions as my open codes, through trial and error, I looked for patterns in the data and created codes based on commonalities among the open codes. I cut out each column and created a visual on the glass wall in my office, then sorting each set into common codes.

The common codes as seen in the appendix were for the first question: What happens when I, an early childhood teacher educator, scaffold the teaching of critical literacy with three preservice teachers as we facilitate a Junk Art Club with kindergarten, first- and second-grade students? These codes included: revisiting the crisis from the first JAC; preservice teachers and my frustration; excitement and pride; preservice teachers’ discomfort taking the lead; preservice teachers taking over the lead; learning as they planned and implemented the JAC; emotions, healing, and my own vulnerability.

For the second question: What evidence is there, if any, that the critical literacy conceptualizations previously constructed in their critical literacy workshop support their enactment of critical literacy teaching in the Junk Art Club? The codes were: the preservice teachers entered the planning and JAC with a basic understanding; individual process; building on each other’s ideas during planning and discussions; building on ideas from CLW; community, and importance of prior knowledge in planning and implementing the JAC.

For the final question: How does providing feedback, instruction, explanation, and
questions for the preservice teachers support their enactment of critical literacy instruction as they increasingly facilitate the Junk Art Club? The codes were scaffolding; questioning; extending ideas; role modeling; clarifying, and summarizing.

These codes helped me make meaning out of the data and facilitated the creation of the themes that I used to document the findings (Merriam, 2009). I then collapsed the codes and developed themes. The themes were the individualized learning process; the value of the lived experience; healing and emotions as important to the process of becoming critically literate, and the tension of my vulnerability.

After I created the themes, as I began to think about how to organize the findings, I revisited my research questions and the overarching goal of the study. One of the themes that was prevalent throughout the entire study was the individual learning process of each of the preservice teachers. I therefore decided to document the preservice teachers’ understanding of critical literacy and their journey towards becoming a critical literacy educator at various point before and after the two studies. I wanted to honor their experience, so I decided to look at them separately rather than compare and judge them against each other. I documented their journey both in the CLW and the JAC. I began by looking at their initial understanding of critical literacy prior to the research. I then documented the CLW and our personal experience of exploring critical literacy as learners/ inquirers. I wrote about the JAC and our individual process of growing critically literate, including planning for critical literacy Junk Art Club and enacting critical literacy as teachers. Finally, I documented our individual processes of becoming critically literate.

**Trustworthiness**

It is important when analyzing the data of a practitioner action research study to
acknowledge that the findings are always open to the researcher’s interpretation (Merriam, 2009). As in every study, it was important that I built mechanisms into the study to ensure the trustworthiness of the inferences that I drew from the data (Anderson et al., 2007).

I accomplished trustworthiness in several ways: triangulation of data, member checking, working with my committee chair, and communicating with my critical friend. I used triangulation of data to ensure trustworthiness. Triangulation of data encompassed collecting numerous different forms of data so that I as the researcher during the analysis phase of the study could cross check the findings by discovering themes that are evident across the data sources (Merriam, 2009). Through gathering different forms of data such as journals, artifacts, recordings of the planning, club, and debriefing meetings, and planning documents, I ensured that the findings are trustworthy by looking for patterns that appeared in more than one data source. I coded the data from the various sources listed above, charted the commonalities, and then dug deeper to find the themes that emerged across the data.

Member checking is inviting the participants to give feedback on the findings in order to ensure that there is no misinterpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009). I used member checking in my study to ensure accuracy of the findings. Upon completion of the data analysis, I sent each preservice teacher the findings via email asking for feedback. The preservice teachers expressed excitement when I asked if they would be interested in reading their case studies. I sent them an email with the case study and requested feedback. I asked them to please read the finding and provide feedback. Rose sent a text message stating, “OMG your writing is so awesome by the way, but the analysis of it is so deep and good.” I replied, “Thank you, is it accurate?” Rose replied, “It is like I read this and learned about myself all over again lol. Super accurate.” I responded, “Great thank you. Nothing that you want changed?” “Nope it is awesome” (Text
Message Exchange, September 2019). Dory initially sent me a text stating, “It’s awesome professor and very interesting. Loved it.” I replied “Thank you. Are there any inaccuracies?” Three days later, Dory sent me a text message stating “The list (privilege chart) was not hers it was Rose’s” (Text Message Exchange, September 2019). I thanked her, went back and looked at the data, discovered she was correct, and edited the findings. Bianca, although she expressed interest, never responded to the email or follow-up texts. Member checking ensured that the data were interpreted to reflect the voices of the participants.

My committee chair served as both a sounding board and a resource during the analysis of the data. I meet with her and shared my charts, codes, and themes. Then, through discussion and her reading my drafts, she pushed me to reassess my findings and dig deeper. I was able to gain a broader perspective of the data and my understanding of critical literacy. She pushed me to reconsider my original finding and reevaluate my understanding of critical literacy. It was through these interactions that I grew as a critical literacy educator.

I was also communicating with my critical friend, a doctoral professor who I had used as a critical friend in previous research. I emailed her journal entries and then had a forty-minute phone call during which she pushed me to reexamine my need for perfection and dedicate myself to being an active participant and researcher. Examining varied forms of data helped ensure that the findings were an accurate portrayal of the study.

As in any study, it is important that the participants were protected in terms of confidentiality. The study was Institutional Review Board approved at Montclair State University and at my community college. In the process of preparing for my IRB, I considered the ethical dilemmas and possible consequences of this study (Anderson et al., 2007). As the participants were volunteers and did not receive credit or a grade, there were little or no risks.
However, the preservice teachers may have found enacting the critical literacy workshop stressful and time consuming considering they were all currently full-time college students. I negotiated with the preservice teachers to create a schedule that worked for them and offered my support when needed. As in any study, they had the option of leaving the study at any point if they so choose. The preservice teachers could have benefited from participating in the study because they gained experience in a classroom setting and developed an understanding of how to enact critical literacy in an early childhood setting.

The minors of the study were children of students in my college, recruited by flyers and word of mouth. In total we had twelve children who participated, the attendance varying each week. There were five boys and seven girls, ranging in age from five to eight years old.

When a study involves minors, one needs to be cautious concerning both the risks and benefits. As the club leader, I ensured that the children were treated with the utmost respect and consideration. There was little risk, however, the children may have found their new perspective unsettling. I made sure to create a supportive environment to allow them the safe space to process these feelings. The benefits to the children were that they could gain a better understanding of themselves, how to navigate literacy messages, and how to understand others without the influence of stereotypes.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The process of preparing preservice teachers to teach critical literacy in their classrooms has been fraught with barriers. Too often teaching literacy focuses narrowly on reading and decoding words. For this study, critical literacy is more than reading the written word, it is about reading the world and examining how power is constructed and manifested in society (Freire, 1985; Freire & Macedo, 1998), because messages in texts often oppress or liberate people (Freire, 1985; Mosley, 2010). Preparing critically literate students involves examining a variety of texts to unearth the inequities, unheard voices, and stereotypes that are ingrained in the framework of our culture (Arthur, 2001). In the literature review, I described the following four tenets of critical literacy: (a) All texts are embedded with political power and are never neutral; (b) Critical literacy demands that the reader interrogates the text and reads the word and the world; (c) Critical literacy is a process of deconstructing and reframing; and (d) Critical literacy is central to empowerment, the unpacking of privilege, and social responsibility. These components helped me to analyze the preservice teachers’ understanding of critical literacy in the CLW and the JAC.

For this study, building upon previous research, I explored how I could support preservice teachers as they began to develop an understanding of critical literacy and used their knowledge of the concept to co-facilitate a Junk Art Club with kindergarten, first-, and second-grade children. I sought to answer the following research questions: What happens when I, an early childhood teacher educator, scaffold the teaching of critical literacy with three preservice teachers as we facilitate a Junk Art Club with kindergarten, first- and second-grade students? All three preservice teachers previously took part in a critical literacy workshop group that I facilitated where they worked to unpack their own relationship with literacy and power. I was
interested in fostering and documenting their continued growth as critical literacy educators. Additionally, I asked: What evidence is there, if any, that the critical literacy conceptualizations previously constructed in their critical literacy workshop support their enactment of critical literacy teaching in the Junk Art Club? How does providing feedback, instruction, explanations, and questions for the preservice teachers support their enactment of critical literacy instruction as they increasingly facilitate the Junk Art Club?

I used a practitioner action research methodology for my study because it allowed me the opportunity to engage in research that focused on my teaching practices, and teacher identity as a teacher educator, and my preservice teachers’ experiences in an educational setting. Using this framework helped me to grow as a reflective educator and investigate how to support preservice teachers integrating critical literacy in their future classrooms as well as contributing to the literature on critical literacy for preservice teachers in teacher education programs.

In this chapter, I attempt to tell a multilayered story of the process and product of co-facilitating the JAC with the preservice teachers. My telling is messy as I move from my own reflections of scaffolding and co-facilitating the JAC to those of my preservice teachers as they began to take up and teach from a critical literacy stance. Some of the storytelling involves the personal insights that I began to notice about myself as a teacher educator and these aspects mirror the identity exploration of my students too. There is an interplay of narratives and examples from the data that help to highlight some of the complexities that emerged as we did this work together.

**The Players**

I began this study by designing a Critical Literacy Workshop (CLW) where the preservice teachers and I unpacked our relationship with literacy and power. My goal was to
create a safe space where the preservice teachers and I would feel comfortable as we began to think about how literacy had affected our understanding of self and others. The participants in this initial pilot study were recruited from my various classes at the community college through both flyers and verbal invitations for volunteers in the CLW. The three women that volunteered were in my Introduction to Early Childhood Education class. In particular, I began working with Bianca, Rose, and Dory. Below I introduce and provide my look into my identity as well as the backgrounds of each of the preservice teachers. These detailed portraits offer insights into who we were as we began planning and teaching the JAC.

Angela: Examining the Self

I am a middle-aged White woman with blonde hair and blue eyes who is a teacher educator at an urban community college. I have worked in the early childhood department full time for the last ten years. I am divorced single mother of three children as well as a doctoral student. I continually struggle to balance all my responsibilities and identities. I am also passionate about embedding social justice and critical literacy into our teacher education program.

As a child, after I immigrated to the United States, I began engaging in critical literacy. I did not understand the theoretical concept, but I was able to integrate this lens into my interactions with historical texts. When I first moved to the U.S., I was bombarded with pro-America propaganda. As I entered my first classroom on my third day in the country, I was required to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Although I was only eight, I felt that my school did not honor my story or my identity. I only saw my country of the United Kingdom negatively portrayed in history. Yet I yearned to go home. After listening to the rhetoric of how America was the only place where you had freedom and was the best country in the world, I became a
rebel. I refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance, and I started to research. I inherently knew there was more to history because I knew that my country was more than the villain in the American Revolution story.

I began reading about Native American history, the Middle Passage and slavery. I was interested in finding the ways that America was not the perfect land of the free that school presented. I knew there were different perspectives to the same historical story and I spent high school and college investigating the other stories. I took feminist sociology and Black History. I developed an understanding of the concept that the written word is never neutral and that it reflects the group in power in society.

However, it would be inaccurate to say that I used critical literacy in all of my interactions with texts. In fact, a large part of my self-esteem has been negatively impacted by ads and television. When it came to my concept of self, I was not able to unpack the meaning behind the messages.

As a child I was average weight but developed a negative self-concept partly based on the messages I received. I wanted to be taller, thinner, and prettier. I strove to disappear by going on my mother’s grapefruit and egg diets and refusing food. I was diagnosed with an eating disorder at 19 and have wrestled with it ever since. It would be simplistic to place the blame entirely on the messages I received from advertisements and television, however I grew up in a home that was riddled with distorted and unhealthy body image messages. The effect that advertisements and television had on other members of my childhood household is something I do not have information about. Yet the ads and the images on the television reaffirmed and expanded my negative sense of self. Walking through a supermarket checkout felt like torture. No matter where you looked you saw pictures of perfect bodies and ads telling you how to lose your belly.
in six days or how to drop 20 pounds in a month. In those moments, I knew I could never measure up and I felt like a failure, one that was unworthy of respect and love. The messages became embedded into my self-concept.

In some parts of my life, such as my interaction with the retelling of historical events, I was able to use tenets of critical literacy, but when it came to my body and my own sense of self, I consumed the messages without a second thought. I was not able to unpack the messages and instead used them to reaffirm the negative body images that I received at home. When I encountered the images, I would feel a sinking feeling of failure throughout my body. I am left considering the impact of my negative self-concept as I digest literacy messages. It clouded my ability to think critically about literacy. It was not until later that I was able to think critically about literacy messages concerning my body. However, it would simplistic to say that once I developed the ability to think critically about body image messages that I was able to ignore them and not be affected by them. It is still a struggle even though I can intellectualize the fact that the messages provide unrealistic expectations and objectify women.

As a doctoral student and a teacher educator, I have had the opportunity to explore the concept of critical literacy. While researching in preparation to teach my Emergent Literacy class, I happened upon the concept. While reading about it a light bulb went off in my head. The terminology gave a name to my paradigm. I had spent many semesters teaching an Exploring Multicultural Studies class, in which my students and I compared different perspectives of history, unpacked privilege in society, and looked for the hidden messages in ads and music videos. I was very excited to learn more and began researching.

The concept of creating a CLW was borne of my research surrounding critical literacy. After reading the current literature, I discovered that preservice teachers were not often given the
opportunity to unpack their own relationship with literacy and power in society. I decided to create a workshop where the preservice teachers and I would unpack our relationship with literacy and power in society as well as investigate how literacy influenced our understanding of self and others. Before I started, I hoped that the preservice teachers would leave the CLW with a deep understanding of critical literacy. I had high expectations and feared failure. An essential component to the study was that I would be an active participant and scaffold the experience for the preservice teachers. Before I delve into the experience of the CLW and the JAC, it is important to introduce the three preservice teachers. I begin by introducing Bianca and then Rose and Dory.

**Bianca: Confident and Articulate**

Bianca is a 33-year-old graduate of Easton Community College (ECC). She majored in early childhood education and planned to transfer upon graduation. Her experience at ECC was academically successful. She graduated with a 3.8 GPA and was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. Due to financial constraints however, she has put transferring to a four-year institution on hold and is currently opening an online women’s clothing boutique.

Bianca is a biracial Puerto Rican and White woman. Her Puerto Rican single mother, for whom she provides financial support, raised her. She is 5’3” with red-dyed hair, green eyes, and light skin. Bianca is stylish and in good physical shape. Her first language was English. Although her mother speaks both Spanish and English and her grandmother only speaks Spanish, Bianca speaks some Spanish, but is not fluent. She identifies with the Puerto Rican side of her family and does not feel connected to the White part of her family. She was not in contact with her father during her childhood, and lost him to a drug overdose during her early twenties. After high school, Bianca had a series of jobs including working as a bartender and in a hair salon. Bianca
shared her perception of self:

I was very strong as a teenager. I was very well aware and confident. I grew up fast and at the age of 15, I was doing adult things. This actually lowered my self-awareness through the years. I did not have a father figure and I did things that a teenager should not do. I yearned for love in the wrong places, not getting it at home. Into my twenties this went on. Feeling like I needed love from a man. I would compete with other girls to get that love. This tore down my confidence as I was always trying to become a certain image that I thought was “perfect.” (Clarification Email, January 2019)

During those years, Bianca’s interactions with texts, especially advertisements and television, affirmed her understanding of self and convinced her of the importance of a woman’s appearance as a sexual being.

I let society and what they put on TV, ads, and the Internet control my emotions and thoughts. It shaped my life at that time. I used my looks and body because I thought that those things made you beautiful and people would love and adore you if you could portray the image that society praised so much. (Clarification Email, January 2019)

Bianca decided to return to school at the age of 25. She reflected: “I wanted to get out of the night life. My best friend went back to school, which motivated me to do the same” (Clarification Email, January 2019). Prior to community college, Bianca graduated high school and began to work in bars. As the first member of her family to attend college, she has expressed a desire to break the cycle of poverty that has plagued her family. Bianca feels that through earning a college degree, she will be able to attain financial security.

I met Bianca when she was a student in my class. She was a dedicated student who expressed her desire to become involved in the teacher education club. My initial impression of
her was that she was a stylish and serious student who could articulate her goals and perspectives. In my younger years, I would have described her as “the cool pretty girl.” She appeared very comfortable with her body and never came to class looking anything but well put together. I was excited when Bianca showed interest and signed up for the workshop. I was interested to learn more about her and her relationship with literacy.

Rose: Guarded and Caring

Rose, the second preservice teacher, is a 23-year-old graduate of Easton Community College. She is a 5’4” athletic woman with brown skin and thick curly hair. Both her parents immigrated to the United States as children. Her mother emigrated from Peru and her father emigrated from El Salvador. Rose is the first member in her family to be born in the United States. Both of her parents are first-generation college graduates. Rose’s first language is English and she is fluent in Spanish. Rose speaks Spanish with both sets of grandparents.

Rose’s mother became pregnant during her sophomore year of college. Her father who was a junior at West Country University finished his engineering degree and then came home to live with his girlfriend and daughter. They married several years later. Her parents depended on their parents to help take care of Rose while they began to build their careers. Rose has a strong bond with her grandparents and considers family as the number one priority in her life.

Rose’s parents had two more daughters, 16 and 18 years old, one of whom has been diagnosed with epilepsy. Her epilepsy has affected her educational career and has impacted the family dynamics. Rose, as the eldest sister, is responsible for assisting her parents with taking care of her sisters, including driving them to activities and helping with homework.

Throughout high school Rose, was a dedicated student and athlete who swam for both her high school team and a private swim team. Rose shared her perception of self during this time:
As a teenager, I was just trying to get through high school, but at the same time excel in both sport and academics. I lived in a town where everyone knew everyone, so growing up was easy. High school was easy for me because I knew everyone, especially the teachers. I never got in trouble since I mainly focused on sports and academics. I guess I can say I was a student athlete and always recognized at school. In high school there are always cliques but I never belonged to just one because I got along with everyone. There were the cliques that considered themselves “popular” which I would hang out with but I wouldn’t say I was “popular.” Then there was the clique of simply just the “smart” kids, which I would get along with as well since I had most of my honor classes with them.

(Clarification Email, February 2019)

During these years, Rose’s interactions with literacy, especially advertisements, were based on her desire for academic success. Rose shared that “literacy in high school was terrible for me. I wasn’t a huge fan of reading or writing in high school at all. When there was reading to be done for homework I never did it because I refused to read” (Clarification Email, February 2019). Rose saw reading academic texts as a chore and she was aware that the required literature did not represent her. During a CLW meeting, Rose shared with the group that “I never saw anyone in classroom curriculum and in books that reflected me. There were no books about Brown children. We never learned history about Brown people” (Field Notes, October 2016).

Not only did Rose feel that she was not represented in academic texts, she also felt that the messages she received from other kinds of writing such as magazines, ads, and social media were damaging to her self-esteem. She shared,

My self-esteem was damaged by literacy messages all the time. I believe I grew up in an era where social media was introduced to the world and it did me damage. I was obsessed
with wanting blonde hair and being skinny. I wanted to look like the girls I would see in magazines and television (Clarification Email, February 2019).

Rose felt that literacy messages not only affected her body image and fueled her desire to be thin, but they also left her wanting to shed her ethnic identity and become blonde.

After graduating high school, Rose originally went away to West Country University for one year, where she swam for the school’s club team. She came back home after the first year due to financial constraints. She then attended ECC for two years and earned her associate’s in early childhood education. Rose graduated with a 3.67 GPA. She is currently enrolled at New City University where she is majoring in early childhood/ special education. Her content area is history.

My first impression of Rose was confusing. As a student, she presented two different personas. On the one hand, she was a dedicated student who always tried to help others, going out of her way to include quiet classmates. I remember one class where there was a student looking uncomfortable and sitting alone. Rose went up to her and said, “Come sit with me.” They chatted and laughed. On the other hand, Rose could be sarcastic and standoffish. My perception was that she did not care. Through working with her in the CLW, I was able to connect with her. I learned that her demeanor of not caring was a defense mechanism. I understood this because in my late teens and early twenties, I used these strategies to protect myself. After working with her for a while, I shared this to Rose and she laughed. She then replied, “You get me.” During that conversation, I told her that I was impressed that she helped the student feel more comfortable. She replied, “I always do that. I want everyone to feel like they belong.” She seemed uncomfortable that I had noticed and appeared more comfortable with her gruff persona. I was at first nervous when Rose volunteered, as my perception of her
personality was that she was intimidatingly gruff. I was worried about sharing information about myself with her. Yet, I was also excited because I needed volunteers and was interested in learning more about Rose.

**Dory: Quiet and Thoughtful**

Dory, the third preservice teacher, is a 24-year-old graduate of Easton Community College. She majored in early childhood education. Her academic experience at ECC was successful as she graduated with a 3.0 GPA. She is currently attending New City University in pursuit of her bachelor’s dual degree in early childhood and special education with a concentration in history.

Dory previously worked as a paraprofessional in a self-contained classroom. She supported a child with autism. She currently works as an Applied Behavior Specialist with autistic children, ranging in age from two to fourteen years old. She has an ABA certification. Dory has shared that she finds her job very rewarding and is particularly proud of the fact that she is the only specialist at her agency without a bachelor’s degree.

Dory is a first-generation American; both of her parents emigrated from Guatemala when they were fifteen. Her father drives a truck and her mother works in maintenance. She is five feet and curvy with dark brown hair and light skin. Her first language was Spanish. She is fluent in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language (ASL). She began learning ASL at seven because she wanted to communicate with her best friend’s parents who were both deaf. When she enrolled in college, she took ASL courses to continue to develop her language skills.

Dory has a large family that is always together. She lives with her parents and sisters in a two-family home that is owned by her aunt who lives upstairs. She complains that at certain times she wishes for privacy. She is a first-generation college student who has two sisters; her
older sister graduated from Mountain State University and her younger sister is currently in high school.

Dory was academically successful in high school, and excelled at sports and music. She played three instruments: alto saxophone, baritone saxophone, and the flute. She described her perception of herself during high school:

It was my job to focus on school, whatever you do, do not become another statistic. In other words, do not get pregnant at a young age and obtain a degree first. Do not let a man dictate your life. Do not be afraid to be the best versions of you do not be afraid to succeed. As a teenager, I always felt my body developed “before its time.” When I was a teenager my body made me feel unsafe or that’s what I thought. As a result, I wore loose clothing because men would always cat call me when I would simply go to the store. I hated my body. Having big thighs and a big gluteus maximus wasn’t always a “trend” and sadly society has created standards for women. And physically I felt that I wasn’t good enough because of those “standards.” (Clarification Email, March 2019)

Dory struggled with her body image and unwanted sexual attention in high school. The literacy messages that influenced Dory’s during her high school years were mostly outside of the classroom. Her interactions with literacy contributed to her insecurity in her identity as a woman. She wrote:

During high school, I was always active in sports and in band. However, literacy is everywhere. For example, when I was on the track team, I was a runner and a shot putter, which meant that I would always go to the gym and life weights. The guys there would be like, “Dory, don’t break a nail” or, “Don’t hurt yourself” and I hated that. If it was up to me, I would have thrown a dumbbell to each of them but instead I shut their voices out
of my head and just worked out. (Clarification Email, March 2019)

I met Dory in one of my classes. She was a dedicated student who was quiet and withdrawn. Our classroom was made up of six tables with four chairs at each table. Dory would consistently choose to sit at an empty table in the corner of the room. She never spoke during class but was intent on taking notes. My initial impression of her was that she was either tough or uncomfortable in social situations. I was surprised when Dory volunteered but I was also interested to get to know her as I found her hard to read.

All three of the preservice teachers were invested in the process and attended all of the CLW. Prior to discussing the CLW, I think it is important to discuss my planning process of the CLW as well as describe the initial understanding of the preservice teachers. I start with my thoughts and plans prior to the CLW and then I share the understandings of each of the preservice teachers.

