WHAT IT MEANS TO KNOW:

ADOLESCENTS' DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

Current educational policy promulgates what Freire has deemed the banking model of education in that it expects students to gain knowledge that can be measured through standardized tests. In critical pedagogy, though, we hope that our students will be active participants in learning and producers of knowledge. However, sparse empirical literature explores whether adolescents adopt new ways of speaking about learning and knowledge after immersion in a critical pedagogy. This study investigates through discourse analysis how high school students describe knowledge and learning after experiencing critical pedagogy across all of their classes in their ninth and tenth grade years. After notable features of the students' discourse were identified, the discourse was sorted into McLaren's (2007) three types of knowledge: technical, practical, and emancipatory/critical. Findings show that most students used the discourse of practical knowledge but fell short of the knowledge and learning characteristics that we might imagine students immersed in critical pedagogy would develop.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, knowledge, adolescents, discourse analysis

KNOWLEDGE IN POLICY AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Policy documents, such as curricula and standards, assume a postpositivist paradigm: knowledge is understood to be a fixed entity that exists outside of humans yet that is also within human grasp. Moreover, knowledge can be transmitted without interpretation from one human to another. In such policy and in many classrooms, this knowledge, as Egan (2008) writes, is "[stripped] of its human context and human meaning" (p. 279). Additionally, knowledge in policy documents and standardized exams is positioned as right or wrong, transferable to any student in any context through the "best practices" of education (Kincheloe, 2008).

Critical pedagogues argue that current policy restricts students from thinking independently and critically. For instance, Westheimer (2009) worries, "If being a good democratic citizen requires thinking critically about important social assumptions, then that foundation of citizenship is at odds with recent trends in education policy" (p. 259). Westheimer is not alone in fretting over the state of our democracy; Apple (2009) believes that current educational policy reproduces societal inequalities, and McLaren (2007) asserts that the lived experiences of many Americans are overlooked by policy and that today's youth do not learn to be critical, questioning participants in our democracy. Fecho, Coombs, and McAuley (2012) argue, "If we don't value questioning and a multiplicity of voices among teachers and students, then we reify meaning. Without many voices and perspectives participating in the shaping of our society, we are left with one perspective, a condition that violates the heart of democracy" (p. 481). Shapiro (2009) calls this "a time of crisis" for education, and hooks (2003) writes of "assaults" on progressive educators. Smyth (2011) concludes that current educational policy is "fundamentally at odds with principles of social justice" (p. 129). Therefore, we need to consider how knowledge within critical pedagogy is different from that within the discourse of current educational policy, and how knowledge created through critical pedagogy develops more thoughtful, analytical, and questioning citizens.

KNOWLEDGE IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Freire (with Shor, 1987) suggests that the fundamental flaw in modern education is its abstraction of ideas from students' known and experienced realities. The consequences for students' lives are clear: if knowledge cannot be questioned or challenged, "students tend to locate the sources and construction of knowledge through other authoritative sources" (Luke, 2010, p. 171). Cho (2010) emphasizes the implications of locating knowledge in sources other than oneself: "The most significant focus of critical pedagogy is the relationship between knowledge and power" (p. 311). She adds that critical pedagogy "adamantly and steadfastly dismisses the mainstream assumption of knowledge as objective and neutral… [and] aims to construct alternative or counter-hegemonic forms of knowledge" (p. 311). Freire (with Macedo, 1987) argues for an understanding of knowledge that is markedly different from how it is positioned in policy documents: "Knowledge is not a piece of data, something immobilized, concluded, finished, something to be transferred by one who acquired it to one who still does not possess it" (p. 41). Freire believed that students build upon their own experiences to learn and that classrooms must be designed to accommodate for these prior knowledges.

We begin to realize the ways in which knowledge is, in fact, socially constructed when we consider a topic that seems fixed. Gee (2008) suggests that many of us believe we clearly understand the statement, "The coffee spilled" (p. 8). However, he complicates this seemingly unambiguous statement by noting that the coffee might be grounds or brewed, solid or liquid, which means that the listener could easily confuse the means for clean-up. To push Gee's example even further, I can also recall how the teachers at the high school where I used to teach would use "coffee" as a euphemistic invitation to happy hour. Language, then, is the medium through which knowledge is mediated and displayed. Analyzing discourse can indicate how knowledge is positioned in critical pedagogy classrooms. Nystrand (1997) states, "…understandings evolve – are co-constructed – in 'the unique interaction between author and reader, the play of two consciousnesses'" (citing Bakhtin, p. 11). In other words, there are no

perfect understandings because the speaker's meaning must always be interpreted by the listener (Edelsky & Cherland, 2006). This imperfection troubles traditional conceptions of truth and knowledge. Looking closely at classroom talk – or discourse – can help us better understand these struggles for meaning. After all, as Apple (2009) notes, education is not something separate from society: "It is not something alien, something that stands outside. Indeed, it is a key set of institutions and a key set of social and personal relations. It is just as central to a society as... so many other places in which people and power interact" (p. 40). Kincheloe (2007) terms this the "situated nature of knowledge": "No simple, universally applicable answers can be provided to the questions of justice, power, and praxis that haunt us. Indeed, such questions have to be asked time and again by teachers and other educational professionals operating in different historical times and diverse pedagogical locales" (as cited in Edwards, 2010, p. 227).

WHAT THE POSITIONING OF KNOWLEDGE IN CRITICAL PEDAGOGY MEANS IN PRACTICE

Although some critical pedagogues (e.g., Duncan-Andrade, 2007) speak vaguely of students learning to think and act critically after experiencing critical pedagogy, most have specific ideas about how knowledge should be positioned in the classroom. For instance, most note that critical pedagogies must move past skill and knowledge acquisition (Simon, 1992) to instead guide students to challenge and transform the worlds in which they live. As Giroux (2007) suggests, students should "learn how to deliberate, make judgments, and exercise choice." Additionally, students should come to see knowledge as value-laden and historical (Edwards, 2010). Within a critical pedagogy, students should not merely receive uni-directional knowledge from the teacher but should also co-create that knowledge (Freire, 1993; Smyth, 2011). In fact, most critical pedagogues argue that students must be producers, not recipients or consumers, of knowledge (McLaren, 1998; Wink, 2011).

In their intensive study into the discourse of eighth- and ninth-grade English classes, Nystrand and Gamoran (1997) conceptualize classroom experiences as something in which teachers and students

engage together, rather than as a one-way transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. Interested in dialogic instruction, they primarily analyzed teacher and student questions, asserting that questions "play a key role in both accommodating and excluding student voices in the public, authoritative discourse of the classroom, and they are the central instructional mechanism in American classrooms for assigning epistemic roles to students" (p. 36). Although the teachers stated in interviews that they clearly valued discussion, they instead enacted monologic discussions in their classrooms; Nystrand and Gamoran found that the teacher dominated talk time, often through lectures. Lower track and urban classes were even more likely to receive monologic lessons; burdened by problems of "truancy and attendance, discipline, short attention spans, general apathy and disengagement, and poor reading skills," most – but not all – teachers in urban schools held low expectations for their students (p. 52).

Text after text emphasizes the role of questioning in critical pedagogy: the students should question the teacher, the teacher should question the students, all participants should question texts and societal structures and assumptions. Significantly, most agree that participants in a critical pedagogy should question "official knowledge" (Apple, 1993; Edwards, 2010), specifically the knowledge that counts on standardized tests. Hinchey (2004) offers four additional spheres that should be questioned, an activity she deems central to critical pedagogy: (1) matters of importance to students; (2) why things are the way they are; (3) who benefits from the status quo; and (4) the possibilities for changing the conditions they don't like (pp. 122-3). This idea relates to Duncan-Andrade's (2007) insistence that critical pedagogy create equitable, but not equal, "social and academic outcomes for students" that are academically rigorous but also address the conditions of students' lives (p. 618).

One of the major issues throughout the literature, however, is the assumption that teachers should reposition knowledge in their critical pedagogies without empirical studies into what this repositioning looks like in practice. For instance, Kincheloe (2008) offers suggestions of what teachers "could" do: "They could develop lessons that explore the human, physical, political, and economic geography of particular

areas. In this context they could explore literature, novels, and short stories that depict particular elements of life in these settings…. Not only would such lessons engage student interest, but students would also gain valuable research and analytical skills" (p. 12). Unfortunately, such statements remain hypothetical and are riddled with assumptions. Similarly, Durst (1999) acknowledges that critical literacy is prevalent and important in classrooms but that "it is not immediately clear how [these issues] map onto our role as teachers helping students improve their writing" (p. 5). Edwards (2010) adds, "In describing the approach of critical pedagogy, what becomes apparent is that it in fact does provide its own way of determining what important knowledge is... Critical pedagogy does propose an alternative to the current curriculum policy" (p. 228). However, for this alternative to be a legitimate response to policy, we must delineate what, exactly, marks the students' knowledge within critical pedagogy as different and better without merely theorizing that it is. Sarroub and Quadros (2015) suggest that additional classroom discourse analysis is necessary for us to understand critical pedagogy and its relationship to knowledge and learning.