**Planning the Critical Literacy Workshop**

After researching the concept of critical literacy and how to prepare preservice teachers to teach critical literacy in their future classrooms, I decided to plan a CLW where the preservice teachers and I would have the opportunity to unpack our relationship with literacy and power through creating artifacts and discussing them. At the back of the classroom are three shelves containing various materials usually found in an early childhood classroom. There are multicultural dolls, manipulatives, blocks, and books. The room is usually bustling with activity after I teach. Students usually ask for help with anything from class to registration and even transferring. Yet when the CLW started, it became a sacred space. Every week I told all the students that the room was closed. The preservice teachers in the beginning of the CLW entered the space quietly but as the weeks went when they entered the room it was filled with chatter
about class and their personal lives. We always sat around the rectangular table in the middle of the room and engaged in a few minutes of chit-chat, discussing various topics from their personal lives to class. The preservice teachers talked about classes in which they were struggling, problems at home, and struggles with work. In my journal after the third workshop, I wrote:

The preservice teachers are creating a strong bond. They are always excited to come and see each other. The beginning of the CLW is a check-in time where they share pertinent information about their lives. We have created a community. (My Journal, October 2016)

I began every session by checking in with the preservice teachers by asking them how their week was going. I then asked them to respond to a peer’s journal entry from the week before and the room was always silent. As the preservice teachers finished and closed their journals, I introduced the artifact we were going to create. We did not discuss the journals as a group because I wanted to ensure the preservice teachers’ anonymity. It gave us the opportunity to revisit the topic, read another’s thoughts, and respond. I felt that through the journals the preservice teachers and I could reflect on the prior session and also share thoughts and feelings that we did not feel comfortable speaking about during the junk art process. I then introduced the concept for the week and we created an artifact. The concepts that we covered were *I am*/*I am not*, messages behind ads, privilege in society, representation and marginalization in school, stereotypes in society, and finally a picture of myself. I chose art as the medium by which we would investigate the concept of critical literacy because it allowed the preservice teachers to creatively express themselves and investigate their emotions. Art is an integral sign system that provided the preservice teachers the opportunity to explore, understand, and express their thinking and feelings (Leland & Harste, 1994). Through using art to access their cognitive and emotional intelligences, I hoped the preservice teachers would understand that critical literacy is
comprehending how our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by texts. Art was a creative medium to investigate and express our emotions and understanding of texts and how they influenced our sense of self and others. I began every session by checking in with the preservice teachers by asking them about their week. Then, handing out the journals, I asked them to respond to a random journal entry from the prior week, and the room was always silent. As the preservice teachers finished and closed their journals, I introduced the artifact we were going to create and we discussed the topic. I made sure that the materials for the activity were set up on the round table prior to the preservice teachers’ entrance. We chose our materials, sat together, and created our piece of art. The artifacts we created were: a rewritten ad, privilege/ not privileged chart, picture of me, pictorial and word chart of the ways I was included and marginalized in school, and a I am/ I am not chart.

While we were creating art, I learned a tremendous amount about the preservice teachers. After they bridged the uncomfortable process of becoming a community, they moved past talking about school and starting to share about their dating life, home life, dreams, and frustrations. On one particular day we discussed their frustrations with their families. In my journal I wrote,

Rose shared that her family expected her to run around after her younger sisters. I said why don’t you tell them how you feel. Rose laughed and said that is not how Spanish families work. Dory agreed and shared how she was overwhelmed by all the family visitors and could never say anything (Field Notes, 2016).

I reflected on the sense of our community in my journal I wrote “It is amazing how I have learned so much about them just by sitting and creating art” (My Journal, November 2016).

I always gave the preservice teachers a 15-minute warning so they would begin to finish
creating their piece of art. As we finished, I would ask if someone would like to share; usually met with silence, I then felt chose to share my own. This always made me feel vulnerable, but it seemed to help the preservice teachers share, which I will discuss in detail below. Sharing seemed to allow for moments when we delved into deep conversations.

One time, a random student wandered in the room during the club’s session and asked to use a computer. I was surprised by how protective the preservice students were of the space. I did not have to say anything. Rose told the student the room was closed. In my journal I wrote “I was shocked how Rose quickly told the student that the room was closed. The group started to talk about how they felt it was their time and that it was special” (My Journal, October, 2016). The preservice teachers voiced how the CLW time was important to them and a safe space that they valued as private.

We closed the sessions by cleaning up and engaging in chit-chat. It was a way to separate from the deep discussion that occurred when we were sharing our art at the end of the CLW. I thought about this in my journal:

It feels awkward at the end of the sessions and I notice as we clean up the preservice teachers move away from the topic and have a lighter conversation. Today they were teasing Rose about how she always acts like she does not like her boyfriend. (My Journal, November 2016)

**Initial Understandings of Critical Literacy**

I started the first CLW meeting by asking the preservice teachers what their understanding of the concept of literacy was and we discussed their definitions then introducing the concept of critical literacy. I told the group that critical literacy is “looking at literacy through a new lens, where you understand that literacy is never neutral. It is all based on someone’s
perspective and reflects the perspective of power in society” (Field Notes, September, 2016). All three of the preservice teachers had unique definitions of the concept.

Bianca shared that this definition “was new” to her (Field Notes, September, 2016). She considered literacy as a “way to get information and to learn new things” (Field Notes, September, 2016). She saw it as a method to acquire new information. Her conceptualization of literacy aligned with the traditional understanding of literacy education that consists of learning the skills needed to break the code in order to use literacy as a means for gaining new information (Dudley-Marling, 2015).

When asked to reflect at the end of the JAC, Bianca confirmed her first statement but also added that throughout her childhood and young adulthood she was able to interrogate ads and look for the meaning behind them. She shared:

Because I think I was doing that (thinking critically about literacy) before we were doing this and you started you know you told us about it and explained about it. I was doing it already. You know what I mean not knowing it but doing it. Seeing something seeing a commercial and taking it and picking it apart and saying oh well what do I think about that. (JAC Final Meeting Transcript, January 2018)

Although Bianca expressed that she interrogated ads prior to the CLW, she shared that the CLW made her aware of her relationship with literacy. She stated that “it really showed me like that you have to be mindful of what you are digesting and what people around you are digesting and I feel like that is how it helped me because now I do it consciously and before I was doing it unconsciously” (JAC Final Meeting Transcript, January 2018). It is not clear whether Bianca’s expanded explanation of her prior knowledge was based on her new understanding, or whether her new understanding gave her the knowledge base to look at the experiences in her child and
young adulthood through a critical literacy lens, or whether critical literacy was intuitive for her.

Rose when asked about her understanding of literacy shared that it “was for getting information and enjoyment” (Field Notes, September 2016). After she was introduced to the concept of critical literacy, she replied, “I have never heard of it” (Field Notes, September, 2016). Rose’s understanding of literacy was that its purpose was to give and receive information. Her definition reflects the traditional perspective of literacy education where the focus is on the skills needed to break the code and gain new information (Dudley-Marling 2015).

During the initial planning meeting for the JAC, Rose reiterated her understanding of critical literacy prior to the CLW. She shared, “I didn’t see things in different perspectives. I saw it the way it was told because everyone else was doing it so I didn’t take it apart. I didn’t see any differences until we started” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Rose had a one-dimensional understanding of literacy. Literacy was something to be consumed rather than interrogated. As a consumer, she took it at face value without contemplating the validity of the messages that were received. As discussed previously these messages left her feeling not represented in academic literature and insecure about how the media portrayed people like her.

Dora when asked about literacy replied, “I have never heard of it. I always just thought literacy was something to read and learn from” (Field Notes, September, 2016). She thought literacy was the way in which you learn about new things or a vehicle to acquire new information. Her notion of literacy resonated with the traditional view of literacy education, which focuses on decoding and comprehension (Dudley-Marling, 2015). It was important to learn the preservice teachers’ understanding of literacy prior to introducing the concept of critical literacy because it helped me gauge their understanding of literacy, how it is used, and its connection to power in society.
I was excited to introduce the concept of critical literacy to the preservice teachers but I was also nervous because I was planning on discussing sensitive issues with a group of preservice teachers who I only had only just met. In my journal wrote, “I wonder how it will go. I hardly know these women and we are going to investigate critical literacy issues that are very personal. I hope that I can do this” (My Journal, September 2016).

Filled with excitement I began the CLW. In the following section I will document the CLW.

Throughout the CLW each of the preservice teachers ventured on their own journey to begin to unpack how critical literacy has affected their understanding of self and others. Below I begin by, sharing my own journey of facilitating the workshop, and describing each of the preservice teachers’ experiences in the CLW. My experience facilitating the CLW was filled with insecurity and growth. In the following section, I will examine my experience in the CLW and then discuss each of the preservice teachers’ experiences.

**Looking at Myself: Critically Unpacking my Own Identity**

In order to develop a co-facilitation relationship, it was essential that I also participated in the activities of the CLW. I found facilitating and analyzing myself with my students was challenging as it forced me to blur the boundaries between my personal and professional identities and open myself up to examine some of my insecurities. Throughout the CLW, I was challenged, as my personal identity was revealed in an environment where usually I have only shown my professional identity.

On the first day of the CLW, as I mentioned earlier, the group created an *I Am/ I Am Not* (McIntosh, 1988) chart which we filled out for ourselves. The words that I wrote in the *I Am* chart were caring, smart, dedicated, persistent, professor, researcher, mother, friend, and independent. For *I Am Not*, I wrote: cute, fat, stupid, dumb blonde, dependent, broken family,
failure, and ugly.

Figure 2, My I Am/ I Am Not Chart (September 2016)

The process of creating the chart pictured in Figure 2 was beyond uncomfortable for me. I wanted to avoid putting my feelings down on paper in front of my students. As I sat there and began to fill out the chart, I debated leaving out specific words that had been assigned to me because they left me feeling vulnerable. To write the words on paper that exposed my insecurities was almost overwhelming. In my journal I wrote:

I was frozen as I wrote and began by writing words that did not feel uncomfortable. I sat and thought. I thought about painting a specific image of myself. I do not want to preservice teachers to look at me differently. I am comfortable in my role as the professor. It is one where I have excelled. In my head, I knew my thoughts were irrational but I couldn’t do it. I took a deep breath and then wrote them. Honestly it felt so overwhelming but I wanted to stay true to the goal. (My Journal, September 2016)

The words that I struggled writing were “fat and broken family.” As a person who has struggled with body image her whole life, I felt that I was beyond vulnerable by sharing this with my students. I felt that I was potentially showing them a negative view of who I am, not the confident and knowledgeable instructor that they know. I was not sure that I was ready to do take down my walls. I also didn’t want them to understand the guilt I had felt around my divorce and my constant worry that my children were portrayed in society as broken. By sharing those words
with my students, I was exposing my insecurities, many of which were prescribed to me by society. I feared losing my preservice teachers’ respect. How would they take me seriously as a teacher educator when I was flawed and insecure and my perception was that I was viewed as a failure by society? Although I could speak at length about the importance of the work, I feared the ramifications from showing my authentic self in the CLW. Allowing my preservice teachers into my personal world was a daunting thought.

I made a conscious decision in that moment to share myself and fight through the feelings, as I wanted to remain true to the integrity of the CLW. If I had presented a polished version of myself, I would not have contributed to the creation of a supportive environment for the preservice teachers to unpack their relationship between literacy and power. I believe that my sharing helped to encourage the preservice teachers to open up and share their own charts with the group.

![Figure 3. Rewriting an Ad (October, 2016).](image)

Not only was it hard to think about how the preservice teachers might change their views of me, but it was painful to look at myself and realize how protective I was about my personal identity and how much I compartmentalized myself to portray a confident and competent teacher educator. I realized how much I valued my work identity as the competent teacher educator and how it afforded me comfort while I struggled in other areas of my life. Through realizing that I
guarded the prestige of my work identity, I also realized that the ads I encountered daily had left a larger scar on my understanding of self than I originally thought. When we discussed our rewritten ads, I was saddened to thinking about how advertisements and other forms of media had contributed to my body dysmorphia and eating disorder. I thought about how I had internalized the media’s notion of a perfect body and how the feeling of never being good enough had led to my body dysmorphia. The need to fit into the perfect image plagues me every time I look in the mirror, when I see ads, and when I walk past clothing store window. I am constantly bombarded with messages such as how to get the perfect body in ten days, do this to get the perfect stomach, and how to dress to hide your problem areas. Although I know the photos are Photoshopped and there is no such thing as a perfect body, it is hard to move past the damage inflicted by the constant media messages and my family’s distorted views.

Yet my rewritten ad, as seen in Figure 3, did not focus on messages that I considered personal. I identified messages in texts geared towards children that prescribed gender roles. I took a traditional toy ad where children were engaged in stereotypical play and I wrote bubbles with comments. Above the girl who was playing with an Easy-Bake Oven, I wrote, “I like cooking but I love playing with swords”; above the boy playing with a Nerf gun I wrote, “I am shooting down gender stereotypes. I want to play with the doll.” Although I engaged in the activity, my choice of ads was safe and did not give the preservice students access to my personal relationship with ads and the ways in which they influenced my sense of self. It was only during the discussion with the preservice teachers about their assemblage art, that I connected to my own relationship with texts and the emotions surrounding it. As we talked about their assemblage art, I opened up to the preservice teachers about how I felt that ads and society’s views on women and beauty had a negative impact on my sense of self. I told them that
I had always wrestled with unrealistic expectations when it came to my body. I shared with them how I felt that I would never measure up and felt insecurities about my body.

After viewing the preservice teachers’ ads in our group share, I felt quite emotional and vulnerable. In my journal, I wrote:

I cried a few tears after the preservice teachers left today. It hit me how I have spent years being unable to see myself properly in a mirror and a contributing factor is because during my whole life, society has consistently told me over and over again that I am not good enough. I am not tall enough and not thin enough. Today I thought about how that standard is unattainable and more importantly that society has set me up to fail. I have contemplated this before but sitting with my preservice teachers and listening to them speak was powerful. Dory and Rose opened up about how they felt insecure about their bodies. It was a powerful moment of connection as we exposed how ads made us feel less beautiful and attractive. On another note, I wasn’t ready to share about my eating disorder with the group because it felt too overwhelming and vulnerable. How could I invite them into a world where I felt so flawed? How could I explain that the size I look in the mirror is directly connected to my mood and my level of insecurity? I chose to keep that part of myself private. It made me feel too weak. (My Journal, September 2017)

In my journal, as I sat in the office and processed my emotions, I realized how sad and connected to my preservice teachers I felt. I was sad because, although I realized how I have bought into the body messages, I was not sure how to heal the damage. It has become ingrained into who I am and how I see myself in the world. My preservice teachers expressed the same body insecurities and I sat there and thought about how hard it is to be a female in society and live up to unrealistic expectations.
I was not ready to be completely vulnerable and reveal all of my true authentic self. In that moment, my personal identity was bumping up against my professional self and I refused to completely expose myself. I was not ready to become completely exposed. I did share how I felt bad about my body, how I constantly compared myself to ads, and how I felt uncomfortable in my skin. I was not ready to expose the secret I had spent my life hiding, instead choosing to protect myself and letting the preservice teachers only see a selective part of me.

As the CLW ended, I felt very exposed yet very connected to my preservice teachers. There were definitely things I shared and some things that I did not. I left uncomfortable with the knowledge they now possessed about my personal self.

Yet it was through those moments of becoming vulnerable with the preservice teachers that encouraged them to be vulnerable as well (Taylor, Klein, & Abrams, 2014). Through role modeling vulnerability, I was able to contribute to the creation of a safe space that helped the preservice teachers open up and share. Dory shared in the final meeting for the JAC, “When you opened up about your divorce, it was deep. I never saw you in that way because when I came to your class the first day I will never forget. It wasn’t like other classes. You gave us perspective. You were a good professor but the CLW was deep. It made it easier to open up when you shared your story” (January, 2019). I realized that in order to facilitate the preservice teachers unpacking their relationship between literacy and power, I had to be willing to be an active participant in the experience.

It would be untrue to say that I became completely comfortable with the process. I continually struggled with not wanting to share myself and holding strong to my professional identity. In my journal I wrote, “I leave every workshop fearing for the information they now possess. What if they tell people? But then I think that is just me guarding my insecurities and
trying to be the woman that literacy tells me I should” (September, 2016). My fears were
twofold. I was scared of appearing flawed in a professional environment and therefore looking
incompetent. I was also scared of the crashing of my two identities. I depended on my work
identity to provide confidence when I felt I was struggling with my personal identity. Yet, it was
only through this struggle and reflecting on my identities that I was in retrospect able to
understand that vulnerability does not equal incompetency. Through this experience, I learned
the importance of role modeling vulnerability.

Through thinking about my relationship with media and power, I understood at a deeper
level that the images and words I constantly consumed have bombarded me with negative
messages. All of my preservice teachers have also struggled with this at some point in their lives.
The CLW gave me the opportunity to look at myself in a new light and also think about the role
of vulnerability in my teaching. I learned the value of sharing my body issues and my “broken
family” because my preservice teachers could relate to me on a different level. They realized that
even though we are at different places and have different roles we shared similar experiences and
insecurities. Every one of the preservice teachers shared how at certain points in their lives they
felt insecure in their skin. By exposing myself and showing my vulnerability, the preservice
teachers felt comfortable sharing more of themselves. Though not always comfortable, I believe
in the importance of teacher educator vulnerability in the CLW, and its benefit for the learning
community a teacher educator creates.

As the CLW started, I was ready to actively participate, which I realized meant sharing
my personal self. Yet, I found that it was hard to go from the theoretical to the literal. I was ready
to share myself in theory but found that I felt vulnerable during the process and struggled with
inner conflict. I was planning to be an active participant; I never contemplated what it would feel
like to share my personal insecurities. Before the club meeting, I was focused on supporting my preservice teachers as they unpacked their relationship with literacy and power. I was not focused on myself; I did not think about how I would feel as I unpacked how literacy affected my understanding of self and others. Yet during the first CLW it became apparent that this was going to be a challenging experience for me both personally and as a teacher educator.

As I reflected, I tried to identify the teacher education strategies I used to facilitate critical literacy inquiry. I noted how important it was to allow myself to be vulnerable and also to partake in the unpacking process. In a sense, this was a form of role modeling for my students. I wrote in my journal:

Role modeling was key. The preservice teachers were consistently able to share and unpack their relationship with literacy after I shared. I noticed that at the final meeting Rose volunteered to share first. This was an important step. She did not need me to create a safe space through role modeling; she was able to begin the sharing. (My Journal, November 2016)

Another strategy that I used consistently throughout the CLW was asking open-ended questions to facilitate the preservice teachers’ unpacking process. In the beginning of the workshop, I was nervous about asking questions that could possibly push the preservice teachers past their comfort zone. In my journal I wrote,

I was nervous to ask Dory why her body type was a way in which she was not privileged. I am not sure if that was because I was not comfortable because of my own issues, whether I did not want to push her to discuss something that made her uncomfortable, or both (My Journal, September 2016).

Yet it was through asking the questions that the preservice teachers were able to take a closer
look at the relationship they had with literacy. After that CLW, I wrote in my field notes:

When I questioned Dory about why her body was in the lacking privilege column, she seemed to take a deep breath and then shared that she felt that society did not look at her body type as beautiful when compared to others. She felt that when she gained weight, she was judged and she did not see herself represented favorably in magazines. She seemed to connect to the concept on a deeper level after I asked the question. I think it is important that I continue to push through asking questions. (Field Notes, September 2016)

During the rest of the CLW, I asked the preservice teachers questions to facilitate their development of a deeper understanding of critical literacy. I found that the key elements were both modeling and the questioning. Although both were uncomfortable for me at times it was essential that I worked through these feelings by journaling. Reflecting gave me the opportunity to look at my feelings through a deeper lens and helped me process my emotions so I could continue to facilitate the CLW. Below I will discuss my perspective of each of the preservice teachers’ individual experiences in the CLW.

**Exploring Critical Literacy as Learners/ Inquirers**

The process of the preservice teachers beginning to develop an understanding of critical literacy was an individual one. Each of the preservice teachers connected to critical literacy through their prior personal experience. My role was to provide the environment and material to begin to think about critical literacy, role model, engage in the process, listen, and ask scaffolding questions. As discussed above, the process was not easy for me. It was filled with emotions and my identity crisis yet, through my struggles, I was able to contribute to the creation of a safe space and community where the preservice teachers embarked on their own journeys to
unpack their relationship with literacy.

I learned that with my support the process of becoming critically literate was emotional, personal, and individualized. This experience required that the preservice teachers look at themselves and their experiences to discover the ways in which texts have influenced their sense of self and others. Ultimately, this was a healing experience for all involved. Because of this very unique experience, I am presenting individual portraits of the preservice teachers’ experience in the CLW.

**Bianca: Gender Roles, Privilege, and Body Images**

Throughout the CLW, Bianca was invested in thinking about how literacy affected her understanding of self and others. During the session, she was able to express through her art, sharing time, and journals her growing understanding of critical literacy. She shared that literate texts, specifically ads and the internet, influenced her concept of self and others and she was able to unpack the hidden messages in texts that are prescribed to women.

Although a person may believe that they are immune to the stereotypical messages in media, most people’s understanding of self and others are impacted by messages received from literacy sources (Douglas, 2010). The media, for example, has portrayed women as submissive, sexual, and valued for their beauty rather than their brains (Cortse, 2016). This is particularly true in traditional alcohol ads. Women are typically scantily clad and either their bodies turn into the bottle or they are submissively holding a bottle for a fully-clothed man. The messages, or as I have termed them *hidden messages*, prescribe to women what their societal roles because they are female. I term them *hidden messages* because they covertly dictate to women what society expects of them.
Through the CLW, Bianca started to think about how texts influence our understanding of self and others. She reflected on how the messages received from media, books, and other forms of literacy influence the way you see yourself and the world around you. Figure 4 demonstrates how she began to unpack the way in which the world looked at her versus the way she saw herself. She shared the words given to her directly from texts and her community. The words she wrote in the *I Am Not* column were: “not friendly, not social, only pretty, not smart, boring, grandma, lazy, not loving, not caring, selfish, isolate myself, no values, and not a traditional woman.” While in the *I Am* column, she wrote: “loving, caring, goal oriented, athletic, compassionate, trustworthy, honest, friendly, fun, smart, values, independent, and responsible.”

Looking closely at Bianca’s *I Am Not* column, there are words that reflect stereotypes given to women considered pretty by society. These criteria are often reinforced in ads, social media, and even literature. These words are based on individual interactions; a few of the words such as “only pretty” and “not smart” are based on explicit messages that are assigned to young pretty women by the media. The media values women for their looks and portrays attractive women as lacking intelligence. When Bianca shared this piece of art, she discussed that “as a pretty woman the only messages you see are that your value is based on your looks” (Field Notes, September 2016). As I reflected, “Bianca pointed out that ads sell products to make you
skinnier and prettier” (Field Notes, September 2016). This was the beginning of her unpacking her relationship between literacy and one of her understandings of self.

Even though at first glance her picture was only partly based on messages from society, examined closely all of her words represent societal messages. The words assigned to her by her community, “selfish and not social,” reflect the stereotypes of a determined woman. Too often American society portrays women who are determined as selfish and not friendly, traits that are deemed negative in society. Women are portrayed as either good or evil. Good women are gentle, subordinate to men, and faithful, while evil women are portrayed as selfish, dominant, and abusive of power (Fixmer-Oraiz & Woods, 2019).

Bianca was able to recognize that reading the world not only affected her understanding of self, but also influenced the way people saw her. Her journal entry spoke to the new concept she had learned: “This exercise was insightful. It is an eye opener to see how at times we can all conform to societies’ (sic) beliefs, even when they do not make sense” (Bianca’s Journal CLW, September 2016). She pointed out that although literacy messages influence our sense of self and others, people never think about them explicitly and can accept truths that are against what they consider to make sense. As a person interacts with texts, they integrate the messages they receive into their understandings of the world. People may believe that they are immune to these messages, however research has pointed out that the texts a person consumes affects their view of themselves as men and women (Berger, 2015).

Throughout the rest of the CLW workshop, Bianca’s understanding of how her experiences with literacy affected her concept of self and others deepened. She continually expressed how literacy messages affected the way she saw the world and the way that world saw her. This was particularly apparent in her graphic organizer that represented *Ways I Am*
Bianca created a poster that documented her understanding of ways that she was privileged but also lacked privilege. She wrote that she was privileged because she had white skin, was educated, and had a strong community of friends. Bianca was able to express how her white skin gave her privilege. The creation of Figure 5 was insightful because she realized that her white skin held power in our society. She understood she has advantages in society based on her light skin even though she does not identify with her White family. She shared with the group, “I do not identify with the White part of myself. I grew up with my Spanish mother and my father was absent” (Field Notes, October 2016). Bianca was able to articulate how white skin is always “represented as beautiful in the media and in books” (Field Notes, October 2016). She communicated verbally and through her chart about how she understood the privilege of white skin, even when it is not something with which she identified as a Puerto Rican. Within texts, Whiteness is portrayed as both the ideal and the norm for female beauty (Fixmer-Oraiz & Woods, 2019). Whiteness is a physical attribute. In society, one’s outward appearance is the focus, not necessarily the community to which you belong. If you look white, you are identified as White.

As the CLW came to an end, Bianca reflected on her learning. She expressed how critical
literacy is essential to understanding how texts influence one’s understanding of self and others. She said, “I feel it is important to teach critical literacy because children need to know how the media and the perspective of close-minded people is not who they are or who they have to be” (CLW Post-Reflection, January 2017). Once again, Bianca expressed how important it is to be able to critique the ways in which a person is portrayed in the media. She was able to express how thinking critically about literacy is therefore essential as one develops a sense of self and others.

She not only discussed how literacy messages affect her sense of self and other, but also expressed how a negative understanding of self could lead a person to make decisions that they later regret. She shared, “Growing up I wished I was taught critical literacy because I know it would have helped me make better decisions” (CLW Reflection, January 2017). I later asked her to clarify this quote and Bianca explained that,

I was seeing guys quickly. Like, I would date this one then that one. I gave myself away to them. And I feel like if I was taught this, I would have thought more about the decisions I was making, why I was making them” (Clarification Email, December 2018).

The messages Bianca took up taught her “women should use their looks and if you do not look a certain way and aren’t a certain race then you will not succeed” (Clarification Email, December 2018). Bianca expressed how her understanding of self was based on the way in which women are portrayed, and felt that all she had to offer was her looks. It was the way in which she could succeed. This understanding of a woman’s role in society can be connected to the way woman are portrayed in texts, especially advertisements. Ads sexualize women and position them as sex objects and possessions in order to sell products (Durham, 2009).

Through her life experiences and the CLW, she was able to move past viewing herself as
one-dimensional, a woman whose strength is her looks. She reflected:

Thankfully I ran across people that changed my influence. When we did the CLW it helped me see so much. It helped me dive into and realize all of this. I don’t think I would have known how badly I was affected if I didn’t do it. (Clarification Email, December 2018)

Bianca felt that she is now in a better place: “I am good. Navigating through life. 😊 Still trying to make the best decisions” (Clarification Email, December 2018). Through her leaving bar work, going back to school, and becoming active in her church, Bianca readjusted her understanding of self. She no longer saw herself as one-dimensional, rather she envisioned a career that was more than just about her looks and rather based on her intellect. She wanted to finish her bachelor’s degree and build her own business. Her current perception of self has evolved and she began to see herself as more than just a pretty face. She began to strive towards building a career. She stated:

I have my confidence back, but in a true way. I know who I am and what makes me unique. I know my worth and that was a game changer for me. I know I do not need anyone to complete me, and that I am a complete on my own. I know what love is and I have people in my life who truly show me it. I also know that there is no such thing as perfect. (Clarification Email, January 2019)

Through the experience of participating in the CLW, Bianca grew her ability to verbally and artistically express how literacy affected her understanding of self and others, as well as how it also changed the lens by which the world saw her. This is an essential component of critical literacy.
After starting the second CLW, Bianca was able to begin to look at the messages found in texts. She developed an understanding that these messages are never neutral and reflect the dominant beliefs in society, and were evident in both her artwork and her journal. She created an ad as seen in Figure 6. This rewritten ad (Vasquez et al., 2013) looked at the message given to children: Fat bodies are not healthy. Bianca wrote several comments to connect to the warning images: “I feel healthy and am active” and “I love how I look.” Bianca not only worked to rewrite the ad, but she also began to think about the hidden messages. She clearly stated this in her journal when she wrote, “We subconsciously let ads dictate what we think and what we see ourselves as” (Bianca’s Journal, October 2016). Through this rewritten ad, Bianca documented her ability to acknowledge the message of the ad about healthy bodies, and rewrite the message. This experience helped her realize that ads send hidden messages that are subconsciously accepted and adopted as ways of understanding ourselves and others.

Bianca was able to integrate the concept of how narratives contain hidden messages that represent the dominant beliefs in society and was able to unpack them. She not only expressed this in her art and journal, but also in the CLW Post-reflection where Bianca wrote, “I feel it is important to teach critical literacy because children need to know how the media and the
perspective of close-minded people is not who they are or who they have to be” (CLW Post Reflection, Jan 2017).

This new understanding helped Bianca on a daily basis as she interacted with literacy. She shared:

The critical literacy workshop that I took part in helped me think deeper about the daily occurrences and messages I see through the media and people. It also helped me look inward to see things in myself that I did not before the workshop. It shed a lot of light on how the media tries to tell us who we are. The media tells woman that they have to be skinny and have sex appeal and that is all we are good for. (CLW Post Reflection, Jan 2017)

The CLW served not only as an experience where Bianca could understand critical literacy, but also as an experience where she began to articulate how the media influenced her self-esteem and her actions. Bianca was able to express how the media had influenced how she viewed herself as a woman. The media, and in particular ads, affected what a woman considers beauty, attractiveness, success, and femininity (Berger, 2015).

**Rose: Embracing Brownness**

Rose, the second preservice teacher, was also an active participant in the CLW. Throughout the CLW, Rose began to develop an understanding of critical literacy. Her understanding focused on how literacy affected her understanding of the world and the way in which the world saw her (Freire, 1972). She focused on how society saw her and began to investigate the consequences of skin color, specifically Brownness.

Rose started to reflect on the components of critical literacy through interrogating the validity of literacy messages. She began by interrogating labels that were assigned to her.
Throughout the CLW workshop, Rose discussed and investigated the concept of stereotypes created by texts. During the CLW she shared two incidents that described how being considered Latinx affected her life. The first incident occurred while Rose was away at college. As I noted, “Rose told us that she felt very out of place at school because everyone was White. She was the only Latinx person. One day a white boy on a campus bus asked, “What are you?” Rose felt like she stood out and everyone was staring at her” (Field Notes, September 2016). This moment was one that she shared with emotion. In my journal I wrote, “Today when Rose shared the story about the boy on the bus, I sensed that she was angry. She shared that “people are people”, and why did he have to ask” (My Journal, October 2016). Through acknowledging the power of a label, Rose was beginning to be cognizant of the messages that are assigned to Latinx people by the media.

Rose believed that through interacting with texts, especially advertisements, television, and movies, people learn how to categorize and label specific groups. I noted, “Today Rose talked about how she felt that literacy and people were always trying to label everyone. She shared; they want to know who we are. Why does that matter?” (Field Notes, October 2016). Rose was beginning to interrogate the validity of stereotypical messages that exist in the world and can be seen in various representations (Vasquez et al., 2013).

Rose also shared in the CLW that being Latinx led to discrimination in society. She shared a story that represented her understanding of society. I wrote about the incident she shared in my field notes:

Today Rose shared an incident that occurred when she went to a chain electronic store with her father to buy a flat screen TV. The store clerk said, “That one is expensive. How about this one?” When her father insisted on seeing the original TV, the clerk once again
said it was too expensive and directed him to a cheaper TV. Her father got upset and asked to speak to the manager. He then told the manager that the clerk was being racist and had lost a sale. He then left the store. Rose felt that this was because he was Latinx. She shared everyone believes you are poor and can’t afford anything just because you are Latinx. That is not my life. My Dad has a degree in engineering and we own our house. People look at you and think they know you. (Field Notes, September 2016)

Rose, with the support of the group, unpacked the incident and began to think about the connection between the incident and stereotypes that are rampant in the world and can be seen in literacy. In my journal I wrote, “It was interesting to see the group supported Rose as she shared the story about her father. Rose was thoughtful when I asked her how do you think this connects to the way Latinx people are portrayed in literacy” (My Journal, September 2016). The preservice teachers then engaged in the lively discussion that I share below:

When I asked Rose how Latinx people are portrayed in literacy, she responded that today Rose mentioned how there never were books about Brown children when she was growing up and she thought that there weren’t any books now. All the books and curricula were geared to White students. The preservice teachers also talked about how they never learned about Latin American history or read books with Latinx characters in school. We all discussed writing books for Brown children. (Field Notes, September 2016)

Rose, through the experience of sharing and unpacking with the group, was able to understand how literacy messages are connected to power and privilege or lack of in society (Freire, 1985). She identified how Latinx people are negatively portrayed in the media and are mostly absent in school curricula, while White people are positively identified and represented in the curricula.
By unpacking the messages, Rose was exhibiting and understanding that critical literacy demands that the reader interrogates the text, understands whose perspective is represented, and how it is connected to power in society (Vasquez, et al., 2013).

Rose, during the CLW, moved from labeling herself as Hispanic (Latinx) to considering herself Brown. Thinking about critical literacy, and the messages in society that are prescribed to Latinx people as discussed above, led her to change how she identified herself. Rose’s change in label was integral to her new understanding of self. She shared her thoughts in the post questionnaire, where I asked the question, “How did this workshop change the way you look at the media, yourself, and others?” Rose wrote:

This workshop (CLW) changed the way I am overall. I look at literacy differently because I was able to see to messages that they threw at us. I would see media as it is and not even think about it twice. Now, based on what I learned, I found out new things about myself that I would have never thought about ever. I now describe myself to be “Brown”, since others are described to be “White” or “Black.” I’ve always wondered why we were labeled to be “Hispanic”? Why not just “Brown”? What if I was “Brown” but not Hispanic? The workshop had me thinking about myself as a whole and who I really was a person. Based on others which are my classmates in the workshop gave me a reality check. (CLW Reflection, Jan 2017)

Rose identifying herself as Brown was an empowering action. She was no longer willing to be identified by the term “Hispanic” and the stereotypes that literacy and society has assigned her. She instead decided to identify with a new label. documenting her understanding of an important component of critical literacy the connection between label created by literacy and empowerment (Freire & Macedo, 1998; Mosley, 2010. Rose was no longer willing to be identified through
society’s stereotypical definition of Hispanic identity. Through changing the label, Rose disassociated herself from a label she considered negative, and created her own understanding of self (Vasquez et al., 2013).

Although Rose identified with her new label, she also acknowledged that “It is not easy being Brown in society” (Field Notes, October 2016). Rose shared how through her experiences in society and in literacy she felt marginalized. I documented: “Rose shared that Brown people are not represented in history classes or other content areas. She was angry that there are no children’s books for Brown children, only White children. She was struggling with feeling marginalized in society” (My Journal, September 2016).

Rose documented her experience of marginalization in her *Ways I Am Privileged/Ways I Am Not Privileged* literacy chart that is documented in Figure 7. In the chart, she wrote that she is privileged because she was born in the United States, is able to speak two languages, lives with her entire family, is educated and athletic, and was born into a financially stable family. She also documented the ways in which she did not feel that she has privilege: because she is Spanish, is regarded as poor, is a Brown female, and does not live in a good neighborhood.

Rose’s poster documented her understanding that privilege is linked to both skin color
and ethnicity (McIntosh, 1988). As a Brown Latinx woman, she noted that she was not in possession of the currency of power of our country. However, Rose also understood the privilege one has when she is an educated citizen of the United States.

Rose’s ability to articulate how hard it is to be Brown, and document her marginalization in her *Ways I Am Privileged/Ways I Am Not Privileged* (McIntosh, 1988) chart (illustrated in Figure 7) exhibited her new understanding of critical literacy. She was able to connect how books and curriculum reflect the dominant group in society as well as silence others by excluding them from literacy. By pointing out that Brown people are not seen in history and in books, Rose expressed her understanding that texts reflect the dominant group in society (Freire, 1972; Mosley, 2010).

As the CLW closed, Rose reflected on her learning. She discussed, as stated above, how the CLW helped her to develop a new understanding of self: she is a Brown woman. During her final reflection for the CLW, Rose wrote, “When coming into the workshop, I really didn’t think I would leave knowing who I really am” (Final Reflection CLW, October 2016). Through creating the art and discussing with the group, Rose developed what she considered to be a new understanding of herself, reflected in her final artwork. In the piece, we each chose to either draw a picture of or write words that represent ourselves; Rose’s art expressed her new identification as a Brown woman.

Rose left the CLW understanding how critical literacy is not only about reading the world, but also about determining how power is represented and functions in society (Freire & Macedo, 1998; Shor & Pari, 1999). She reflected:

Teaching critical literacy to children is important because it gives them an overview of how to think. It teaches them to uncover underlying messages that other people might not
see. Children need to learn how to analyze certain things whether it is the media, school, or people in general. It gives children a sense of being able to understand topics such as power and inequity in human relationships. (CLW Post-Reflection, January 2017)

Through teaching children to think about literacy, Rose shared that it would teach them how to analyze the media, school, people, as well as begin to interrogate power in society. In her statement, Rose articulated the understanding that critical literacy is not only looking at the underlying messages in the world, but also interrogating them and connecting those messages to how power and inequity exist in society.

**Dory: Becoming a Social Justice Thinker**

Dory, like Rose and Bianca, was a willing participant in the CLW. Throughout the CLW, Dory delved into examining an important component of critical literacy: interrogating social justice issues and injustice in society. She looked at how the media portrays marginalized populations and reflected on how the media influence one’s self-concept and understanding of others. I documented her understanding by looking at the artifacts she created, her journal entries, and my field notes.

Dory started to think about the components of critical literacy through examining social justice issues in society; specifically, she examined the ways in which different populations are marginalized. The first group that Dory considered was breastfeeding mothers. Breastfeeding has long been looked upon negatively by society. Women’s bodies and breasts are acceptable when it comes to displaying them in public for male attention, however it is unacceptable for women to use their breasts to feed their babies in public (Acker, 2009).

During our second session, the group discussed how ads are created and the hidden messages that exist in advertisements. When the group began to rewrite advertisements, Dory
chose to rewrite a breastfeeding ad.

In Dory’s picture (Figure 8), she wrote “It is everyone’s dream to eat in the bathroom”, and “Why is nature a crime?” (Figure 8, October 2017). Both of these comments point to the important issue that has been neglected in society: the acceptance of public breastfeeding. Through analyzing how breastfeeding women are marginalized, Dory began to enact an important component of critical literacy. She was examining how literacy can be an empowerment tool for marginalized populations (Freire, 1985). Instead of rewriting the ad, Dory chose to reflect on a social justice issue in society and investigate ways in which literacy can be an empowerment tool which helps others and move past their understanding of breastfeeding in public. When asked to journal about the experience, Dory wrote:

Today’s activity helped me look and break out of stereotypes and judgments. For example, breastfeeding people think (some) it’s not okay to breastfeed. It bothers me that people think that way because it’s something so natural. How can a baby be nasty or breastfeeding? Nature is beautiful. (Dory’s Journal, October 2016)

Dory, in her journal, expressed her support of an important social justice issue and shared about
how the activity had helped her to move past stereotypes. She looked at breastfeeding through the lens of the marginalized rather than how it is typically perceived in society.

After the session, I wrote in my field notes, “Dory seemed confused as the purpose of the activity. Yet, when she shared, she did mention stereotypes but she was not able to connect to the concept of hidden messages” (Field Notes, October 2016). However, after further reflection, I was able to look at her experience through a different lens. Even though she waivered from the task by reaffirming the ads, she was in fact articulating her understanding of the power of literacy. Through rewriting the message to reflect the perspective of breastfeeding mothers, a group that has been marginalized in society, Dory expressed her understanding that literacy, although it is connected to power in society, can be also a mechanism for empowerment (Freire, 1985).

As the CLW workshop continued, Dory continued to expand her notions of critical literacy by further looking at how people are marginalized in society. She looked at issues concerning body size, skin color, and gender, which influenced her self-concept. Her new understanding was visible in her creation of the *Ways I Am Privileged/Ways I Am Not Privileged* chart:

*Figure 9. Ways I Am Privileged/ Ways I Am Not Privileged* (October 2016).
Dory’s chart (Figure 9) documented her understanding of privilege in society. She shared that she recognized that she has privilege because she speaks two languages, was in school, and was born in the United States. Dory also felt that she lacks privilege because as she is female, pale-skinned, short, has a specific body shape, and lives in a neighborhood which is Latin and Brown. Through this chart, Dory expressed her understanding that in society people possess different amounts of unearned privilege (McIntosh, 1988). She was able to connect through self-examination to the critical literacy concept that there is unequal access to privilege in society. Dory clearly stated the ways in which she possessed privilege and did not. It is interesting to note that Dory was able to connect to the ways in which one’s identity gives one privilege and also denies one privilege. By putting female in both columns, Dory expressed her understanding of the complexity of one’s identity. Dory reiterated her understanding when she wrote in her journal:

Today we made a chart on what ways we were not privileged and privileged. It made me realize how not having privilege can be a disadvantage, like being a female. However, privileges make me feel blessed. I am Latina and pale complexioned and have an amazing family. It is better to accept who we are because we have no choice. (Dory’s Journal CLW, October 2016)

Dory’s journal documented her understanding. She wrote how she had discovered that when a person does not have privilege in society, it is a disadvantage. She shared that she lacks privilege because she is a woman. Through identifying herself as a female who lacks power, Dory was able to delve deeper into her examination of marginalized populations in society.

Dory also shared that privilege is a blessing. She wrote that her skin color gives her privilege, as she is a light-skinned Latinx woman. Dory recognized the power that her lighter
skin has in our society. Light-skinned Latinx people can possess white privilege (Hunter, 2004). Having lighter skin can enable non-white people to pass as White and therefore reap the benefits of unearned white privilege.

It is interesting to note that Dory expanded her understanding of the ways in which she had privilege in her journal. She wrote that she had privilege because she was “Latin and light-skinned.” Her chart did not mention her light skin. In fact, Dory’s chart documented her understanding that her “Latina and pale skin” identity was a way in which she lacked privilege. Dory’s new understanding could be in part because, when Bianca shared her chart, she discussed with the group that she possessed privilege because she was a light-skinned half “Hispanic” woman. Through engaging in the conversation with the group, Dory expressed a deeper understanding of privilege in her journal. Dory began to understand that in society she possesses white privilege as a light-skinned woman (Hunter, 2004). Dory, when asked to reflect on the CLW, discussed the importance of critical literacy education. She wrote:

The reason why I think that it is important to teach critical literacy to children is because it gives them the opportunity to expand on their ideas and enhance their voices. Critical literacy for children will not only help them speak up for themselves and stay true to their feelings while also creating a better learning and understanding for both student and the teacher. For example, teachers can understand why a person is a way they are based on their experiences. (CLW Post-Reflection, January 2017)

Dory was not only articulating the importance of critical literacy - she was pointing out the importance of using critical literacy as a way to enhance children’s voices. Taking ownership of literacy messages by rewriting them can be a means of empowering marginalized populations (Freire, 1972; Freire & Macedo, 1998; Shor & Pari, 1999).
When reflecting on her own experience in the post reflection of the CLW, Dory demonstrated the emotional journey that can occur when one becomes critically literate:

When sitting at the table for the critical literacy workshop I saw a different side to myself. I am able to notice the drastic change I decided to make. I wasn’t aware of the hurt and pain I held in for so many years. When I opened up and spoke about my personal experiences, there were stories I never told anybody because of no one especially I like to think or remember. [These stories] . . . once caused me so much pain, doubt, and discourage about myself. There were times when I wanted to cry while sitting with my amazing classmate and my professor in our sessions. I never expected to ever express myself. I was digging up memories that I promised myself I would never want to talk about. (CLW Post-Reflection, January 2017)

Dory shared that the CLW was an experience where she learned to open up to people. She also unpacked experiences in her past that had left her feeling vulnerable. Her experience with critical literacy involved unpacking the emotions that were connected to her experiences with literacy, as well as her experiences as a marginalized person in society. The emotional journey, I have come to realize, can be an important part of becoming a critical literacy educator because, without unpacking the emotions that have merged from feeling marginalized by societal narratives, it is impossible to truly connect to the power of critical literacy and the effect these narratives can have on our sense of self. Traditionally, emotions have been looked upon as barriers to cognition. More and more in the field of teacher education, emotions are being acknowledged as a valid way to constructing knowledge and understanding, and should be valued as part of the learning process (Forgasz & Clemans, 2014).

Specifically recognizing the negative effects that narratives have on one’s self concept,
and the pain they can cause, allows a person to develop a new understanding of the messages that are embedded in literacy. I had a different initial understanding of the importance of emotions in critical literacy. I saw them as part of the process but not as part of the learning. As the CLW ended, I thought about Dory’s conception in my journal:

Dory seems to have gone through an emotional experience. Numerous times throughout the club she talked about social justice issues with the group that she was not comfortable sharing with other people. Yet she did not seem to grasp the concept of critical literacy. I wonder though, if by investigating her emotions concerning social justice issues, is she beginning her journey to becoming critically literate? (My Journal, October 2016)

As I investigated the data and discussed my initial findings with my advisor, I realized the importance of looking past my narrow view of critical literacy, and considering the important emotional work that needs to be done as one builds an understanding of critical literacy. Through reflecting on, and emotionally connecting to, social justice issues and specifically ways in which she felt marginalized, Dory expressed the emotions connected to her experiences with literacy and messages she received from the media. Those experiences were connected to social justice and body issues in society. She wrote in the CLW Post-Reflection:

This session changed how I see myself and how I see others. Everyone has a different story, different setting, plot, beginning, climax, and ending. Everyone’s journey is not the same, which is what makes everyone unique. We all continue to write and tell our stories and should live life the way we want. We shouldn’t worry about people’s expectation especially the expectation of the media since it is all Photoshop and we sometimes fail to realize that we live in a reality and not in a virtual world and accept that no matter how much we try we will never be perfect but there will forever be room for improvement and
that it is okay to make mistakes. The beauty of life are the life lessons and pain because if I lived my life the way I imagine and once planned as a child I would have never come across these experiences along with the fascinating people that came along and for that, I am thankful for. (CLW Post-Reflection, January 2017)

Dory, in her reflection, articulated how the experience in the CLW began to change the way she thought of herself. She acknowledged that the media and the ways in which the body is presented had taken an emotional toll and that she needed to let go off people’s expectations of herself. Dory reflected on the process of letting go in her clarification email. She shared that she used to, “hate my body having big thighs and a big gluteus maximus wasn’t always a ‘trend’” (Clarification Email, March 2019) but now she has a new perspective: “Magazines only show males lifting weights and woman taking picture of on the treadmill working on cardio. Why couldn’t pictures be taken of women lifting weights? Why was it such an issue to be strong or look manly?” (Clarification Email, March 2019). When Dory was questioning why women were not portrayed as strong, she was moving past blindly accepting media messages, to interrogating them and questioning their validity. For Dory, unpacking the media messages that affected her understanding of self and her emotional scars, caused her to express her understanding that critical literacy demands the reader interrogates the word and the world (Freire, 1985, Freire & Macedo, 1998).

As the CLW ended, I found that it was emotional but rewarding - the insight gained was that the experience in the CLW was unique. It was unique for two reasons. First, we had a tremendous amount of time to investigate our relationship with critical literacy; little time was devoted to providing preservice teachers with the opportunity and support to unpack their relationship with literacy. The preservice teachers were able to begin to understand critical
literacy, not through an academic experience where they investigated the concept through a theoretical lens, but rather through the lived experience. The lived experience, as theorized by Dewey, is learning through taking part in the work and then having the opportunity to processing the experience by engaging in reflective practice (Dewey, 1938). They were able to use art and the group discussions to experience the impact that literacy had on their understanding of self and others as well as begin to heal.

I am able to look back and realize that my role was to provide the preservice teachers the space, time, and scaffolding needed to unpack their emotional experience. It was through that emotional experience that the preservice teachers were able to connect to critical literacy and begin to heal. It would be simple to say that the preservice teachers all left the CLW with a unified understanding of critical literacy. However, that would be untrue and unrealistic. Each of their journeys spoke to their personal experience with understanding literacy and how it affected their understanding of self and others. It would also be simplistic to state that I now understand how to prepare preservice teachers to begin to understand the concept of critical literacy. It has left me contemplating how I could recreate this experience in a teacher education classroom where there are rigorous materials that need to be covered, a large group of preservice teachers, and preservice teachers who maybe resistant to the process.

After the CLW, I decided to provide the preservice teachers the opportunity to co-construct a JAC with kindergarten, first-, and second-graders. I began preparing for the JAC and was filled with expectations, excitement, and fear. In the following section, I describe my process of co-planning the Critical Literacy Junk Art Club as well as the preservice teachers’ experiences in the planning of the JAC.
Growing Critically Literate: Planning for Critical Literacy Junk Art Club

The preservice teachers and I met to plan the JAC. I document the experience by first setting the scene, discussing my experience co-planning the JAC, and then documenting each of the preservice teachers’ experiences.

Setting the Scene

Before the JAC, I was filled with excitement and nerves. I wrote, “Tomorrow is exciting but I am nervous. I am dedicated to creating a space for the preservice teachers to take their prior knowledge and use it in the JAC. I plan to provide scaffolding” (October, 2018).

We agreed to meet and plan in the conference room connected to my office. The small room is filled with one large conference table and six comfortable leather chairs. I wanted to make sure that the preservice teachers were comfortable and understood that I appreciated their time so I went out and got water and snacks (skinny popcorn, fruit, and munchkins). They were excited upon arrival as they had not seen each other in a while. As they arrived, they began chit-chatting and catching up. In my journal I wrote:

It is amazing to see how connected they all are. Rose and Dory had gotten together socially over the break and they all seemed to be aware of the important things happening in each other’s lives. They were chatting about Bianca’s Instagram pictures, Rose’s puppy, relationships issues, and Dory’s job. They had gone from being members of the group to friends. I was happy to see that they considered me as part of the group. They asked me questions about my life and school. In fact, several times during the planning session the discussion became sidetracked.

I began the initial planning session by asking the preservice teachers about their understanding of critical literacy, which I discuss below, when I reflect on each of the preservice
teacher’s experiences. I mentally wrestled to make sure that I didn't lead the discussion and focused on scaffolding without taking over the conversation. In my journal I wrote, “During the session today, I struggled to make sure that I didn’t lead and take over the conversation so they could run the conversation” (My Journal, October 2017). Each of the preservice teachers had different levels of involvement in the planning session, yet they were all engaged and lively during the meeting.

Our initial planning session started with the creation of a prior knowledge chart which I will document below. During the making of the chart, I recorded the preservice teachers’ thoughts on the chart. I then introduced the basic parameters of the JAC, and we began to plan the goal, the components of the lesson plans, the lesson plans, and the structure of the JAC. The parameters I shared were that the club was going to be a JAC, and would last one and half hours. At the closing of the planning meeting, we wrote in our journals. Below, I discuss my growth as a critical educator during the planning phase of the JAC as well as the experiences of each of the preservice teachers:

Critical Literacy Co-Planning: Broadening my Understanding of Critical Literacy

In retrospect, I entered the CLW and the JAC with a very specific understanding of critical literacy. The process of providing scaffolding for Dory and Rose and analyzing the data caused me to reconsider and expand my understanding of critical literacy. I was constrained by my own point of view I was working towards the preservice teachers developing an understanding of critical literacy. I now felt shocked by my arrogance and narrow view. The realizations I document below were humbling and necessary. They taught me an important lesson: being a critical literacy and social justice educator is not about becoming an expert but rather continually growing, evolving, and challenging one’s understandings with my preservice
We created a goal for the JAC as a group. The goal was that we hoped the children would leave the JAC being “more open-minded” and able “to begin to look at literacy and decided what is factual and what is not, and learning to think for oneself instead of accepting what is fed to you by society” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2107).

Rose, during the creation of the goal, shared that children should leave the JAC with an “open mind and creative thinking” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2107) and see “literacy with an imagination not just how they are taught to see it” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2107). My initial reaction to this was that Rose was confused. I did not understand how having an open mind and thinking creatively and using your imagination were tenets of critical literacy. I was limited by my rigid understanding of critical literacy. In my journal I wrote, “She seemed confused when creating the prior knowledge chart and the goal. Her words were sometimes on target but then she seemed to get lost such as when she was talking about having an imagination and being creative” (My Journal, October 2017). I was fixated on my narrow understanding and was not able to develop a deeper understanding.

It was not until I had written the first draft of my dissertation, and was questioned by my advisor, that I understood that Rose had shared a profound perspective of critical literacy that expanded my understanding. My understanding of critical literacy expanded when I reflected on the connection between having an imagination and how it applied to critical thinking about literacy. When you draw upon Greene’s (1988) work, and the concept of the social imagination, you begin to understand the connection. The social imagination is the process of envisioning an alternate reality where the current social injustices in society do not exist. It is through imagining that one can read texts differently and begin to see a society where the current status quo no
longer exists and look at ways in which it can be different. I also discovered that Rose’s understanding of the importance of having an open mind when interacting with literature describes the process of looking at texts and seeing multiple possibilities when reading the messages.

The process of scaffolding for Dory also brought me to another important discovery: that becoming critically literate can include an emotional component. When I was scaffolding, and recording her experience during the JAC, I did so with a very limited lens. I looked upon her journey as one of completely misunderstanding the concept because she focused solely on her emotional journey. I wrote in my journal:

Dory seems to have gone through an emotional experience. Numerous times throughout the club she talked about social justice issues with the group that she was not comfortable sharing with other people. Yet she did not seem to grasp the concept of critical literacy. I wonder, though if by investigating her emotions concerning social justice issues, is she beginning her journey to becoming critically literate. (My Journal, October 2017)

I was under the assumption that her emotional experience was not connected to critical literacy; I wrote: “Yet she did not seem to grasp the concept of critical literacy” (My Journal, October, 2017). I looked upon emotion as an important part of her journey; I did not connect her feelings to her developing understanding of critical literacy. I did not connect her emotions to her learning. Emotions have long been looked up as separate from cognitive learning. They have been seen as a barrier to developing reasoning or a cognitive understanding (Winans, 2012). Emotions however, are a different way of knowing one’s self and the word we live in (Dirkx, 2008).

In retrospect, I realize that my journey, much like Dory’s, was one where learning
occurred through my emotions. It started when I was first moved to the United States and felt alienated in a classroom where there my heritage and identity were not valued. I felt invisible and worthless. As I processed my feelings, I began to question the system. I sought to erase my feeling of invisibility and worthlessness through proving that the United States was not the only country of worth; that my country was modern, free, and valuable, and that the American worldview and history was not the only perspective. The emotion drove me to discover, and through my research I learned, that the history I learned at school and that view of the world was not pure fact. It was a perspective and there were other perspectives of the same events and different views of the world. My discovery, driven by emotions, taught me that texts are never neutral and often reflect the dominant groups in society’s perspective.

Years later, as I struggled with my body image issues, I had a hard time connecting to my prior knowledge and instead consumed the body messages like a starving person. I have been teaching about sexism in our society and the media’s contribution to female body issues and eating disorders for years. I can discuss the concepts, but have had a hard time integrating the knowledge on an emotional level. However, during the CLW as I sat and listened and felt, I was able to use my emotions to feel the pain from societal female body messages. Feeling the pain is not only part of healing, but also part of learning: learning that body images are prescribed by a male-dominated society that marginalizes women and the deep understanding that critical literacy is an emotional learning journey. I would love to say that, through the unpacking process, I have conquered my demons, however that would be untrue. I am now beginning the process of intellectually moving past understanding critical literacy, when it pertains to my body image, and trying to emotionally grasp the concept.

In retrospect, I realize that Bianca’s understanding of critical literacy is the most aligned
to my own. However, the two other preservice teachers facilitated the expanding of my understanding, not only in my growth as a critical literacy teacher educator, but in my understanding of critical literacy, and as a person.

Broadening my understanding was essential for my growth as a teacher educator. It taught me to not only look to educate my students, but also need to constantly interrogate and be open to changing my understanding. I learned that co-constructing not only means planning and implementing the lessons, but also being open to co-constructing the concepts that we were investigating. It was important that I learned to reassess my role, and I plan to dedicate myself to not only talking about co-constructing, but also fully investing myself in the process in the future.

Each of the preservice teachers uniquely contributed to the planning meetings as they entered with their individual understandings of critical literacy, as well as their personal background experiences in school and society. The following section details my understanding of each of the preservice teachers’ contributions to the planning of the JAC.

**Bianca: Critical Literacy Coach**

As a preservice teacher, Bianca entered the planning phase of the JAC with the most coherent understanding of critical literacy of the group. This was evident both in the discussion and creation of the prior knowledge chart. During the creation of the chart, Bianca shared that the way in which a person comprehended texts was dependent on “their environment and background” (JAC Prior Knowledge Chart, October 2017). She articulated that narratives affect a person’s understanding of self, history, and the world around him or her. She also expressed that when one creates texts they are based “on a person’s perspective” (JAC Prior Knowledge Chart, October 2017). She explained that to be critically literate you need to recognize how texts
influence our personal view of the world.

Not only was she able to articulate her understanding of critical literacy in the prior knowledge chart, but she also did so during the setting of goals. While discussing the goals, Bianca was able to quickly relate to the important components of critical literacy. Bianca thought it was important that when the children completed the Junk Art Club, they left knowing that just because it is fed to them by the media, TV, or books they don’t have to buy that and you can think for yourself and you can decide who you are, who you want to be, what is acceptable to you, and what is important in your life (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017).

Her goals for the children built upon the concepts she expressed while creating the prior knowledge chart and in the CLW. In the CLW, she articulated that reading affects your sense of self and that there are hidden messages in texts. Her expanded explanation above discusses the importance of unpacking the hidden messages in literacies so you can decide who you want to be.

The planning meeting was the first time that Bianca referenced how thinking critically about literacy is tied to understanding that dominant texts often represent power in society. During our creation of the prior knowledge chart and the lesson planning, she discussed two issues that reflected how narratives could be tied to power in society. At first, she expressed how the Latinx experience was not documented in the history of Columbus. While we discussed Columbus during the creation of the prior knowledge chart, Bianca expressed how she felt that the K-12 curricula does not represent everyone. When I questioned her on the issue, she answered, “Um, I probably wouldn’t say ever. Maybe in college you start seeing it in multicultural classes or some history classes” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017).
She also shared how she was disgusted that people had Columbus Day off as a holiday: “A lot of people don’t have work. I went to dinner and with my friends and they had off. It is insane that we honor a man who committed awful crimes” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Bianca articulated how society tells one version of events and that groups of people’s experiences are often left out. Christopher Columbus, as Bianca discussed, is an example of this. He is a figure who in history is represented as the man who discovered America. Yet, the details of his atrocities are not widely documented (Bigelow, 1992).

We then focused on creating a variety of lessons for the JAC. We planned six lessons, including two based on holidays; two based on ads, and two based on examining one’s self-concept. In particular, we worked on a lesson plan for Thanksgiving. As we began to choose the topic, Bianca shared, “You could think about the history behind it” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017) and “there is not just one story but we usually hear one story, a White man’s story” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Bianca’s comments reveal her awareness of the dominance in history of those in power and how the story of Thanksgiving is largely told through the eyes of a white male perspective. The erasure of Native American culture, theft of their land, and genocide of their people are not the focus of the narrative.

Not only did she have the ability to discuss the important components of critical literacy, Bianca was able to apply theoretical knowledge to create materials for the JAC. One example of her application of a critical literacy framework to the lesson was the Halloween PowerPoint. As we worked together to create the introduction, Bianca shared the following ideas:

Angela: From the lesson plan, we are going to focus on how gender is portrayed. We are going to show the costume without a face.
Bianca: Let’s use a firefighter and a postman. Those are jobs that people assume are for men. (JAC Planning Session 2 Transcript, October 2017)

The Halloween PowerPoint (Figure 10) was co-constructed by Rose, and addressed the important issue of how the media gives specific characteristics to different genders. The PowerPoint included pictures of Halloween costumes in which the faces of the children were obscured. The plan was to ask the children to describe what they thought the person wearing the costume looked like. We worked together to find costumes that were stereotypically male and female. The three male costumes, as seen in Figure 10, are policeman, fireman, and mailman. Upon choosing them, Bianca pointed out that “the body language of the boys is different than the girls. Girls are only seen as sexy” (JAC Session 2 Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Both the pictures, and her observation, express how Bianca saw the ways men and woman are portrayed differently. Too often women are portrayed as weak sexual objects while men are portrayed as aggressors (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019). Using these pictures in the PowerPoint created an activity, which provided the children with the opportunity to think about these messages.
Bianca not only had an emerging understanding of critical literacy, but was also able to apply this framework to support the other preservice teachers as we worked. She used her emerging knowledge to help keep the group on target during the goal setting and planning. For example, we were sitting down in the conference room in my office and had just finished creating the prior knowledge chart. I asked the group what our goal for the JAC should be. Rose felt we should aspire to have the children leave the club with an “open mind and creative thinking” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2107) and to see “literacy with an imagination not just how they are taught to see it” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Although these statements describe how we need to think about literacy rather than just digesting it, the concept of imagination and creativity speaks to inventing rather than interrogating and unpacking texts. Bianca quickly picked up on this and corrected Rose by saying:

Not imagination, because imagination is not real. We want them to see the messages. I think it all falls under the umbrella of really thinking for yourself and really you know okay you are going to read this stuff you are going to learn this stuff you are going to see this stuff but knowing that okay this is what they are feeding us but let me think let me do my own research on what I perceive. (JAC Initial Planning Transcript, October 2017)

Through her conversation with Rose, Bianca was able to express how critical literacy is looking at the hidden messages and then doing research to figure out the way you personally perceive them. This was the first time Bianca ever stated that critical literacy is more than seeing the hidden messages and understanding how literacy affects your sense of self and others, but it also requires readers to interrogate and research to develop their own under perspective of the texts and messages.
When the group was creating the lesson plan for the Halloween project, Bianca was able to bring the group back when the discussion started to waver and lose the focus of the lesson goal and the critical literacy component. As the group was deciding a goal for the lesson, we had the following conversation:

Angela: Okay, so what is our goal?
Rose: Maybe ask them what they are going to be for Halloween?
Dory: What if they don’t celebrate Halloween, because I know some people don’t.
Rose: Oh yeah.
Bianca: But that isn’t our goal. We need a critical literacy goal.
Angela: Yeah that is true.
Rose: Oh, goal. (JAC Initial Planning Transcript, October 2017)

Bianca, through her comments, demonstrated how she understood the importance of making sure that our plan was focused on developing critical literacy. When the other two preservice teachers were off-topic and focusing on who was celebrating Halloween, Bianca used her knowledge to bring the group back on task. She did not, however, negate the preservice teachers’ thoughts on making sure the project spoke to all students and that they felt included in the plan. She added, “We don’t want people to feel left out. I was thinking perception of Halloween” (JAC Initial Planning Transcript, October 2017). Through this exchange, Bianca demonstrated her understanding of the value of critical literacy, as she did not want to waver from the goal. She also expressed how engaging in critical literacy includes the ability to interrogate societal messages even though they may not personally pertain to oneself.

Bianca was able to use the preservice teachers’ concerns, and build upon them, while ensuring that the goal of the plan reflected the purpose of the JAC. I wrote in my field notes,
“Bianca was able to keep the group on task when at certain points we digressed into conversations that were off-topic or missed the point of the JAC” (My Field Notes, October 2017). This was helpful to the process. Bianca, through her emerging role as a leader, was able to keep us focused on critical literacy.

**Rose: The Planner**

Rose entered the JAC having previously shared her understanding of the three components of critical literacy. However, at certain points she was unable to articulate her understanding. When we began creating the prior knowledge chart, Rose was the first person to share, stating that critical literacy “is how we see it in our own point of view” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017) and “is not the same” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). When asked to explain, Rose stated, “the paper and the ads….” In retrospect, I think that Rose was trying to articulate that when we read media and advertising, we understand them through our own perspective. Specifically, when we engage with texts, we use our background knowledge as the lens by which we interpret the information. However, the words she used were hard to interpret.

At another point in the discussion, Rose was able to articulate her understanding. She shared, “Words don’t have the same meaning for everyone.” She expressed her critical literacy belief that texts are never neutral and meaning depends on the person that is reading the world (Freire & Macedo, 1998; Shor & Pari, 1999).

Even though Rose was struggling to express her beliefs, she was able to apply them through interrogating texts. As we created the prior knowledge chart she shared, Since day one…that is when I started to see the different perspectives and my own perspective. I remember this one time I was telling my sister, “Do you see what they just
did?”, and she was like, “No, I don’t get it.”, and I was like, “Watch it again.”, and we watched it again and she was still like, ‘No, I still don’t.”, and then I tore it apart for her and she was like, “Oh, my God! (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). When describing this interaction with her sister, Rose demonstrated her knowledge that texts are never neutral, need to be unpacked, and that readers cannot only read the word (Freire & Macedo, 1998). She was able to integrate critical literacy into her life even though, when trying to create the prior knowledge chart, she struggled to coherently express the concept.

Rose also expressed her understanding of the concepts as we created the goal. She was quick to express her thoughts and told the group that the goal should be for children to leave the JAC with an “open mind and being creative” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017) and to see “literacy with an imagination, not just how they are taught to see it” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Her statement, although not initially compatible with my definition of critical literacy, helped to expand my own understanding. Imagination, or as described by Greene (2000) social imagination, speaks to the ability of the students to create an alternate vision of society that looks beyond our current situation. Through creating an alternate version of messaging in society, Rose suggested that students work to envision a society where they are not negatively affected by the narratives. Rose also shared that our goal should be to have children leave the club with an open mind. Having an open mind when interacting with texts is important because one needs to think about their messages. Having an open mind when interacting with literacy requires that the consumer can look past the messages and think about considering different perspectives rather than just integrating the message into their understanding of self and others. Therefore, they are reading the word and the world (Freire
After the creation of the prior knowledge chart and the goal, we began creating the plan for the activities. Rose was very active in the planning of the JAC, brainstorming four of six lesson plans, including the first and last lessons; as well as the Thanksgiving and toy activity lessons. When asked what activities we should do with the children Rose immediately stated: I can think of the first one and the last. The first one we should, I wouldn’t say what do they think about critical literacy because they are babies. They are not going to know what critical literacy is. So, I think we start off with who are you and the last one should also be who they are. It will show us how they have grown. (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)

Rose also shared, “We could have them write about who they are and draw who they are” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). She continued: “During the last workshop, they could draw themselves. We would see how they see themselves in a new way” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Rose’s plan for the first and last activities started with the children expressing who they are and words that describe them and ended with the children engaging in the same activity in the last session. These activities started with the children thinking about how the world sees them and how they see themselves and then giving them the opportunity to describe themselves after the experience of engaging in the JAC.

Rose also excitedly stated, “Thanksgiving. I think that is a really big one” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Rose then shared a conversation she had with her sister about Christopher Columbus and Thanksgiving. She asked her sister:

What do you think of Thanksgiving? She (her sister) goes I think we celebrate it in a sense of being thankful. I was like you might believe that but other people don’t celebrate it because of the real reason and then she saw the same thing. Christopher Columbus did
the same the same thing. So, she said I see why people don’t celebrate it because she used to question people who didn’t celebrate Thanksgiving. There is not just one meaning of Thanksgiving. (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)

Later when we were editing the plan Rose suggested, “They need to see two perspectives. We could use one doll story and then one in the book” (Planning Meeting Session 5, November 2017). Rose wanted to give the children the opportunity to look at the Thanksgiving story through the traditional lens and then look at it through the Native American experience. Rose, through these exchanges, was exhibiting her understanding that literacy is never neutral and that engaging critically with history requires one to interrogate multiple version of a historical event (Freire, 1985; Shor & Pari, 1999; Mosley, 2010).

Rose was not only actively engaged in the planning, but also took the lead in the choosing materials for the Thanksgiving lesson plan. She chose the book and sent me the Amazon link and helped to create the PowerPoint illustration. The book she chose, The Story of the Pilgrims (1995) by Katharine Ross, tells a traditional version of the Thanksgiving story. The Native Americans help the Pilgrims to plant crops and they all share a dinner together to celebrate the harvest. The book cover (Figure 11), portrays the Pilgrim family with open arms facing the Native American. Rose excitedly shared with the group, “This one is very

Figure 11. Thanksgiving Book (Ross, 1995).
stereotypical. It presents the traditional story. It will be great for the kids to hear both sides” (JAC Planning Meeting 5 Transcript, November 2017).

In my journal, I wrote, “Rose chose an excellent book. It will give the children the opportunity to look at the traditional story as well another perspective” (My Journal October 2017). Rose and the group decided to tell two versions of the Thanksgiving story. The book discussed above tells a very traditional version where the Native Americans helped the settlers as they started their lives in the New World. After surviving the year and harvesting the crops, the Native Americans and the Pilgrims sat down and happily shared a Thanksgiving meal.

![Figure 12. Thanksgiving PowerPoint (October, 2017).](image)

The Thanksgiving PowerPoint (Figure 12) presented pictures that documented the life of Phillip, a Native American boy. It showed pictures of his family and the reservation where his grandparents lived. It also had pictures of his favorite food, hamburgers, and his favorite game, Pokémon. The PowerPoint ended with pictures of the National Day of Mourning. On the same day as Thanksgiving, groups of Native Americans take part in the National Day of Mourning (Kurtiš, Adams, & Yellow Bird, 2010). Native Americans gather at Plymouth Rock to fast and march to mark the event that represents the beginning of the genocide of their people and destruction of their culture. Both the book and the PowerPoint gave the children the opportunity to think about different versions of the Thanksgiving story and begin to consider how Native
Americans are marginalized in society as well as understand that there are multiple versions of the same story.

The last activity that Rose suggested was having children look at toy ads and think about who would play with them. She insisted, “We want them to think critically about gender” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). In my journal I wrote, “The toy ads activity is exciting. Toys are always gendered in the media. This will be a wonderful opportunity for the kids to reconsider prescribed gender roles” (My Journal, October 2017). Rose’s toy ad activity plan gave the children the opportunity to engage in an important component of critical literacy, unpacking messages and evaluating them (Vasquez et al., 2013).

All of the activities that Rose suggested gave the children the opportunity to engage critically with texts. Her activities expressed her understanding of critical literacy because they invited the children to unpack messages, interrogate multiple perspectives of a historical event, and think about their identities.

As the planning session ended, I reflected on the effects of the 10-month time lapse between the CLW and the JAC. Rose left the CLW understanding that literacy is never neutral. However, she was not able to articulate her previous understanding during the JAC planning meeting. In my journal, I wrote:

What I found intriguing was that she (Rose) was the most active in the planning and was able to create lessons that gave the children the opportunity to engage in critical literacy yet she seemed confused when creating the prior knowledge chart and the goal. Her words were sometimes on target but then she seemed to get lost such as when she was talking about having an imagination and being creative. Was this because she had not spoken about critical literacy during the time lapse or was, she still confused? But if she
was confused why was Rose able to plan lessons that were rich and focused on the important components of critical literacy? (My Journal, October 2017)

In retrospect, I realized that through using words that I initially did not prescribe to my definition of critical literacy, Rose was expanding my understanding of critical literacy. I did not consider imagination and open-mindedness to be tenets of critical literacy. However, when you think about using your social imagination to envision a socially justice society (Greene, 2000) and you are open-minded to varied possibilities when interacting with literacy, you move past reading the words and use literacy as a mechanism to create personal and social change (Freire, 1972; Freire & Macedo, 1998; Shor & Pari, 1999).

Interestingly when Rose identified the goal for the children as having an open mind and an imagination, it seemed as if she were struggling to articulate her understanding of critical literacy in depth. She was able to identify phrases that expressed her understanding but she was not able to articulate a more comprehensive definition. It was easier for her to apply the concepts by designing engaging lessons than it was for her to explain critical literacy. Dewey (1938), through his concept of the construction of knowledge through lived experience, identifies the importance of an organic connection between learning and experience. He believed that all learning comes from experience through action. The action of creating the activities was one where Rose was able to continue to deepen her understanding of critical literacy.

Dory, the third preservice teacher, was quiet yet engaged during the planning meeting. She continued to think about marginalization in society and began to discuss how students are marginalized in school curricula. In the section below, I detail how she moved from addressing social justice in society to also considering social justice issues in the classroom.
Dory: Journey to Become a Social Justice Educator

Dory, when we started creating the prior knowledge chart and the lesson plan, was almost completely silent. For the most part she did not contribute to the conversation other than agreeing to the statements of others. She did answer when I directly questioned her. When asked I asked her if there was anything that she would like to add to the prior knowledge chart, Dory replied:

I think it is an advantage to have an open mind about critical literacy. Many people are closed-minded and they will be like no like they will fight against every other person’s opinion but anyone has the right to say what they feel. Do you know what I mean? (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)

Dory’s contribution to the prior knowledge chart was confusing. She seemed to be speaking in general terms about open-mindedness. I followed her statement and tried to help her expand the concept by adding, “So critical literacy is the act of thinking critically about literacy. Critical literacy is an action. Do you mean that when people think critically about literacy, they would then have an open mind” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)? Dory responded to my question and articulate her understanding of the emotional component of critical literacy. Dory replied:

So, when we first started the meetings and stuff, each session got deeper and deeper. You know we got to open up and say who we are and I didn’t want to open up back then and now I have conversations with people. Wow, you know? (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)

I was confused by Dory’s initial comment on how critical literacy was open-ended. In retrospect, I think she was trying to express that critical literacy is about looking past the messages in society and having an open mind to the numerous possibilities. Having an open mind would help
a consumer of texts move past accepting stereotypes and interrogating the messages instead. Dory once again expressed that engaging in the CLW was an emotional experience. Her attempt to explain her understanding, her response to my clarifying question, and her discussion of the emotional experience led me to assume that Dory’s understanding was connected to her own relationship with literacy and her understanding of self. Dory, through unpacking the ways in which the texts had affected her self-concept and caused her pain, was able to develop an understanding of critical literacy.

After the prior knowledge chart was constructed the group began creating the goal for the JAC. Dory did not contribute verbally to the creation of the goal for the workshop other than to voice her agreement. When we planned the activities for the JAC, Dory contribution was threefold: she introduced the idea of doing a Halloween activity; she shared stories that veered the group from the task; and she helped the group to focus on the importance of planning activities that were respectful of the children’s culture and experiences to all children.

When the group was planning the toy and Halloween activities the following conversation occurred:

Bianca: We could have them pick apart ads maybe.
Rose: Yeah.

Bianca: They could think about what the perception of the ad is.
Rose: That would be interesting. I was thinking toy ads from Toys “R” Us.
Angela: Toys “R” Us is interesting. What other ideas do you have?
Dory: We could also do Halloween.
Angela: Both are excellent ideas. Halloween is interesting to think about. (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)
Dory introduced the concept of a Halloween activity to the group. Looking at Halloween ads, and thinking about the messages behind them, was an idea that would help the children begin to investigate the hidden messages in advertisements. Examining hidden messages is an important tenet of critical literacy and developing a lesson that incorporates this tenet demonstrates an understanding that critical literacy involves analyzing advertisements to discover the prescribed gender roles designated by society (Douglas, 2010). Yet as we began planning the activity, Dory became distracted and started to tell stories that diverted the group. In the transcript below, I document the conversation that occurred as we planned the activities for the JAC.

Angela: So that might be interesting, to pick apart an ad. Do you want to do toys or Halloween? Both are very gender specific.

Dory: Yes, they are.

Rose: It is . . .

Dory: Children I have worked with have said, “You can’t wear that, you are a girl.” You can’t arm wrestle me and then they are so little I am like, “Okay, let’s go.” I then beat them they are like, “Again!” and I am like, Hey, you lost because I am a girl. I am going to win.” and then are like, “UHHH!” Because I win again but then I stop because they start to cry. (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)

In this exchange, I felt that Dory seemed to lose track of the task and began telling a story about her interaction with a child who said he could beat her at arm wrestling. She initially began discussing how her students prescribed limited gender roles and then seemed to lose focus. The group continued to plan the activity but Dory remained silent. It was hard to understand whether why Dory introduced the concept for the activity and then was distracted during the planning. In my journal, I wrote, “Dory introduced the concept of Halloween but did not add anything else.
The concept was exciting and yet I am not sure that it showed her understanding as she did not contribute anything else to the planning process” (My Journal, October 2017). Later as I reflected on my journal, I realized I had jumped to two conclusions: first, that presenting the idea did not document her understanding; and secondly, I was left wondering why she was distracted. Was Dory uncomfortable planning with the group or was she distracted by other factors? Below I narrate how Dory was actively engaged in the creation of the Halloween PowerPoint.

Dory’s main contribution to the group was to continually help us understand the importance of planning activities that respected the children’s culture. Her first contribution occurred when the group was beginning to discuss the planning of the Halloween activity:

Angela: For our Halloween activity, what is our goal?

Dory: What if they don’t celebrate Halloween because some people don’t?

Rose: Oh yeah.

Dory: When I was younger, I celebrated Halloween for one year and then the next year my Mom was like, “No” and I was like, “Why”? I want candy and she was like, “Because we go to church now, we can’t celebrate.”

Angela: That is an important point. What should we do?

Bianca: We can talk about the subject but not talk how people celebrate it.

Angela: We can talk about the parts of the holiday and introduce the concept by saying some people celebrate it and some do not. (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)

Through her own personal experience, Dory was able to remind the group of the importance of planning activities that reflect the children’s cultures and experiences. She helped the group to focus on an important part of the planning process, making sure that you consider the children’s
backgrounds and cultures when planning an activity so that there is never a time when children are excluded from the experience. Dory reminded the group that our critical literacy activities need to move past focusing on the perspective of the population who holds power in society and instead reflect the entire population of children, including children that are traditionally marginalized by literacy and curricula. Dory revisited the importance of inclusive curricula during the planning meeting for JAC Session 2. She shared with the group, “We need to ask (who celebrates Halloween) because not everyone celebrates. Do you know what I mean?” (JAC Session 2 Planning Transcript, October 2017). Dory, by reminding the group, was exhibiting her understanding of creating activities that are accessible to all.

Through both of these events, Dory articulated an important component of critical literacy. She expressed her understanding that literacy reflects power in society and literacy can be used to include instead of marginalizing specific populations (Freire, 1985). The action of including all students in the activity plan created an inclusive literacy experience that moved past the current only representing the population in power and therefore helps to end the marginalization of the children in the JAC.

As we continued to plan in subsequent planning meetings, Dory was active in the creation of materials. She worked with the group to co-construct a PowerPoint for the Halloween activity. The group discussed creating a slide show with pictures of numerous children in costumes. They would then facilitate a conversation with the children about who do you think would wear the costume. After scaffolding, Dory was able to work with the group to create the PowerPoint.

Dory: I like that. That is a happy face (happy face emoji costume).

Angela: That is interesting. Do you want that one?
Dory: Do you want something controversial?

Angela: No, your concept. The concept from the lesson plan.

Bianca: What about the firefighter?

Angela: From the lesson plan. We want the children to contemplate gender roles in ads.

Dory: What about a military person or Superman? (JAC Session 2 Planning Transcript, October 2017).

After I explained the goal of the slide show, Dory was able to work to choose pictures that gave the children the opportunity to contemplate the gender messages in Halloween ads. The PowerPoint below contained numerous images of children in Halloween costumes, which were gender specific such as the military person, Superman, the waitress, and the fireman.

![Halloween PowerPoint](image)

Through the creation of Halloween PowerPoint, (Figure 13), Dory expressed her understanding that critical literacy requires that one interrogates literacy and looks for the hidden messages (Freire & Macedo, 1998; Shor & Pari, 1999). The pictures that Dory chose were gender-stereotypical costumes. Through covering up the face, Dory gave the students the opportunity to
interrogate the gender message in the Halloween costume ads and therefore documented her understanding that critical literacy requires that the reader interrogates the message and therefore reads the world (Freire & Macedo, 1998).

**Reflections**

In retrospect, I realized that the preservice teachers each were on an individualized journey. Their contributions to the planning were unique and represented their ability to plan and articulate critical literacy lessons, and their comfort level contributing to the group. As I discussed above each of their contributions were valuable and part of their learning journey. As a critical literacy educator, when I reflected on the experience, I realized that my role was to support their individualized learning experience rather than forcing them to meet my unrealistic expectations. Becoming a critical literacy educator is a journey of soul-searching and developing a new understanding of self and others as well as becoming prepared to enact critical literacy in the classroom. This involves an individualized experience. After the planning, I realized that the preservice teachers continued to be in the process of becoming critical literacy educators. I needed to consider alternatives ways for preparing preservice teachers to be critical literacy educators in my college education classes. I wondered how I could give the time needed, the support, and the lived experience of planning critical literacy curriculum for children?

**Enacting Critical Literacy as Teachers**

I designed the JAC to give preservice teachers the opportunity to co-construct and enact critical literacy with young children. Once the preservice teachers agreed to participate in the club, we set up an initial meeting. During the initial planning meeting, we made a prior knowledge chart and created the plans. We then met every week before the JAC meeting to finalize the plans either in person or via Google Docs. Each club session started with a group
discussion where the preservice teachers and I introduced the concept to the children. The introduction was followed by an art activity. After the activity we had a group share, where the children shared their art creation. After the children left each week, we wrote in our journals and had a debriefing meeting. The Junk Art Club was an experience where we each grew as critical literacy educators. Below I document our experience as we co-taught the JAC.

As the JAC started we tried to navigate our roles. Before the JAC, we had an initial planning meeting. During the meeting, we discussed what our roles would be. I shared with the group:

We are going to introduce the topic that we plan together. It is important that we give the children the opportunity to contemplate the topics rather than tell them what to think. It is our job to ask scaffolding questions as we present the topic, as they are making the art, and during the wrap up. (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)

We discussed the importance of facilitating conversation and giving the children the opportunity to discover their own understanding. During the planning meeting for the first Junk Art Club we had the following conversation.

Angela: We are going to start by having a discussion, correct?

Dory: Yeah.

Rose: So, we should guide them by asking questions like what do you like to do?

Angela: That is a good point. Should we use guiding questions?

Bianca: Yes, because we want them to develop their own understanding. If we tell them they are going to copy us.

Angela: Right and we want them to develop their own understanding.

Bianca: Rather than I heard it so that is the way it is.
Angela: Exactly.

Rose: Yes. We will guide them with questions.

During the exchange, we decided together how we would interact with the children. Our focus was on giving the children the experience of being introduced to the concept and then through creating art and asking scaffolding questions, we supported the children as they developed their own understanding. Before I discuss the experience of co-teaching the JAC it is important to set the scene.

**Setting the Scene for the JAC**

The JAC was held on Saturdays from 2-4 pm, the preservice teachers and me arriving about one hour before. I made sure to bring the preservice teachers snacks and water. Typically, we set up and planned together, although this depended on the preservice teachers’ other commitments, as they were often delayed.

Before each JAC session the preservice teachers and I rearranged the room, moving the rug to the center of the room and surrounding it with tables. The materials for the junk art project were displayed on two tables at the back of the room.

The children arrived; we greeted them at the door; the parents signed them in, and the children entered the room. The number of children ranged from 4 to 8. Upon entering the room, they sat on the rug, and we introduced the activity for the day.

The following is the introduction from the first JAC.

Angela: Hello. We are so excited that you guys came to do junk art. What do you think junk art is?

Child 1: Uh…

Angela: Take a guess let’s think about the words.
Rose: Junk art.

Angela: What is junk?

Child 1: Junk is garbage.

Angela: Okay- what is garbage?

Child 1: Garbage is disgusting. You don’t eat that.

Angela: So, garbage is disgusting and things you don’t eat. What else is garbage?

Bianca: What else were you saying before?

Child 2: It is recyclable.

Angela: Recyclables are things you don’t use anymore. Right?

Child 3: You don’t want to throw it in the recyclable bin because then how are you going to play with it?

Child 4: You help out with it.

Angela: If it is recyclable can you make something else with it?

Child 2: You can make lots of things.

All Children: OHHHHH. (JAC Session 1 Transcript, October 2017)

After we introduced the weekly topic, the children left the rug and began choosing materials. We changed topics every week. The weekly topics were: who I am, reading advertisements, gender stereotypes, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and a picture of me. The material tables contained paper, glue, boxes, fabrics, plastic bottles and lids, old toys, and other materials. The preservice teachers and I supported the children as they chose materials and sat down at the table to create. In my field notes I wrote, “Today everyone was busy facilitating the children as they created the art. I heard lots of conversations between the preservice teachers and the children. Dory and Victoria were discussing why blue is a color for girls and boys” (Field Notes,
October, 2017).

I would typically give the children a five-minute warning that we were going to clean up in ten minutes. After they finished creating the art, the children, preservice teachers, and I would come back to the rug, where preservice teachers and I would facilitate conversation with the children as they shared their art. The following is an excerpt from the fifth JAC share where we introduced two versions of the Thanksgiving story and the children made a mural.

Bianca: We made a mural today. We can take turns telling about it.

Angela: Who wants to tell us first?

Child 1: My picture is about food. It has rice, chicken, corn.

Rose: That makes me really hungry.

Child 1: It has potatoes.

Rose: I love potatoes.

Bianca: Who else wants to share?

Child 2: Me! Mine is a turkey. It has turkey legs. I made it run because it doesn’t want to get eaten.

Gladys: It doesn’t want to get eaten.

Angela: Big question, tell us about the words you put on there.

Child 3: Sad and happy?

Bianca: Why do we have sad and happy?

Child 3: The Native Americans were sad because they lost everything.

Bianca: Why happy?

Child 3: Because the Pilgrims were happy because they took over and had everything.

(Transcript 5th JAC Share, November 2017).
After all the children had finished, we would open the door and the parents would pick up their children. We would wave goodbye and then the preservice teachers and I would clean up the classroom.

During the JAC, the preservice teachers and I worked together to create a critical literacy learning experiences for the children. Throughout the JAC I worked to support the preservice teachers as they enacted critical literacy education for the first time. I now describe my experience facilitating the critical literacy development of the preservice teachers. I then describe each of the preservice teachers’ experiences during the JAC. As discussed above when documenting the CLW, each of the preservice teachers contributed to the JAC in their own unique way.

**Co-Facilitation: Confronting My Own Insecurities**

The JAC was designed to give the preservice teachers the opportunity to co-construct and enact critical literacy. Through the process, I learned that in order to facilitate for the preservice teachers, I had to work to balance my personal and professional identities. The process of facilitating the critical literacy workshop continued to bring up my feelings of insecurity. It was a journey where I not only questioned my personal identity but also struggled with my teacher educator identity. It was only through the experience and reflection that I grew as a critical literacy educator.

My insecurity was connected to one specific event from the planning meeting. In the planning meeting, we discussed how to start the JAC session. There was a discussion as to whether or not to use an example as an introduction:

Rose: Or like tell them okay or be like for an example: I consider myself Spanish, Brown, I like swimming. Things that represent themselves in a way.
Angela: So, we should give them an example.

Rose: Yeah, yeah.

Dory: Maybe we could show them a visual?

Bianca: A drawing of ourselves.

Dory: I guess.

Rose: We can draw ourselves.

Angela: We need to be really careful about bringing in our art because our art is going to be more advanced. It could make children feel intimidated.

Dory: Oh yeah.

Rose: My art is terrible already. They are probably better than I am.

Everyone: (laughter)

Angela: Oh my god. That is funny, but I think that it is something to think about. If we give them the words or show them a picture, we might lead them.

Bianca: We can help them to brainstorm in their own words. (JAC Planning Meeting Transcription, October 2017)

The conversation above was revisited numerous times throughout the JAC. Although in the conversation, I pointed out the need to allow the children the opportunity to create their own understanding of self, it was considered as me making a decision to not include a proper introduction to the activity. The catalyst for the group’s focus on the discussion was the first JAC. The goal for the first JAC was as Bianca stated, “Our goal is to see to see what these children are thinking of themselves and how they are perceiving themselves” (JAC Planning Meeting Transcription, October 2017).
Victoria, a five-year-old girl, created the self-portrait in Figure 14. She shared with the group that “I have long hair. I like rainbows and cupcakes” (JAC Session 1 Transcript, October 2017). She was beginning to think about what she likes and her characteristics, such as her long hair. Although the children were representing themselves with self-portraits, as seen by Victoria’s art (Figure 14), the preservice teachers’ consensus was that the first meeting was not successful. In the first post-JAC discussion, the preservice teachers shared their feelings:

Angela: How do you think it went? What went well and what do you think we could have done differently?

Rose: Give examples. Describe what we like. Because they missed the whole concept.

Dory: It wasn’t as easy as I thought it would be.

Rose: I knew it would be hard.

Bianca: We need to explain more.

Rose: They didn’t get it. We need more visuals. (Post-JAC Session 1, October 2017)

I internalized the preservice teachers’ reflections on the first meeting and felt that our first
JAC session was a failure. I reflected on this in my journal:

I felt completely overwhelmed by the fact that it didn’t start well. I started to question if I honestly can do this. I felt that everyone thought it went badly because I suggested that we don’t use a model. My reasoning was that I didn’t want to lead the children. I wanted them to have the opportunity to think. I believe that is still valid but now I am second-guessing myself. (My Journal, September 2017)

The decision not to provide a model came up over and over throughout the JAC. The preservice teacher mentioned it in every post-JAC discussion meeting. Rose shared, “they are getting the concept because we have an introduction. See” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 2 October 2017). Bianca also voiced her thoughts “it worked much better when we had the introduction. Let’s make sure that we do it again” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 3, October 2017). Dory shared with the group, “They got it. They needed the visuals” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 4, November 2017). The preservice teachers were able to internalize the importance of using a solid introduction to create a comprehensive lesson. However, I found the subject hard to discuss.

The focus on the decision left me feeling insecure in my role as a teacher educator; a role in which I typically feel very comfortable. Even though I was uncomfortable, I was willing to take responsibility. After the first JAC session, I told the group “I think you are right. It would have been helpful to provide them with an example or more of an introduction” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 1, October 2017). In the planning meeting for session 4, I acknowledged the mistake. I told the group, “I agree with you. Rose’s idea works” (Planning Meeting JAC Session 4, November 2017). I knew it was important to continue to acknowledge her contribution but it left me feeling insecure.

In those moments when I was feeling insecure, I fought the internal battle to continue to
co-construct the lesson. Yet through my insecurities, I lost sight of the importance of the purpose of the JAC and was focused on my need to appear competent and have all the answers. In my mind, I was holding myself accountable in the traditional role of the teacher educator, the person who had all the answers. It was only after the JAC that I was able to look at my feelings through a different lens. I realized the importance of not only co-constructing the instructional plans with my preservice teachers but also the importance as the teacher educator of being allowed to be fallible.

In retrospect, now that I have had time to process my thoughts and feelings, I have concluded that I was comfortable with the preservice teachers struggling and learning. It was when the focus was on me that I felt overwhelmed. I struggled with the perceived flaw in my professional identity. Yet I needed to internalize the importance of the students being active in the process and the possibility of not having all the answer and being fallible. I needed to grow as a teacher educator so I could fully engage in the process of co-construction.

Upon reflection, I was comfortable with the preservice teachers being in process as long as they felt that the club sessions were successful. It was their perceived failure and my perception that they were blaming it on me that left me feeling insecure. I cannot help but wonder if in order to truly co-construct with preservice teachers the teacher educator needs to be able to be comfortable being fallible in front of the preservice teachers or does the teacher educator always struggle with the process of being fallible?

The process of struggling and admitting to my perceived failure was a turning point for the preservice teachers and me. It was in that moment that the preservice teachers were claiming a seat at the table as educators. They were using their voices to express their understanding of teaching. Following that conversation, the preservice teachers were more active in the planning
At the time, I did not understand the preservice teachers’ need to claim a spot. I was immersed in my own feelings of self-doubt. This lasted throughout the entire JAC:

“I felt uncomfortable when the introducing of the material was brought up. It wasn't discussed in depth but it made me feel insecure about my teaching. I felt vulnerable” (My Journal, October 2017). I was feeling very insecure in my identity as a teacher educator. This continued throughout the entire JAC. After the last session I wrote in my journal:

Is it bad to say that I am tired of talking about the first planning and club meeting? Rose brought it up again. Yet at the same time, she also talked about not leading students. It made me think that it was more about asserting themselves than honing in on a big mistake that I made. But honestly, I am tired of talking about it. Every planning session it is discussed. (My Journal, December 2018)

After the last JAC session, in the post-JAC meeting, Rose brought up the burning issue again. It was in that moment when she expressed both her thoughts about not leading the children and what was deemed my mistake that I began to think about the incident in a different light. I realized in retrospect that I was comfortable with the preservice teachers being in the process of becoming critical literacy educators only when they deemed my contribution a success.

My need to be considered competent was clear during the planning meeting for the third JAC. During the third planning session, I suggested using Kids Like Us dolls to introduce the topic. Kids Like Us dolls are used to help teachers do social justice work with children. The dolls are given a persona and background information. The teacher introduces the doll and uses it to tell a story. A story is: I am sad because children are making fun of me because of my skin color.
The teacher facilitates the conversation with the children as they work towards providing suggestions and support the doll. The activity helps children develop empathy, become advocates for social justice, and learn how to stand up for themselves (Whitney, 2002).

After the third and fourth sessions where we used the dolls as an introduction, the preservice teachers were excited about the success of the activity.

Figure 15. Tiffany the Doll (October 2017)

We used the doll Tiffany, (Figure 15) in the third session. The story we told was that Tiffany went shopping with her mother and wanted a sugary cereal because it had a prize inside. After the session, the preservice teachers shared their thoughts during the post-JAC meeting.

Dory: Using the story helped. I think they got it.

Angela: I think they did. What did you think?

Bianca: I did. I felt that they did because they go shopping with their parents or whoever they live with. They go grocery shopping and they can relate to baby Tiffany (the doll) and going down the aisles and picking things that they want and they can relate to not getting. (Post-JAC Discussion Session 4, November 2017)
Tiffany the doll was used in the fourth session to tell a story of a girl who wants to get a toy in the toy store but her mother tells her it is for boys. The girl gets upset and starts to cry. The children were able to problematize the doll’s experience. During the post-sessions, the preservice teachers shared their thoughts:

Rose: They are getting the concept of it because when I was doing the PowerPoint and the doll with them, I didn’t even have to ask the questions. Were like boom, boom.

Dory: The doll really helped.

Angela: I agree.

Bianca: The doll helped the kids connect to the concept. (Post-JAC Discussion Session 4, November 2017)

The use of the dolls provided a way for the children to connect to the activities in a deeper way. The doll provided a concrete face to the activity. It also provided me with a sense of security in my role as a teacher educator. In my journal, I wrote “the preservice teachers were excited about the doll story today. It also made me feel good to see how the doll story helped the children” (My Journal, October 2017). My expression of feeling good reflected my need to move past what had been deemed my failure and gain a sense of balance in my role as a teacher educator. It was my way of reclaiming my professional identity and feeling competent. However, I needed to let go of the traditional role of the teacher educator as the person with all the answers and realize the importance of co-constructing both in practice and emotionally.

During the planning of the fifth JAC session, the preservice teachers brought up the first session again and, in the conversation, I used the doll idea to not only change the subject but also to redeem myself in their eyes. The following conversation occurred:

Angela: I think Rose’s idea really made a lot of sense. In the beginning we did not give
them enough of an example.

Rose: Yeah.

Angela: Okay, yes you are right.

Rose: My education courses are coming together (Bianca laughs.). I am learning a lot of stuff.

Angela: They really are.

Rose: Yeah, I know.

Angela: You should be proud of that, but I think then bringing the doll makes it so real to them.

Rose: Yeah. (Planning Meeting JAC Session 5, November 2017)

In this conversation, I was not only acknowledging the importance of Rose’s contribution, I was also trying to regain my footing. Through saying “you should be proud of that but I think then bringing the dolls makes it so real” (Planning Meeting JAC Session 5, November 2017), I was trying to taking ownership of a successful idea and therefore reclaiming my status as a competent teacher educator. This revelation, upon reflection, can be framed as somewhat problematic because instead of dedicating myself to the process I was struggling with my need to feel competent.

As I reflected on the experience, I realized the importance of the preservice teachers finding their voices in the JAC. I also think that my focus on the initial JAC session was my struggle. The preservice teachers discovering the importance of using visuals to make the activity accessible to the children was an important educational strategy for them to learn. They also learned that it takes multiple exposures for the students to begin to think critically about literacy. It is the process of planting a seed. It was my insecurity that stopped me from being able to see
the value in it and focus on my vulnerability as a teacher educator. Even though my contribution of using the doll stories was highly valued by the preservice teachers, I was not able to completely feel secure in my role. In retrospect, feeling insecure is part of the process of engaging in a new challenge and in order to truly co-construct I need to not only process my insecure feelings but realize the importance of them and how they contribute to my development as a teacher educator. I have begun to consider the importance not only of vulnerability but also of processing those feelings. Although I connected with my critical friend, I did not choose to share my feelings of vulnerability. I have learned that although I struggle with vulnerability it is an important part of the process but not just acknowledging it but also working through it is essential to my development as a teacher educator.

In retrospect, I realized two important points. First, teacher educators need to embrace vulnerability and use emotions as a tool for learning. Secondly, it is important to consider having more than one critical friend. The creation of a support circle with varied people is imperative. My critical friend in this study is also my professor. She is a person I greatly admire and to whom I hope to appear competent. I struggled to be completely vulnerable with her. I believe that if I had had another critical friend who was a colleague, that I might have felt safer and I might have been able to open up more. I learned that I need more than one critical friend to push me as I engage in this work.

In retrospect, I learned the importance of the individual experience and my role in facilitating each student by accepting their journey and providing the needed support. I now share my view of each of the preservice teachers experience enacting critical literacy in the JAC.

*Scaffolding for Bianca*

Although Bianca had an understanding of critical literacy and was able to contribute to
the planning and goal setting, she was not ready to enact critical literacy teaching practices without some scaffolding. As we started the workshop, Bianca asked, “Who would like to lead?” and then quickly “laughed” without answering (JAC Initial Planning Transcript, October 2017). Bianca was almost silent during the introduction and conclusion of the first JAC. In my journal I wrote, “It is interesting to observe that although Bianca and Rose were actively involved in the planning, they were almost silent in the large group introduction and discussion” (My Journal, October 2017). During the first session, Bianca copied the pattern of questions that I asked the children and then remained silent. The first session activity was to have children create a self-portrait and complete an *I Am/I Am Not* chart. I led the first discussion and described the activity to the five children: “It (words in the chart) could be a word that describes who you are or what you like to do” (JAC Transcript Session 1, October 2017). Bianca then added, “What do you like to do?” (JAC Transcript Session 1, October 2017); Followed by “Do you like to paint?” and “Do you like to play soccer?” (JAC Transcript Session 1, October 2017). Bianca was working to participate in the discussion and was able to do so when she had a guide.

After I modeled the first JAC, Bianca was able to replicate the introduction. She started with, “So what do you know about Halloween?” She then acquiesced, let me lead the group, and copied my comments:

> Victoria: A girl cannot be a fireman.
>
> Angela: Why not?
>
> Victoria: Because if a girl is a fireman she would get burned.
>
> Angela: Would a boy get burned?
>
> Bianca: Would a boy get burned? (JAC Session 2 Transcript, 2017)

Bianca reverted to asking only questions that mimicked my questions. As you can see in the
conversation above when I asked “Would a boy get burned?”, Bianca quickly followed suit and asked the same question. After this she began by adding scaffolding questions that mimicked the one that I used in the first JAC. She asked questions such as “Who can be Woody? What do you think Woody would be? A girl. Why do you think the cupcake would be a girl?” and “Why do you think a boy?” (JAC Session 2, 2017). This was a first step for Bianca. She was able to be a successful contributor to the JAC group discussions when she had an example to follow. She then moved on to leading the group introduction and discussion, which also followed the pattern I used in the first JAC. Bianca needed role modeling to interact with the children in the JAC. She needed the opportunity to watch me enact critical literacy before she was able to interact with the children. The role modeling provided the scaffolding that she needed in order to ask facilitating questions and lead the JAC discussion. Role modeling provided her the support she needed to start her journey to becoming a critical literacy educator.

Bianca was the first person to take over leading the JAC group discussions with the children. She began by interjecting the conversation and pushing children to reassess their understanding. The following are examples of questions Bianca asked: “Who do you think Woody would be?” (JAC Session 2 Transcript, October 2017), “Do you guys think that too when you see cereal boxes and you see really cool cartoons?” (JAC Session 3 Transcript, October 2017), “Who do you think can play with Legos?” (JAC Session Transcript, November 2017).

Her first venture where she expressed a feeling of success occurred when discussing Halloween and who would wear the costume in the PowerPoint pictures (Figure 13). The children said that a boy needed to wear the costume because it was blue. Bianca quickly added that she liked blue and showed the children her blue shoes. Here is the conversation between Bianca, five children, and myself:
Victoria (Six y.o. girl): It is a boy.

Bianca: Why do you think a boy?

Seth (Six y.o. boy): Because he has blue shoes.

Victoria: Blue is for boys.

Bianca: Because he has blue shoes. Very interesting. I have blue shoes.

Angela (Myself): That is very interesting. She is a girl with blue shoes.

Bianca: They are my favorite.

Angela: She is a girl with blue shoes.

Bianca: They are my favorite. Well, look at that, it is pretty interesting. I am a girl and I am wearing blue shoes.

Angela: That is interesting to think about.

Lucy (Six y.o. girl): I have blue shoes and my brother had blue shoes.

Bianca: Your whole family wears blue shoes. (Lucy nods). Wow, pretty cool! (JAC Session 2 Transcript, October 2017)

This was a learning moment for the children. The children began to think about the assignment of color to gender. Victoria who had initially stated that blue was for boys, created a girl with blue as seen in the photo. Bianca, during this exchange, was able to use the example of the questions that I asked students in the previous session and ask the children questions that encouraged them to engage in critical thought. When she asked Victoria, “Why do you think a boy?” (JAC Session 2 Transcript, October 2017), Bianca was pushing her to articulate her understanding. She was then able to seize the critical moments and offer an example of her own shoes to push Victoria to reassess her understanding of color and gender. Through this exchange, Bianca exhibited the ability to facilitate critical literacy conversation and utilize critical moments
to encourage children to reassess their understanding of the world.

Figure 16. Victoria’s Halloween Picture (October, 2017).

Victoria’s art creation, as seen in Figure 16, gave Bianca a sense of pride. She shared her response in the debriefing session:

Bianca: Because she felt like it was okay to wear blue.

Angela: Right.

Dory: And then you had those sneakers.

Bianca: I had those sneakers.

Dory: They could see it.

Bianca: They could see it because kids at that age are very visual. So, when they see things like a girl firefighter or a girl doctor, they can be like yeah, a girl can be a firefighter, a girl can be a doctor, and a girl can wear blue sneakers. (JAC Session 2 Transcript, October 2017)

During the next session, Bianca led the introduction for the children who arrived late. In my journal I wrote, “It was exciting to watch Bianca take over and lead a successful introduction with the group. She asked questions and facilitated conversation” (My Journal, October 2017).

This caused me to wonder about the power of enacting critical literacy in the process of
becoming a critical literacy educator. Was the blue shoe conversation that Bianca facilitated, where they were able to think about and share ideas, a pivotal moment for Bianca? She was excited in the post meeting, “It went well. They really got it” (Post-JAC Meeting 2, October 2017). This feeling of accomplishment seemed to be an important moment in Bianca’s journey and gave her the confidence to act.

Throughout the rest of the four sessions, Bianca was able to continue to push children to think about their preconceived ideas of gender and holidays. She asked questions like: “Do you guys think that too when you see cereal boxes and you see really cool cartoon characters on it? Does it make you want it?” (JAC Session 3 Transcript, October 2017)? Or “Why do you think both (a boy and a girl) would play with it?” (JAC Session 4, November 2017). Bianca was also able to reflect on the children’s learning when she said, “I think it went really well because they got the concept that cereal companies put toys and color and cartoons on the cereal boxes for children to be attracted to them” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 3, October 2017). She also reflected, “I think today went well but it was hard for Victoria. She was the only one here and she has traditional ideas of gender” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 4, November 2017).

She was also able to lead the group discussions with the children. At the beginning of the JAC meeting, we had a discussion to introduce the concept and at the end we gathered together to give children the opportunity to share their art. After I led the discussion with the one child who came on time, Bianca was able to then facilitate the conversation with the group that arrived late. The following is an example of the first time Bianca was able to run the group discussion: “Bianca: So today we are going to talk about toys. Do you have a favorite toy?” (JAC Session 4, November 2017). She then proceeded to engage the children in a conversation about the Kids Like Us doll’s story we had written:
I am going to tell you a story about baby Tiffany. So, Tiffany was going to the store and she wanted to get toys and she really loved these cars. But people were telling her no you shouldn’t play with them because they are not for girls. (JAC Session 4, November 2017)

Throughout the JAC, Bianca began to grow as an educator who was able to begin to enact critical literacy with early childhood children. She was able to ask scaffolding questions, engage students in conversation, and lead the JAC discussions. Bianca benefited from being able to observe me teaching critical literacy to the children.

*Rose: Becoming Confident*

As the JAC started, Rose was able to plan activities that gave the children the opportunity to explore literacy through a critical lens. During the beginning sessions of the JAC, Rose needed scaffolding before she could enact critical literacy teaching practices. During the planning session, I explained to the group what our roles would be during the JAC. I shared with the group:

We are going to introduce the topic that we planned together. It is important that we give the children the opportunity to contemplate the topics rather than tell them what to think. It is our job to ask scaffolding questions as we present the topic, as they are making the art, and during the wrap up. (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017)

The group discussed the importance of scaffolding our conversations with the children in order to give them the opportunity to develop their own understanding rather than adopting ours.

Before the first JAC began, I questioned the group as to who would lead the first session. Rose quickly replied, “No it doesn’t matter. I don’t think we should have an order. I think we should just go” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). Although Rose told the group that “we should just go” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017) she was
silent throughout the first JAC. I thought about the first meeting in my journal, “It is interesting to observe that although Bianca and Rose were actively involved in the planning, they were almost silent in the large group introduction and discussion” (My Journal, October 2017).

The first session activity was to have the children create a self-portrait and complete an *I Am/I Am Not* chart. During the first session, Rose imitated the question that I asked the children and then was silent during both the introduction and discussion. I started the session by welcoming the children, “Hello. We are so excited that you all came to do junk art. What do you think junk art is?” (JAC Transcript Session 1, October 2017). As the question was met by silence, Rose repeated the word “junk art” (JAC Transcript Session 1, October 2017). As the club session ended, we gathered together to discuss the children’s art and Rose facilitated the process of children sharing their art. She asked a child, “Do you want me to hold it (child’s art)?” (JAC Transcript Session 1, October 2017). During the first JAC meeting, Rose was actively involved with the children as they created art. She helped them find supplies and sat with the children as they made their art.

Even though Rose was quiet during the first JAC meeting, she was very active in the first post-JAC meeting. Her ability to engage in reflective practice centered on critiquing the introduction of the activity rather than her practice. During the first JAC, the group’s goal was to “see what the children are thinking of themselves and how they perceive themselves” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, 2017). Instead of focusing on personality traits, they focused on creating surface representations of themselves:

Angela: Do you want to tell us about yourself?

Child: I put this on it. I am not sure why. These are my arms and I was thinking about putting on a charm bracelet.
Victoria: And I made eyes and flowers in my hair and I made a dress cupcake. I put on pants and three bows and I made shoes red. (JAC Transcript Session 1, October 2017)

Although the children were beginning to investigate their likes and dislikes, the preservice teachers deemed the experience a failure and felt that the children had missed the concept.

During the post meeting, the group shared:

Angela: How do you think it went? What went well and what do you think we could have done differently?

Rose: Give examples. Describe what we like. Because they missed the whole concept.

Dory: It wasn’t as easy as I thought it would be.

Rose: I knew it would be hard.

Bianca: We need to explain more.

Rose: They didn’t get it. We need more visuals. (Post-JAC Session 1, October 2017)

Rose felt that the failure of the first Junk Art Club was due to the group not listening to her suggestion to give more specific examples to the children in the introduction. As we planned the session, Rose shared, “We should use an example. I consider myself Spanish and Brown. I like swimming. They could share things that represent themselves in a way” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). I, however, was concerned that the children would copy our words. I told the preservice teachers, “We need to be careful about giving them words that might lead them” (JAC Initial Planning Meeting Transcript, October 2017). The group followed my lead and we decided not to give the children an example. In retrospect the preservice teachers may have agreed to my suggestion because they saw me as a person in power in the group or they felt that I had more experience.

Rose in the first post club meeting criticized the introduction of the activity and shared
that no one listened to her. She stated, “We needed to give an example, like who we are. Describe what we like to do. What people think I am” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 1, October 2017)? She felt that they “missed the whole concept of the thing” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 1, October 2017). After the first JAC, Rose wrote in her journal,

I learned that the concepts that we used have to be used differently since we are with little ones. I knew from the beginning that it was going to be hard. I think visuals would be easier for the children to understand. I’ve grown a lot as a critical literacy educator.

(Rose’s Journal, October 2017)

During the rest of the JAC, Rose continued to focus on the introduction. She mentioned it in post-JAC meetings. She shared with the group “they are getting the concept because we have an introduction. See” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 4, November 2017). She also brought it up in planning meetings: “We need to make sure that we have an introduction” (JAC Planning Meeting Session 3, October 2017) and “a visual before they start, my education classes coming together” (JAC Planning Meeting Session 5, November 2017).

Rose used the perceived failure of the introduction to the first JAC as an empowerment tool. When discussing her idea, she deemed herself as having “grown a lot as a critical educator” (Rose’s Journal, October 2017) and told everyone “my education classes are really coming together” (Post-JAC Discussion Session 4, November 2017).

Rose’s fixation on the visuals for the introduction left me thinking about the importance of her feeling that she had a seat at the table. Through continually focusing on the suggestion that I had questioned, was Rose creating space for herself in the group? Was she defining herself as an educator through what was perceived as my failure?

Rose began to ask some scaffolding questions during the second JAC and was able to
take the lead with the children during the fifth club meeting. During the second JAC, she volunteered to present the PowerPoint, however she was not comfortable running the discussion. Rose contributed to the conversation by intermittently asking questions that followed the pattern of questions that I role modeled. Rose asked the children: “Do you think girls can be Superman?” (JAC Session 2 Transcript, 2017) and “Do you guys eat hamburgers?” The children expressed agreement. “Then why can’t you be a hamburger?” (JAC Session 2 Transcript, 2017). Although she missed the third session, Rose was able to lead the fourth session. She began by explaining the topic:

Rose: Today the topic is toys. Do you guys have a favorite toy?

Child 1 (boy): I have a favorite toy.

Child 2 (girl): I have a Baby Alive.

Everyone: (all talk at once)

Rose: You guys have lots of cool favorite toys. I am going to show you different type of toys and you are going to answer my questions. One by one. Not everyone at once. So, these are cleaning supplies. They are a mop, a broom, and garbage. Would you guys play with this?

Child 1: No.

Rose: Why not?

Child 1: It is to clean.

Rose: Would a girl or a boy play with this?

Group: A girl?

Rose: Why?

Child 1: Girls clean.
Rose: Why do you think only girls clean?

Child 2: Boys can also clean.

Rose: In my family both boys and girls clean. (JAC Session 4 Transcript, 2017)

Rose, through the interaction documented above, was able to lead the discussion, ask scaffolding questions, and share personal information to facilitate children interrogating the ads and gender roles.

**Dory: Working One on One**

Dory never took over the running of the JAC introduction and sharing sessions with the children. Instead she focused her energy on working one on one with students. She was completely silent during the first three JAC introduction and sharing sessions. She seemed to use the time to learn through observation. In my field notes I wrote, “Dory was actively observing during the session today. She was physically present and appeared to be mentally engaged” (Field Notes, October 2017). Although Dory was mostly quiet during the introduction and sharing sessions, she occasionally interjected and was actively involved with the children during the art activities.

Dory was comfortable during the art activities. Dory was very effective when interacting one on one with the children. I wrote in my journal:

Dory is most comfortable observing during the introduction and the sharing sessions, yet when she is working one on one with the children during the activity, she appears comfortable. Today I overheard her asking scaffolding questions to the child she was working with. She asked a child, “Why do you want to use that color crayon?” When the child replied that the color was for girls, Dory replied, “Why do you think that?” The child answered, “Girls always wear this color on TV.” Dory then reminded her that TV tells you one way to be but, “Look, Bianca is wearing blue
shoes.” (My Journal, October 2017)

Through her interaction with the child, Dory demonstrated her understanding of critical literacy. She helped the child reconsider the messages that advertisements and other forms of literacy prescribe to gender. Through interacting with the child, Dory was once again expressing her understanding that literacy is embedded with hidden messages that inform society on gender roles. Understanding that literacy contains hidden messages is an important component of critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1998).

Dory was most active in the post-JAC sessions. She was able to critically reflect on the success of the activity. After the first session she shared, “It wasn’t as easy as I thought it would be” (Post-JAC 1 Discussion Session, October 2017). She felt that helping the children to think critically about literacy was hard. She added that we needed to be “more direct” (Post-JAC 1 Discussion Session, October 2017). Dory was referencing the introduction to the first JAC. Dory agreed with Rose and Bianca’s conclusion that the first JAC need a more extensive introduction.

During our post-JAC session where we had created the Thanksgiving mural, Dory expressed her understanding that texts reflect the group that holds power in society. The children in the JAC had heard two versions of the Thanksgiving story and created a mural depicting their understanding of Thanksgiving. Dory shared with the group her reaction to the book Rose had chosen.

Angela: I thought your (Rose’s) book was really good. It told a very stereotypical story.

Dory: Yeah.

Rose: It worked well.

Dory: The ending killed me. I was like wow. The last picture was wow! The ending killed me. (Post-JAC Discussion Session 5, November 2017)
In the final picture of the book (Figure 17) that Dory discussed, the Native Americans and the Pilgrims are sitting down to share the Thanksgiving meal. The picture presents a happy scene where you can sense friendship and community - a very specific version of the Thanksgiving story. The picture portrays the Pilgrims as peaceful people and clearly represents a White male perspective of history. Other versions of the Thanksgiving story recount that the Pilgrims did not sit down and eat a meal with the Native Americans, but rather considered them savage. Through acknowledging that the ending and the final picture “killed” her, Dory shared her understanding that history reflects the perspective of the people in power (Freire, 1972) and does not reflect the perspective of marginalized people in society. Dory voiced her feelings concerning the unheard voices of the Native American experience.

Dory also contributed to the group by continually reminding us that we had to be mindful of the children’s culture and that a child’s understanding of gender can be tied to his or her culture. After the toy activity, where we showed children a PowerPoint with various toys and asked them to describe who would play with them, the group had a conversation about Victoria’s
reaction to the activity. Victoria is a 5-year-old girl, who immigrated with her parents to the United States from Egypt three years ago. They said:

Rose: She (Victoria) was so confused.

Angela: She was just staring and listening you could tell that she was really taking it in.

Dory: It is part of her culture. I have many Egyptian friends and the role of women is different. They have to dress a certain way and you know what I mean.

Angela: Absolutely. Victoria’s parents just emigrated here from Egypt.

Dory: It is the culture’s mentality.

Dory shared with the group the importance of understanding the perspective of a different culture’s concept of gender roles. Later when the group was discussing what they think of themselves as educators. Dory reiterated the point and took it one step further:

Angela: What do you think of yourself as educators?

Rose: It is not easy.

Bianca: I learned that it is trial and error. As an educator, you need to switch up what you are teaching depending on whom you are teaching.

Angela: You wouldn’t teach children the same think about who is where. For example, take Dory and musical instruments. Doing social justice work it is important to have a picture of where they are.

Bianca: You also have to not assume based on age level or grade level. You need to meet them where they are.

Angela: You can’t assume someone looks this way so they are going to have a specific perspective.

Bianca: You need to meet them where they are at and build from there. Like scaffolding.
If you aren’t teaching where they are at you want them to feel safe and be confident in what they are going to talk about.

Dory: You need to be careful not to offend them or their beliefs. (Post-JAC Discussion Session 4, November 2017)

Through acknowledging that our critical literacy activities needed to reflect all the students, Dory expressed her understanding of the importance of all children seeing themselves represented in the curriculum. She illustrated the idea that literacy and education are not neutral and do not usually represent the perspective of marginalized populations (Freire, 1985; Mosley, 2010). Her understanding is an important component of critical literacy.

**Reflection**

The enacting of critical literacy in the JAC reaffirmed my understanding that critical literacy education takes time and is an individual process. Each of the preservice teachers had varied levels of comfortable and expertise when it came to enacting critical literacy. Bianca was able to take over the discussions in the JAC quickly while Dory never felt comfortable and focused working one on one with students. It would be simple to compare and contrast them and look upon Dory as not achieving the level of expertise that Bianca exhibited. Yet by doing comparing them it negates Dory’s journey and it proposes that one of the preservice teachers’ experience was more valuable than the other. Through analysis, I discovered that comparing is detrimental to the process of facilitating preservice teachers becoming critical literacy educators. Rather than looking at their growth, I would be assessing their failure. It is important to value the process and honor the individuality of their experience and learning through nurturing the preservice teacher.

I also left thinking about the importance of lived experience as a learning tool. Although
each of the preservice teachers had some understanding of critical literacy when they started the JAC they found it challenging to enact critical literacy. It is also interesting to note that their understanding of critical literacy expanded throughout the JAC. The learning speaks to the importance of combining the learning with the lived experience in order to facilitate the growth of critical literacy educators.

**Becoming a Critical Literacy Teacher Educator**

My journey to becoming a critical teacher educator has been twofold. First, I struggled with vulnerability. During the CLW, I struggled to balance my work identity with the work we were doing in the CLW. At certain points, I resisted and struggled with appearing vulnerable to the preservice teachers. It was painful to think about revealing parts of myself that I hid from the world, that made me feel weak, and that made me feel like my professional image was cracking.

As I look back, I discovered that it was only through the cracking of my professional image that I was able to facilitate the preservice teachers unpacking their relationship with literacy and power. My vulnerability created a safe space. As I move forward and continue to support students as they unpack their relationship with literacy and power, I need to embrace the vulnerability and realize the power of showing my preservice teachers my cracks. It allows them the space to process their own identities and vulnerabilities.

Secondly, I struggled with a different kind of vulnerability in the JAC - being vulnerable as a teacher educator. I learned that my vulnerability was essential to both the preservice teachers’ unpacking of their relationship between literacy and power as well as learning how to enact critical literacy in the JAC. I also realized that being vulnerable can be part of the process and it is essential that I process those feelings so I can continue to grow as a teacher educator.

Looking back at the struggle I experienced in both the CLW and the JAC, I realize that
although I have fought to keep my identities separate, the struggles I have in my personal life, such as the need to be perfect, are also struggles that I have as a teacher educator. This speaks to my need to not only process my struggles in my personal life, but to also realize that they could limit my growth as a teacher educator. I need to realize that as a human all parts of myself exist in my various identities to some extent. They are the lens by which I judge myself and see the world. It was naive to believe I could separate my personal struggles from my professional identity. I realized that it is only through acknowledging and working on my personal struggles that I can grow an educator. I need to commit myself to continuing to question myself, reflecting on my various struggles, identifying how they influence my professional career, and working to create a new understanding of self.

I also struggled as I initially judged Rose and Dory by deeming their contributions to the JAC as falling short of my rigid definition of critical literacy. It was through looking back and reconsidering their contributions that I realized that in order to be a critical literacy teacher educator, I needed to give the preservice teachers the ability to create their own understanding of critical literacy rather than expect them to assimilate my understanding as their own. When I opened my mind to thinking about their perspectives on the concept was I able to grow as a critical literacy educator. This has left me thinking about the role of the lived experience (Dewey, 1938) in the growth of teachers. I realize that not only did my preservice teachers learn through the lived experience but I also grew as a teacher educator through both the lived experience and engaging in reflective practice. I have grown to realize that I need to wrestle with the idea that I have all the answers and works towards engaging in the process of co-construction without becoming involved in an inner battle to be perceived as competent. Through reflecting on my lived experience, I have a new understanding of the emotional work I need to continue to
do in order to grow as an educator.

The emotional work, although scary at times, requires that I move past the need to be competent and understand the importance of being in-process. It is only through acknowledging that I will never have all the answers that I will develop true confidence as a teacher educator. Creating a space for myself where I am comfortable being in process will also ensure that when I co-construct, I will be completely open to the process rather than needing to feel competent. It would be simplistic to say that, after having this epiphany, I will not struggle. I realize that it will take emotional work, and I need to be prepared to acknowledge the emotions as they arise, feel them, and then continue the work. I cannot hide from the emotions or ignore them; it is only through processing the emotions that I will be able to develop as a teacher educator.

**Becoming Critically Literate**

Through the CLW and JAC, Bianca grew as a critical literacy educator. She entered into the CLW with an understanding of literacy, but had never been introduced to critical literacy although later she expressed that she had critically engaged with literacy. She initially expressed how the concept of critical literacy was new to her. However, Bianca later shared how she has always interrogated literacy. She left the CLW with the understanding that critical literacy encompassed understanding that literacy influenced one’s sense of self and others as well as contained hidden messages. However, it was not until the planning of the critical literacy workshop that she was able to express how literacy is connected to power in society. Bianca’s new understanding speaks to the need of preservice teachers to have multiple experiences that support diverse learners. Throughout the JAC, Bianca was able to use this knowledge to lead the group and interact with the children.

It is important to consider that even though she had an understanding of the components
of critical literacy, Bianca was not willing to facilitate critical literacy discussions with the children because it was uncomfortable or she did not feel that she was able to. After the first session Bianca shared, “It was uncomfortable, I have never done this before” (Post-JAC Meeting 1, October 2017).

It is therefore essential to separate her learning the theoretical component of critical literacy from her ability to practice critical literacy in a classroom environment. Before the JAC started, Bianca was able to articulate her understanding of the three tenets of critical literacy. Yet, when it came time to enact critical literacy in the JAC, she remained mostly silent during the entire first JAC. However, even with a strong understanding of critical literacy, Bianca was not able to enact critical literacy without scaffolding.

Bianca required scaffolding to take her new knowledge and use it to facilitate critical literacy in the JAC. For Bianca, enacting critical literacy required both a theoretical understanding and some scaffolding. She also needed some confirmation from me that it was working. Through venturing into leading the group discussion and feeling excitement and success, Bianca gained momentum and was able to continue to grow as a critical literacy educator.

Bianca, through her experience, was able to receive support as she attempted to take her understanding of critical literacy and utilize it in the JAC. Connecting the theoretical to a preservice teacher’s practice is an important part of a teacher education program. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) recommend that teacher education programs work to bridge the gap between the theoretical learning and fieldwork. Their research spoke to the importance of connecting learning to practice through utilizing the co-teaching model during a preservice teacher’s clinical experience.
The co-teaching model dictates that both the cooperative teacher and the preservice teacher work together to plan and execute the lesson. Working together gives the cooperating teacher the opportunity to scaffold the preservice teacher through modeling and coaching without the preservice teacher feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility of running the classroom (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010).

During the CLW and the JAC, Rose also grew as a person and a critical literacy educator. Rose entered the CLW never having considered literacy as more than the process of getting and receiving information. Through the CLW, Rose embarked on a journey to redefine her view of herself and in the process developed an understanding of critical literacy. As the CLW ended, she was able to articulate the three tenets of critical literacy. She understood that critical literacy is an empowerment tool, demands the reader interrogate messages in society, is never neutral, and often represents power in society. Rose also was able to integrate critical literacy into her interactions with her sister. When we embarked on the planning phase of the JAC, Rose was able to expand her understanding by identifying the goal as having the children leave with an open mind and an imagination when interacting with literacy. Rose through identifying these components were sharing with us Rose expanded my understanding. Critical literacy encompasses the ability to envision a different society; one that is socially just (Greene, 1988) as well as cultivating an open mind that embraces varied interpretations of literacy messages (Freire & Macedo, 1998; Shor & Pari, 1999). Rose, although not able to completely articulate her understanding, was able to plan activities that engaged the children in critical literacy experiences. This left me wondering if preservice teachers need to be fully able to express their understanding of critical literacy or whether they could develop a deeper understanding as they enacted critical literacy with children. As theorized, was learning through experience the most
beneficial way to become critically literate (Dewey, 1938)?

Although Rose expressed the importance of critical literacy education, she also shared how she found the prospect of teaching critical literacy in a classroom intimidating. She told the group:

It would have to be done carefully. To be honest because not only are you getting the perspective from kids but also you know kids are going back home and are telling this and that and you know parents complain. You need to make sure that you don’t just teach your perspective but are open-minded. (JAC Final Meeting, January 2018)

Rose needed the opportunity to observe before she was able to use her knowledge of critical literacy in the JAC. As with Bianca, Rose benefited from taking part in an experience where the theoretical was connected to the teaching practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) through utilizing the co-teaching model. In the co-teaching model both the cooperative teacher and the preservice teacher work together to both plan and teach the lesson. Joint planning and teaching give the student teacher the opportunity to receive scaffolding from the cooperating teacher through modeling and coaching without the being overwhelmed by the responsibility of teaching the entire lesson alone (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010).

Rose enacting critical literacy required theoretical understanding, a coherent timely transition between developing the theoretical knowledge and enacting critical literacy in the classroom, and scaffolding. Rose also needed to assert herself as an educator in the group.

Finally, throughout the CLW and JAC, Dory grasped two important components of critical literacy. She focused on the emotional journey that is needed to become critically literate. Dory also expressed an understanding that literacy is never neutral and is connected to power in society (Freire, 1972; Freire & Macedo, 1998; Shor & Pari, 1999). One particular story that she
shared in the final wrap up summed up her understanding:

Dory: Growing up, my Dad always broke things apart for me. He always pointed out every little thing. Like he is a critical thinker since I can remember. Back to the commercial that Rose was talking about McDonalds’.

Rose: The one where the Hispanics were excited their children got a job in the drive-thru?

Dory: Yes. We were at the dinner table and we were eating and you know my Dad goes and turns the volume up and he goes, “You guys see this?” This was recent. He goes, “This is bullshit.” I am like, “What do you mean, Papi?” He said, “I am not saying that working at a McDonalds’ is bad but what parent is going to be proud of their children working there? There is more to you guys. You guys are supposed to be working at a career. Working at a nice stable job not taking bullshit from other people.” (JAC Final Meeting, January 2018)

Dory’s story illustrated her new understanding. She was able to articulate the connection between her exchange with her father and critical literacy. She expressed her understanding of the hidden messages in society that prescribe roles to specific populations (Arthur, 2001). She shared how her father taught his children to look at the hidden messages, specifically advertisements that prescribed roles to marginalized populations. Thinking critically about literacy requires that the reader not only reads the word but also reads the world and understands how it is connected to access to or exclusion from power in society (Freire & Macedo, 1998). Dory and her father were able to decipher the hidden message, discuss it, and acknowledge how it provides a limited perspective of the ability to succeed for people of color.

In retrospect, although I struggled to initially understand Dory’s grasp of critical literacy,
by the end of the JAC Dory was able to articulate an understanding of critical literacy in two ways. The first was through her emotional journey where she unpacked the experiences in her life where she felt marginalized. The emotional journey, where she discovered the ways in which literacy negatively impacted her identity, led her to understand that literacy has hidden messages and reflects society’s gender roles. I am left wondering if unpacking one’s emotions concerning literacy can be part of the process of becoming critically literate. Dory also expressed that literacy reflects the perspective of people in power in society and by included marginalized people in literacy it becomes an important tool of empowerment.

**Final Reflections**

In closing, I think it is important to end this chapter by discussing how through looking at the preservice teachers’ and my experience in the JAC and CLW, my understanding of the role of a critical literacy educator has grown and I have learned several points. They are that the preservice teachers each have an individualized learning experience; my vulnerability was essential to the learning process; emotions are a learning tool, and healing is an important part of becoming critically literate, as well as the important of the lived experience in our learning.

All of the preservice teachers and I evolved during the CLW and the JAC; yet we each developed differently during the experience. The preservice teachers had unique and individualized experiences. It was important that I, as an educator, valued their learning in the CLW and JAC, and realized that becoming critical educators is an individualized process. It would be simple to say that one can chart the developmental progression and apply it to future students.

Facilitating the CLW and the JAC was challenging as it required vulnerability. Even though I struggled, I walked away with a deeper understanding of my role as an educator. I
learned that my vulnerability supported the preservice teachers unpacking their relationship with literacy and power. They were able to connect to my sharing personal pain and helped them feel comfortable sharing and unpacking their own relationship with literacy and power. Not only was attempting to expose myself and struggling with being vulnerable in the CLW important, but it was also essential in the process of co-constructing the JAC. As I reflect upon the JAC, I realize that my process of being a co-constructor led me to feel vulnerable as an educator. I am left contemplating how when I co-construct can I balance and work through my insecurities as an educator while giving preservice teachers the freedom to be active participants in the process.

When I think about the learning process after the CLW, I discovered that not only was it essential to unpack one’s emotions, but that emotions were a learning tool. The preservice teachers began to develop an understanding of critical literacy through connecting to their emotions surrounding their understanding of self and others. Specifically, through connecting to their pain surrounding how literacy has negatively impacted their sense of self, they were able to understand important components of critical literacy. This left me thinking about the importance of emotions in the process of becoming critically literate and the role of the teacher educator during the emotional work.

I learned that the process of becoming critical literacy educators included healing. The process of analyzing and unpacking our relationship with literacy and power in the CLW unmasked hurt. Through discussing the hurt, the preservice teachers learned that literacy is connected to power, and recreating our understanding of self and others we began to heal. As an educator, I realized that using emotions as an education tool is essential.

Lastly, I have learned that the lived experience (Dewey, 1938) was an important part of the learning. The learning was not separate from the lived experience. The preservice teachers
developed a deeper understanding of critical literacy through enacting it in the classroom. This left me wondering about traditional teacher education programs that separate learning from practical experience. I thought about what learning is lost and how I can change my teaching practice to combine experience and theoretical learning.

The experience changed our understandings of self as well as our ability to enact critical literacy. The implications of this study speak to looking at critical literacy through a different lens and reconsidering how critical literacy is introduced to preservice teachers. It details the importance of vulnerability; learning through emotions; critical literacy as healing; learning through the lived experience, and authenticity.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This practitioner action research study was conducted to examine how I, a teacher educator, facilitated preservice teachers as we co-planned and co-taught a Junk Art Club for kindergarten, first- and second-graders. The purpose of this study was to share my experiences during the Junk Art Club and document the co-teaching process in hopes of providing a model of an innovative approach to preparing preservice teachers to become critical literacy educators. My goal was to add to the current research concerning critical literacy and preservice teachers’ preparation.

The previous chapter documented the findings from the study. The chapter told the story of the preservice teachers and my experiences during the CLW and the JAC. It highlighted the learning process and struggles of the preservice teachers as they were introduced to the concept of critical literacy and worked to co-plan and co-teach the JAC. It also described my experience and struggles as I worked with the preservice teachers to facilitate their understanding of critical literacy and co-planning and co-teaching the JAC.

This chapter presents the conclusions of the research as well as recommendations for teacher educators and teacher education programs in the pursuit of preparing preservice teachers to becoming critical literacy educators.

Conclusions

I begin by discussing the following three conclusions: (a) Preparing preservice teachers to become critical literacy educators is a process which is learned through the lived experience; (b) This learning process needs to be individualized to the preservice teacher; and (c) Becoming critically literate has the potential to be a healing experience. I then offer recommendations for critical literacy teacher educators and teacher education programs. I conclude with a discussion
of future critical literacy research.

_Becoming Critically Literate Teacher through Lived Experience_

The CLW and the JAC did not separate the educational process from practice, but rather gave the preservice teachers the opportunity to work in a classroom alongside the teacher educator. Too often much of the focus in preservice teacher education is placed on the completion of coursework with little to no opportunities for student teachers to apprentice. It is important to consider that, like the participants in the study, preservice teachers could benefit from learning through the lived experience in a classroom while they are in the process of gaining academic knowledge. The lived experience is defined as “learning through engaging in the organic work and then processing the experience through reflective practice” (Dewey, 1938). Having the opportunity to apprentice with their teacher educator provided a valuable experience for the preservice teachers and together we gained knowledge and understanding of critical literacy and classroom experience as they work to plan and enact a JAC.

Critical literacy teacher educators have used varied approaches to preparing preservice teachers to be critical literacy educators. Typically, critical literacy has been introduced in an academic course setting. The innovative approach used in this study is built upon Dewey’s (1916) understanding of the learning process and how it is a "continual reorganization, reconstruction and transformation of experience" (p. 50). Dewey explained that learning cannot be separated from experience and is dependent on experiences. Experiences provide the information needed to reorganize, reconstruct, and transform one’s understanding of oneself and the world (Dewey, 1916). As a two-tiered study, both the preservice teachers and I benefited from the learned experience of facilitating the CLW as well as the JAC as a means of becoming critical literacy educators.
The study began with the preservice teachers and I unpacking our relationship with literacy and power, modelled from the work of Vasquez, Tate, and Harste (2013). Their book responded to a lack of literature on preparing preservice teachers to become critical literacy educators. They discussed the importance of teachers becoming self-actualized and unpacking systems of meaning in society. They also introduced critical literacy to preservice teachers through the *I Am/ I Am Not* chart, which I used to start the CLW, and then discussed how to negotiate space for critical literacy in the classroom through having children critique the world around them (Vasquez et al., 2013). My study took their theoretical framework one step further by creating the time and space for the preservice teachers and me to work together over six weeks to unpack our relationship with literacy and then use the framework to teach young children as our own lived experience.

The lived experience that we embarked on provided the preservice teachers and myself the opportunity to critically examine texts and deepen our understanding of critical literacy. Through our unpacking experience, each of the preservice teachers discussed how texts, specifically those of the media, had negatively altered their sense of self. Dory and Rose discussed how messages from texts had affected their body image. Bianca shared that messages from texts had negatively influenced her understanding of her role in society. Rose shared that after the CLW she developed a new understanding of self. She no longer considered herself Hispanic and instead identified herself as Brown. Dory and Bianca felt that they walked away with a deeper understanding of self as well. Dory discussed with the group that she faced emotions that she had hidden for years and felt the experience was therapeutic. Through the lived experience, the preservice teachers were able to begin to understand that literacy is never neutral, and is connected to power in society as they investigated their understanding of self.
Their deeper understanding of the concept of self evolved as we did the work to unpack stereotypes in society that had been attributed to us by texts. Rowsell and Pahl (2007) traced how identity is fluid and is formed over time with input from texts. Through creating artifacts and discussing them, we were able to identify and discuss stereotypes that had affected our lives and we began to rethink the ways we thought about our identities. Savali (2015) maintained that we are continually consuming stereotypes and misperceptions that influence our understanding of self and others. It is only through examining and discussing these messages that one can engage in a transformative lived experience. Engaging in this collaborative experience supported the preservice teachers in their journey, enabling us to begin to question the status quo and consider different path to discovering a new understanding of self (Freire, 1972).

It is therefore important to consider that, prior to learning how to plan and teach critical literacy lessons, preservice teachers need to work to understand how literacy has affected their understanding of self and the world around them. Without it, is impossible for preservice teachers to engage in critical literacy education experiences while they are complicit in the agenda of the majority in both their understanding of self and others.

The data from this study suggests that preservice teachers unpacking their relationship with texts, before they have the opportunity to co-plan and co-teach, is beneficial in their journey of critically literacy. The JAC, the second tier of the study, gave the preservice teachers the opportunity to engage in critical literacy education while they were continuing to develop an understanding of critical literacy. Even though the preservice teachers were still developing their theoretical understanding of critical literacy, the lived experience of co-planning and co-teaching the Junk Art Club was valuable.

Observing the participants learning content, at the same time as engaging in lived
experiences, strengthened the understanding that preservice teachers need more opportunities to
develop conceptual understandings through engaging in doing the teaching. The lived experience
that the preservice teachers took part in during the CLW broke away from the traditional model
of teacher education in two ways. First the preservice teachers were still constructing their
understanding of critical literacy as they were engaged in practice and second the preservice
teachers worked alongside the teacher educator in the CLW. Through this experience the
preservice teachers were able to begin to develop as critical literacy educators. They were able to
engage in various levels of planning and interacting with the children. Upon reflection in the
final meeting the preservice teachers were able to begin to explain the importance of critical
literacy and discuss the essential components of this framework to varied degrees.

Critical literacy is an individual journey, which requires that preservice teachers engage
in deep personal reflection about themselves and the world around them as well as work to
recreate their understanding of self and others. Exploring these ideas while also facilitating
critical conversations with children about controversial topics provides multiple intersecting
pathways for developing this framework. As this can be an uncomfortable and unsettling
experience preservice teachers may resist the process (Dedeoglu, Lamme, & Ulusoy, 2012;
Groenke, 2008; Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Sluys et al., 2005; Smith, 2001;
Wolfe, 2010). Not only does it require developing an understanding of this concept, it also
demands that the teacher educator moves past the theoretical and enacts critical literacy in the
classroom. One of the barriers to critical literacy has been that preservice teachers express
discomfort and resistance to introducing social justice concepts with children (Schmidt et al.,
2007; Smith, 2001). Through working with a teacher educator, the preservice teachers in this
study had the opportunity to attempt to work through this barrier in a safe space and two of the
preservice teachers were able to engage the children in hard conversations.

Although all three preservice teachers stated that they felt critical literacy education was important, it is hard to predict whether the preservice teachers will enact critical literacy lessons in their future classrooms. In the final meeting, Rose discussed with the group how she did not know whether she would feel comfortable including critical literacy in her curriculum. She worried about the potential reaction of the parents and administration. The other two preservice teachers agreed. What then can teacher educators do to encourage critical literacy practices in their preservice teachers’ future classrooms? Perhaps an extended critical literacy induction program would be useful in their first few years of teaching, in which teacher educators act as sounding boards.

Not only did the preservice teachers learn from actual co-planning and co-teaching, but also reflecting in the post-JAC debrief meetings was useful to develop their reflective lenses. Beauchamp (2006) defined reflective practice as a “process of evaluating, analyzing, problem solving constructing, developing, and transforming one’s teaching practice.” The question I continued to ask as the researcher was, “How do I effectively prepare preservice teachers to engage in reflective practice?” Cochran and Lytle (2001) discussed how reflective practice should be focused on determining what prior knowledge preservice teachers bring to the classroom and how this knowledge is taken up in the classroom. Even though this undergirding principle is considered an essential component of preservice teacher preparation, in my study reflective teaching looked slightly different and responded to Zeichner’s (2005) argument that all preservice teachers need to develop their ability to engage in reflective practice during their teacher education program. Usually this occurs during the student teaching semester when they work with a teacher educator in the role of mentor to develop their ability to engage in reflective
In my study, the reflective practice discussions during the JAC moved us past the one-sided discussions that typically occur between teacher educators and their preservice teachers. Typically, the preservice teacher and the teacher educator, acting as mentor, work together to think about the preservice teachers’ strengths and needed growth areas in their practice. This study expanded this practice to include a two-sided reflective practice process. The post-JAC meeting provided the preservice teachers with the opportunity to engage in reflective practice with me as the teacher educator/mentor where we all reflected on our roles in the JAC. I was able to scaffold reflective practice by modeling the process of reflection, providing feedback, and asking questions as well as sharing my own joys and frustrations from our lessons.

The method of learning while doing did not come without challenges for the preservice teachers. At certain points, they struggled to find their voice in an environment where they shared the space with me as the teacher educator. They also found the shift from discussing critical literacy to enacting it in the CLW difficult. However, each of the preservice teachers were able to grow in their understanding and knowledge of critical literacy.

**Becoming a Critically Literate Teacher Educator**

The lived experience was important not only for the preservice teachers but it was also important in my own development as a teacher educator. Through scaffolding and supporting the preservice teachers, I grew as an educator. I expanded my understanding of critical literacy and gained insight into the importance of the emotional work. It was only through actively unpacking our relationship with literacy together, that I was able to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of the unpacking process. However, doing this alongside my students was not always an easy process for me. It was filled with self-doubt and unearthed many emotions around my
identity as a teacher educator. Feeling these emotions was essential to my learning process as it pushed me to feel a disequilibrium and begin to disrupt my own critical literacy theories. I began to realize the importance of continuing to develop my theory rather than having a stagnant understanding of critical literacy. I also recognized the importance of balancing my need to control every aspect of the lesson with giving the preservice teachers the space to take ownership of the JAC.

In retrospect, this co-teaching experience gave me the opportunity to not only discuss the concepts that I consider essential to critical literacy education but also to live and enact them. I realized that one’s teaching practice is always developing and needs to be nurtured. It is impossible to cultivate one’s classroom teaching practice when teacher educators work solely in college classrooms. The lived experience of working with the children and preservice teachers took me out of my comfort zone, pushed me to rethink my beliefs, and helped my growth as a teacher educator.

I learned that to facilitate critical literate teacher education, teacher educators need to make sure that they are living their theory. Vasquez at al. (2013) defined “living your theory” as understanding your philosophy and continually working towards becoming a teacher educator who creates a learning environment that empowers preservice teachers. In their critical literacy framework, Vasquez at al. (2013) discussed the importance of living their theory in their lives as critical teacher educators. Teacher educators who live their theory not only teach social justice and critical literacy in the classroom but also embeds it into all aspects of their life. Living my theory in the CLW and JAC was challenging but I also found this essential to the process. The challenge of remaining true to my theory provided the catalyst for my growth as a teacher educator. To do this, I found journaling essential.
During the beginning of the CLW, I struggled with sharing myself even though I believed it to be essential to the process of becoming a critical literacy educator. There were certain points during the planning and teaching of the JAC that were challenging for me. I was conflicted between facilitating and protecting my professional identity. In retrospect, I realized that creating a supportive group of teacher educators who were also engaged in the work would have been beneficial. I would have hopefully been able to share my insecurities and work through them with peers rather than feeling uncomfortable sharing my insecurities with my critical friend, my professor whom I hold in high esteem. A group of fellow educators who are also engaged in the struggle would have possibly created a safe space where I would have felt free to share and work through my feelings.

Through attempting to both live my theory and engage in the lived experience, I learned the importance of creating a safe space for preservice teachers to investigate their practices through trial and error. I realized that to do this I myself had to be vulnerable and engage in the struggle with them. In the JAC sessions we struggled to create a lesson that the preservice teachers felt was successful. It was through actually being part of that struggle that I learned the importance of being active in the learning process. I discovered the need to balance my goals with the preservice teachers’ needs and goals as well as the importance of creating a community of learners where we were all teachers and learners. The experience showed me the value of creating a space where both preservice teachers and teacher educators could work as a teaching unit.

*A Lived Experience Teacher Education Program*

Working together in the CLW and the JAC demonstrated the importance of breaking down the divide between academic coursework and practical experience and interweaving them
to create a lived experience for the growth of both the preservice teachers and the teacher educator. Although reconfiguring teacher education programs to combine the two could be challenge, I feel it is important to consider the value of role modeling, co-constructing, co-teaching, and co-reflecting in the development of preservice teachers and teacher educators.

The role of the lived experience in teacher education programs has long been debated. Traditionally, it has been separated from education classes and completed at the end of one’s teacher education program. Currently there has been a push to extend the student teaching experience. The New Jersey Department of Education, for example, has increased the requirements so that preservice teachers have two semesters in the classroom. The first-semester preservice teachers engage in 175 hours of classroom experience and spend one semester in the classroom. However, the disconnect that has traditionally existed between teacher education instructors and the cooperative teachers still exists in this model (Zeichner, 2012).

Zeichner (2012) discussed that the creation of a third space could create an alternative to the traditional disconnect. It would create a place where preservice teachers, teacher educators, and cooperative teachers worked together to educate and support the preservice teachers during their student teaching experience. Klein et al. (2013) found that through the creation of a residency program in a graduate education program that they were able to create a third space and break down the divide between theory and practice.

The CLW offered an alternate approach to creating a third space in that the teacher educator was an active participant in the practical teaching experience. As an active participant, I was able to scaffold for the preservice teachers, model critical literacy teaching, support the planning process, and engage in reflective practice with the preservice teachers. Through the co-facilitated JAC, we created a third space that disrupted the typical theory and practice divide.
The process of taking part in the lived experience of CLW and the JAC not only suggested the importance of breaking down the divide between theory and practical experience, it also helped highlight the need for individualized learning to becoming a critical literacy educator.

**Becoming Critically Literate is an Individualized Process**

In order to become critically literate teachers, the preservice teachers required an individualized lived experience that honored their strengths and needs. To design learning, teacher educators need to be able to discern the prior knowledge of preservice teachers as well as their openness to unpacking the ways in which texts have defined their identities in order to challenge and support preservice teachers.

Learning for social justice and specifically critically literacy development is an individualized experience because it is a journey of evaluating one’s understanding of the world. All preservice teachers who enter teacher education programs have many identities that are unique to their experiences. Their experiences are impacted by social identities such as race, gender, and class as well as their personal encounters privilege and oppression in society (Villegas & Lucas, 2001). Their identities and experiences coupled with their personal learning style and investment in the work create individualized learning paths.

Each of the preservice teachers’ learning processes throughout the CLW and JAC were unique as they developed their critical literacy stance through different teaching endeavors. Bianca began to develop a critical literate stance when she engaged the children in thinking about topics through asking critical questions. While Rose seemed to construct an understanding of critical literacy when she observed me leading the JAC, reflected and debriefed on teaching in the post-JAC meetings, and slowly began to take over some of the teaching in the lessons. Dory, on the other hand, accessed this new concept as she observed the discussions with the children...
during the entire JAC. She became more active during the creation of the art as she worked one on one with the students. All three of the preservice teachers had different strategies they used to nurture this teaching stance.

I also learned that when fostering critical literacy for preservice teachers it is important to honor each student’s identity and process rather than creating the same expectations and benchmarks for all. Teacher educators need to constantly consider how critical literacy can be part of the social justice teacher education curriculum which requires them to re-examine who they are within the larger world. This kind of re-imagining does not come without discomfort. Mosley (2010), detailed the importance of teacher educators’ understanding that critical literacy education is a study of approximations of critical literacy. Teacher educators need to realize than it is a process and the goal should be to begin to understand and to try to attempt to teach critical literacy.

During my study, I wrestled with managing my expectations and found that I was invested in the preservice teachers gaining a specific level of critical literacy competency. When Dory seemed confused and was resistant to taking over the JAC, I felt frustrated yet in retrospect I learned I needed to value her growth and honor her journey rather than have her live up to my expectations. I walked away from the study understanding the importance of honoring the individualized experience, but also building these opportunities into the curriculum through offering the preservice teachers time, space, and support to wrestle with the concept of critical literacy.

The individualized journey of becoming critically literate calls for teacher education programs to consider providing multiple opportunities for preservice teachers to engage in critical literacy education. Although my study had only three participants who cannot represent
all preservice teachers, they do demonstrate the necessity of valuing each preservice teacher’s unique journey.

Through the experience, I learned that teacher education programs need to consider moving past quickly introducing critical literacy during one week of the program and instead embed it throughout the entire program. Each of the preservice teachers left with different levels of understandings ability to enact critical literacy in the classroom. Had the three preservice teachers not had the opportunity to revisit the concept on multiple occasions they would have left the study with only a limited understanding of the concept.

Besides being individualized, preservice teachers need extended time as well as multiple experiences to consider critical literacy. The CLW and JAC offered the preservice teachers’ multiple opportunities to investigate the concept of critical literacy through the creation of artifacts and discussions. Having multiple exposures to critical literacy gave the preservice teachers the opportunity to revisit and investigate the concept. I realized that different activities can provide moments of clarity for individual preservice teachers. For example, after a session, Bianca wrote in her journal, “This exercise was insightful. It is an eye opener to see how at times we can all conform to society’s beliefs, even when they do not make sense” (Bianca’s Journal CLW, September 2016). The rewriting of the ad activity proved an eye-opening moment that facilitating Bianca’s understanding of the power of messages and how they shape our understanding of self and others. Not only is it essential to consider the importance of respecting and honoring each preservice teachers’ journey, through giving them the opportunity to unpack their relationship with literacy and providing multiple opportunities to investigate the concept, it is also important to consider the emotional dimensions of critical literacy.

**Emotional Dimensions of Critical Literacy**
Emotions have long been considered something that needs to be managed in the classroom prior to learning (Hochschild, 1979). However current literature points to the fact that emotions are essential in the learning process. One’s emotions are embodied memories of experiences and understanding of self and the world in which we live (Denzin, 1985). Emotions can be used to create understanding and construct knowledge (Forgasz & Clemans, 2014).

Emotions are a person’s understanding of their experiences in the world (Denzin, 1985). The CLW began as we worked together to unpack our experiences with texts and our understandings of ourselves. This process seemed to unearth a range of emotions. One’s relationship with one’s self is filled with strengths and insecurities based on one’s experience in the world. Instead of learning about critical literacy as an academic theory, preservice teachers need to unpack their emotions and use them as learning tools as they investigated critical literacy. This study suggested that the importance of allowing emotions in the critical literacy process for preservice teachers. Our entry point into developing a deeper understanding of critical literacy did not occur through only theoretical conversations but rather it occurred through very personally unpacking the messages that texts and other forms of literacy have assigned to us which had negatively affected our understanding of self and our self-worth.

Art was the modality used to unpack our emotions concerning our relationship with literacy and power. Art, through symbol making, gave the preservice teachers the opportunity to think through their understanding of self as they documented their identities (Cohen & Gainer, 1995) and worked to transform perceptions of their selves (Goldberg, 2001). The process of creating allowed the preservice teachers to conceptualize and then recreate their understanding (Strauch-Nelson, 2019), much like art therapy where art is used to express experiences and emotions, empower, and facilitate transformation (American Art Therapy Association, 2017).
I learned that preservice teachers need to be given the time and support to unpack their relationship with literacy and power. It is through this process that the preservice teachers were able to connect to the power of the messages embedded in texts. The process I embarked on was filled with success and challenges. The successes were that through the sharing of the artifacts the preservice teachers and I were able to develop a deeper understanding of critical literacy on both a theoretical and emotional level. The challenges were that at certain points the emotions felt too raw. In retrospect I learned that in order to do this work it is essential to create a safe space, a space where all members of the group feel valued and heard.

Not only was it important for the preservice teachers to use emotions as way to unpack their previous experiences with texts, it was also an essential learning tool. Emotions are embodied reactions to experiences with and understanding of self and the world around us. Embodied learning joins the emotional way of knowing with the cognitive knowledge in the learning process (Nguyen & Larson, 2015). Emotions are key to learning (Mezirow, 1975). Taylor (1988) discussed that in order to engage in learning one goes through an emotional journey of meaning making that delves into both the self and one’s existence in society.

The four of us developed a deeper understanding of critical literacy through using emotions as a way to understand that texts are never neutral, are connected to power in society, and create roles for different groups in society. We all connected as women to the roles women have been assigned through texts and shared the emotions, we have surrounding these roles. The group discussed how the media defined beauty and a woman’s role in our male-dominated world.

The entry point for developing an understanding of critical literacy for both Dory and
Rose was their feelings concerning body image messages they had received through their interactions with texts. As they began to unpack the messages and realize how they were defined by literacy messages, they began to understand how literacy messages affected their understanding of self. Bianca, through unpacking the emotions around how the dominant groups in society construct messages that can define one’s sense of self, discovered that the value of a woman is often measured in terms of her sexuality. She began to think about how the male perspective of the role of a woman was one that caused her pain.

Unpacking the experiences was painful. It was only after the preservice teachers had the opportunity to connect and unpack their painful experiences with texts that they were able to then begin to understand the theoretical components. Emotions were an essential learning tool for the group. It was through unpacking our embodied emotional experiences that we were able to understand how texts reflect the perspective of the group that holds power in society. The process of connecting to our marginalization facilitated our developing an understanding of critical literacy. It is therefore important to consider how embodied experiences and emotions are an essential component to becoming critically literate. Not only do preservice teachers need to acknowledge and unpack the emotional experience, they also need opportunities to heal.

**Critical Literacy as Healing**

The pedagogy of healing has discussed healing as a key component to critical media literacy education for children. Baker-Bell, Stanbrough, and Everett (2017) defined healing as a process where critical literacy education facilitates a catharsis where the students are able to express painful emotions. The healing occurs in two parts: tools to heal and tools to transform. Both steps are important when thinking about the wounds to one’s self-concept created by messaging. Acknowledging the wound does not change the situation or the trauma. It is taking
action to transform that begins to change one’s understanding of self. Through taking action one is able to begin to change their personal narrative. The work can begin to heal the wound created by the uncritical consumption of messages that are embedded in texts (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

I theorized that in order to become a critical literacy educator, one must engage in the healing process discussed above. It is only through being on the healing journey that one can facilitate healing in the classroom. The process of taking part in the CLW and the JAC not only helped the preservice teachers on their journey to becoming critical literacy educators, it also created a healing circle. A healing circle, which is based on Aboriginal Peoples’ culture, is a sharing circle where people work together to support one another as they talk through trauma in their lives (Stevenson, 1999). As a group, we supported each other as we shared our pain and vulnerability. This occurred as we shared our artifacts and our experiences.

It is important to consider that the healing circle was not only beneficial as we dealt with our emotions concerning the effect the messages from texts had on our understanding of self, but it also helped the group develop a deeper understanding of critical literacy. Through those moments where we talked, shared, and supported one another, we were able to look at how literacy is embedded with power, is never neutral, and should be interrogated.

The process of taking part in the CLW and the JAC not only broke down the divide between academic learning and practical experience, it helped the group learn about the concept of critical literacy, and how to enact a JAC but also it gave them time and space to heal. The CLW created a healing community where the participants began to heal from the wounds created by messages found in texts.

**Implications**
This research study, which presents the experience of three preservice teachers and a teacher educator, documents an innovative approach to preparing preservice teachers to become critical literacy educators. I learned that utilizing visual art, such as junk art, is an essential tool in the critical literacy learning process. Three components of pedagogy of critical vulnerability are required to facilitate the process of preservice teachers becoming critically literate: vulnerability, healing, and the importance of co-planning and co-teaching with the teacher educator. I also learned that teacher education programs should consider including critical literacy education throughout their teacher education programs and that future research is needed to develop a deeper understanding of the implications and how they can be manifested in teacher education programs. Below, I discuss each implication in detail.

**Junk Art**

When creating a program to teach critical literacy, it is important to remember that the concept of critical literacy cannot be learned through a “drill and kill” educational experience. It is rather a social justice concept that requires preservice teachers to awaken to a new understanding of self and others (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006). As in other social justice education, it requires soul searching and choice. Preservice teachers need to work through their emotions and barriers.

Creating art was an important part of the CLW for the preservice teachers and the children. Art, as a multimodality, gives one the ability to express meaning in different modes such as visual media or writing (Kress, 1997). Through representing their personal experiences and understandings both the preservice teachers and the students were creating identity narratives (Holland et al., 1998). In the creation of their identity narratives they were able to draw upon their funds of knowledge and use them to conceptualize their understanding of themselves and the
world (Dewey, 1938). Cohen and Gainer (1995) found that art is a natural language of where visual creations both clarify and inspire thought and ideas. Not only is it a way to clarify thoughts and ideas, but it is also a way to express human emotions and experiences (Langer, 1957). The creation of art gives the artist the ability to express possibilities and their understanding of society (Cohen & Gainer, 1995). The preservice teachers and I were able to use art as a way to express our emotion, contemplate a new understanding of self, and document our experience through art. Our final activity was to create a representation of self at the end of the CLW.

Art, as an open-ended modality, provides teacher educators with a teaching tool that can be used to assist preservice teachers as they discover critical literacy. Future research needs to be conducted where art is utilized as a learning strategy to support students learning in social justice and critical literacy in teacher education classrooms.

**Pedagogy of Critical Vulnerability**

Critical literacy has been introduced to preservice teachers in both formal and innovative ways. Critical literacy has traditional been introduced through formal classroom instruction where teacher educators introduce the topic through classroom lecturing. Innovative approaches have been researched such as creating online groups (Calderwood et al., 2010) or having preservice teachers enact critical literacy in a reading lab (Mosely, 2010) to support preservice teachers as they begin to plan and enact critical literacy lessons. However, I believe critical literary education needs to move beyond the current strategies. I theorize that in order to be critically literate one must be able to engage in critical vulnerability. The pedagogy of critical vulnerability necessitates three essential components: vulnerability, healing, and opportunities for co-planning and co-teaching.
Vulnerability

Engaging in critical literacy teaching requires that one develops an understanding of how texts have impacted one’s understanding of self. As discussed above this journey does not come without pain and healing. The process of becoming critically literate requires that preservice teachers’ work to develop self-awareness. Yet self-awareness does not occur without questioning, and soul-searching.

I theorize that engaging in critical literacy work requires that one is vulnerable. Critical vulnerability pedagogy builds upon the pedagogy of vulnerability. Brantmeier’s (2013) pedagogy of vulnerability details the importance of teacher educator vulnerability in the teaching process. It is the creation of a learning environment where the teacher educator through self-disclosure, builds a classroom environment where preservice teachers are encouraged and supported to be vulnerable, share themselves, and co-learn with the teacher educator. Through vulnerability and sharing one’s self, the teacher educator is role modeling how to engage in self-examination, vulnerability, and creating an environment of trust.

Pedagogy of critical vulnerability is the process of using vulnerability in critical literacy education for preservice teachers. It is examining literacy through a vulnerability and healing lens. Teacher educator’s work alongside preservice teachers to unpack the feelings and emotions connected to their relationship with literacy and power as well as take part in healing. It is only through engaging in the vulnerability process that preservice teachers are able to achieve the self-awareness needed to begin to think about how the structures of power in literacy affect society, their contribution or acceptance of the current inequities in society, and how they can become agents of change.

Teacher educators need to be ready to share themselves. Sharing oneself requires a
willingness to be vulnerable when discussing how literacy has affected one’s understanding of self and the world around them as well as during the co-teaching process. It is moving past talking about literacy from a theoretical lens and instead looking at the wounds or privileges we have by the way that we have been represented in texts. The teacher educator through sharing creates a safe space for preservice teachers to begin their journey towards becoming critically literate educators.

When engaging in critical vulnerability with my preservice teachers I found the process emotional at times. My vulnerability however was the catalyst for the preservice teachers opening up, sharing, and unpacking their relationship with literacy and power. I theorize without engaging in the process of unpacking their relationship with literacy they would never be able to fully become critically literate.

Teacher educators need to engage in critical vulnerability for two reasons. First, they need to make sure that they are constantly interrogating their understanding of self and others; and ensure that the lens by which they view themselves and others is not reproducing the current state of societal inequity. Secondly, it facilitates the creation of a safe space for preservice teachers to do the emotional work needed to become critically literate. Without connecting to our inner emotions concerning literacy and our self-concept we would not have been able to truly understand how texts influenced the way we see ourselves and the world around our us.

Teacher educators need to understand that the goal in this process is not comfort. Critical vulnerability in the act of sharing and engaging is modeling how to work through the discomfort of deep self-reflection. It is understanding that no matter how long a teacher educator engages in this work there will always be the possibility of new revelations and emotions.

*Healing*
Another key component in critical vulnerability pedagogy is the creation of a healing community. Healing as detailed above is an important component of becoming critically literate. Vulnerability and healing are intertwined in the process of developing a new lens by which to view oneself and the world. Healing occurs in two ways. First it occurs through sharing, receiving support, and validation. Secondly, it occurs through taking action. The action begins with recreated one’s understanding of self and other and then working to create changing in society. Healing as an important component in the process of becoming critically literate requires that teacher educators understand the process and create an environment that supports the process. Supporting the process demands that the teacher educator works to build a relationship with not only the student but also the person. The person who walks into the classroom has multiple identities such as employee, sibling, significant other, friend, son or daughter, and parent (Crenshaw, 2011, Coia & Taylor, 2013). Preservice teachers’ relationship with literacy is not purely academic; it is intertwined with all their identities. In order to create a place to begin the journey to becoming critically literate, they need an environment where they feel accepted for all their identities and free to investigate their understanding of self and others. It is through sharing and receiving support that preservice teachers are able to begin to heal. The healing process can occur when a preservice teacher is able to be vulnerable. The teacher educator through role modeling vulnerability and validating feelings provides the support needed to begin the healing journey.

Healing also calls for teacher educators to give preservice teachers the opportunity to reconstruct their understanding of self and others. They need the opportunity to take action and work to redefine in which the world they live. Teacher educators should not only be vulnerable and role model the healing process, they also need to be example of individuals who have
embedded critical literacy into their lives inside and outside of the classroom; roles model who understand that it is not a strategy but a way of living.

**Co-planning and Teaching Critical Literacy**

The next phase of becoming critical literacy educators is the process of taking new understandings and creating experiences for children to facilitate their understanding of critical literacy. A barrier to preservice teachers enacting critical literacy has been the lack of mentors who are currently enacting critical literacy in the classroom (Robertson & Hughes, 2011). Enacting critical literacy in the classroom can be challenging in multiple ways. Preservice teachers need to be comfortable engaging in controversial conversations. Sometimes critical literacy activities can cause students to resist. Finally, disrupting inequitable systems that are well established in society can be daunting. Having mentors to guide them through this process is essential.

Through engaging in a critical vulnerability pedagogy, it is important to ensure that the preservice teachers are supported in this process. I believe that co-planning and co-teaching provide some of that scaffolding. A teacher educator can mentor the preservice teachers because she is knowledgeable and comfortable teaching critical literacy with students. Teaching critical literacy brings a completely different form of vulnerability. Having a teacher educator working alongside the preservice teachers provides the supported needed to bridge the gap and create a safe community as the preservice teachers work to becoming competent critical literacy educators.

**Teacher Education Programs**

Previous researchers have discussed that critical literacy education requires that preservice teachers have multiple exposures to the concept. Mosley (2010) shared the importance
of approximation. Her research spoke to the importance of teacher educators understanding that becoming a critical literacy educator takes time and the role of the teacher educator is to value the attempt and understand that the goal is to begin the journey towards becoming a critical literacy educator rather than expecting preservice teachers to be able to fully enact critical literacy education in a classroom setting.

My research built upon prior research as I sought to investigate how I could honor and facilitate the preservice teachers’ journeys of becoming critical literate and provide multiple opportunities to investigate the concept of critical literacy. Through my research, as discussed above, I theorized that there are three components to preparing preservice teachers to be critical literacy educators: vulnerability, healing, and the importance of co-planning and co-teaching with the teacher educator. As the process by which I am advocating to prepare preservice teachers to become critical literacy educators calls for multiple opportunities to unpack one’s relationship with power and process emotions and using emotions as a learning tool to develop an understanding of critical literacy, it cannot not be accomplished in one class meeting or even a semester for numerous reasons. First, it is an individualized process where preservice teachers need to have the time and space to unpack their emotions and begin to develop an understanding of critical literacy. Secondly, processing emotions surrounding one’s relationship with literacy and power is complicated. It requires self-reflection, interrogating one’s understanding of self and others, connecting to emotions as a learning strategy, and recreating one’s understanding of self and others. The emotional work cannot be achieved in one day or even a semester. It is a journey of discovery that takes time.

Therefore, I believe it is essential that we consider moving past the inclusion of critical literacy in the English language portion of teacher education and embed it into the entire teacher
education program. Critical literacy needs to be regarded as more than a language arts strategy, and seen as a way of functioning in the world and a core value of a teacher. Preservice teachers need to be able to investigate the world in which they live and understand how the imbalance of power is part of the knowledge we teach in classroom and that it is our responsibility as educators to create classroom that facilitate students interrogating knowledge. Without engaging in this work, educators could reaffirm the current inequities of power in society and the status quo in which groups of people are marginalized.

Embedding critical literacy in the entire teacher education program, where varied teacher educators would engage in the work of preparing preservice teachers to be critically literate, could create a group of teacher educators who are dedicated to the process, and are mutually supportive. I found it hard to navigate the CLW and the JAC as I became entrenched in my emotions and at certain points was not able to see past my own insecurities. I theorized above that it would have been beneficial to have a support system of my peers. Creating a program where critical literacy education is woven throughout would naturally create a group of teacher educators who would hopefully support and challenging the teacher educator as they enacted the pedagogy of critical vulnerability in their classes.

It would be naive to believe that by having teacher educators engage in the work that they would automatically be comfortable sharing their vulnerabilities with their colleagues. However, through creating relationships and building confidence hopefully the shared experience would create a safe space for teacher educators to engage in the work.

**Future Research**

Previous researchers have discussed that critical literacy education requires that preservice teachers have multiple exposures to this stance (Mosely, 2010). My research built
upon prior research as I sought to investigate how I could honor and facilitate the preservice teachers’ journeys to becoming critical literacy and provide multiple opportunities to investigate the concept of critical literacy. Through my research, as discussed above, I theorized that there are three components to the pedagogy of critical vulnerability: vulnerability, healing, and the importance of co-planning and co-teaching with the teacher educator.

It is important to understand that this study was created in a setting where the preservice teachers were a small group of invested volunteers, and were not assessed or graded on the experience. It therefore created an ideal environment for the work. The preservice teachers attended the CLW and the JAC by choice. They were not obligated by graduation requirements to take part in the process. Volunteers bring a level of investment that is not always found in teacher education classrooms. Teacher education classrooms have a variety of students with different levels of investment in the curricula and in social justice work. The three preservice teachers were dedicated to the work and were willing to invest time from their busy schedule to take part in the CLW and the JAC. The small number of preservice teachers allowed for a dedicated and supportive environment and individual attention during the unpacking process and the co-teaching and co-planning. Finally, the environment was separate from the preservice teachers’ course work, and therefore a safe space where they could share themselves in the CLW and take part in the co-planning and co-teaching in the Junk Art Club without fear of qualitative evaluation and grading, and the teacher educator was not constricted by course requirements.

Future research is needed to investigate how teacher educators can move past the ideal critical literacy vulnerability community which was created in this study and understand how critical literacy vulnerability communities can be created inside of teacher education classes. Attention needs to be paid to how a teacher educator can create a safe space with a larger number
of preservice teachers, work with varied levels of preservice teachers’ investment, navigate preservice teachers who are resistant to the process, and work to balance the need to assess preservice teachers’ work and fulfill the requirements for the course as stated in the course description.

In conclusion, I continually learned and worked to grow as a critical literacy teacher educator through this study. It was filled with learning, excitement, and challenges. In retrospect it is important to understand the importance of the process: the process of becoming as a person and a critical literacy teacher educator. Through using junk art and developing the pedagogy of critical vulnerability, I found that critical literacy education for preservice teachers is not linear and requires that teacher educators are attuned to preservice teachers’ needs in the learning and co-teaching process. I look forward to conducting future research and to developing a deeper understanding of how teacher educators can prepare preservice teachers to enact critical literacy in an early childhood classroom.
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## APPENDIX

*Table 1: Common Codes Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Question 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What happens when I, an early childhood teacher educator, scaffold the teaching of critical literacy with three preservice teachers as we facilitate a Junk Art Club with kindergarten, first and second grade students?</td>
<td>What evidence is there, if any, that the critical literacy conceptualizations previously constructed in their critical literacy workshop support their enactment of critical literacy teaching in the Junk Art Club?</td>
<td>How does providing feedback, instructions, explanations, and questions for the preservice teachers support their enactment of critical literacy instruction as they increasingly facilitate the Junk Art Club?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisiting the crisis from the first JAC - 12</td>
<td>Preservice teachers entered the planning and JAC with a basic understanding - 11</td>
<td>Scaffolding – 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservice teachers and my frustration, excitement and pride - 9</td>
<td>Individual process - 16</td>
<td>Questioning – 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservice teachers uncomfortable taking the lead - 6</td>
<td>Building on ideas from CLW – 12</td>
<td>Extending ideas – 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning as they planned and implemented the JAC - 17</td>
<td>Feeding of each other’s ideas during planning and discussions - 14</td>
<td>Role Modeling – 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions – 16</td>
<td>Community - 25</td>
<td>Clarifying- 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing - 11</td>
<td>Importance prior knowledge in planning and implementing the JAC - 13</td>
<td>Summarizing - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My vulnerability -20</td>
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