McLaren (2007) offers three different perspectives on knowledge that are useful in conceptualizing how knowledge and learning are distinct in different pedagogies. The first perspective is what he terms technical knowledge, "that which can be measured and quantified" (p. 198), the type of knowledge that can be assessed through standardized tests and therefore favored in educational policy. The second is practical knowledge, which "aims to enlighten individuals so they can shape their daily actions in the world" (p. 198). The third is emancipatory knowledge, as termed by Habermas, which "attempts to reconcile and transcend the opposition between technical and practical knowledge" (p. 198). This third understanding is the most critical in that it attempts to break binary thinking, to challenge institutionalized power and privilege, and to contribute to transformation; therefore, I will call it critical knowledge. Murrell (2006) writes that the "learning practices of pupils are coexistent with the teaching practices of teachers" (p. 84). Therefore, the ways students speak about knowledge

and learning are indicative of how knowledge and learning have been positioned in their lives, including as learners in this classroom.

RESEARCH METHODS

I spent a year in Tamara Angulo's tenth grade English class at Einstein High in Center City, Philadelphia, conducting an interpretive ethnography that explored the question of what knowledge and learning looked like in her critical pedagogy. I took daily fieldnotes, collected classroom artifacts, and interviewed Tamara and most of the 29 students in her class. Participating students all submitted assent and parental consent forms and self-selected their pseudonyms, as did Tamara. I was particularly interested in how the students spoke about knowledge and learning and the ways their discursive choices revealed the degree to which immersion in a critical pedagogy moved them from the dominant discourse of technical knowledge in policy and contemporary discussions of knowing and learning to the critical knowledge that we hope would develop through immersion in critical pedagogy.

Although I studied Tamara's classroom, she teaches in a school, Einstein High, that is committed to critical pedagogy, meaning that the students engage in critical pedagogy across all of their inquiry- and project-based classes. Therefore, they potentially have a deeper understanding of how knowledge and learning are positioned in critical pedagogy because they are deeply immersed in it. Kincheloe (2008) argues that critical pedagogues position students to become "epistemologically informed scholars" as they "are challenged to analyze and interpret data, conduct research, and develop a love for scholarship that studies things that matter to the well being of the people of the world" (p. 11), goals that are central in Einstein High's learning stance. Additionally, the school itself is framed around inquiry questions such as "How do we learn?", indicating that students are frequently engaged in thinking about the theoretical framing of knowledge and learning in their classes.

In my interviews with students, I asked the students to define learning and knowledge and to describe how they knew when they'd learned something. I transcribed their interviews verbatim and

analyzed their discourse for its notable features, such as their verbs (Were they active or passive? Progressive or past tense?), their nouns and pronouns, and their descriptors. I then used McLaren's (2007) three knowledges (practical, technical, and critical) as categories to organize the notable features of the students' discourses around knowing and learning. I used these categories to establish the discursive patterns of each type of knowledge.

DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

DISCOURSE OF TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

Students who used the discourse of technical knowledge followed several speech patterns. First, they positioned knowledge in schools and as owned by others. They used verbs that suggest regurgitation, like "repeat," "relaying," and "absorb." This knowledge tended to be owned by others and consisted of "passed down ideas." These students also tended towards vagueness: for instance, they knew they had learned a concept when they "felt" they had. Similarly, they used vague nouns and pronouns such as "something" and an antecedent-less "it."

Student	Definition of Learning	Definition of Knowledge	How S/he Knows When S/he's Learned Something	Notable Features of Discourse
Dean	"Pretty much I would define learning as, what you- what data you gather into your mind, and you process it."	"Knowledge, I'd say, is what you have- is pretty much the things you've learned. Pretty much. It's pretty much the same definition as learning…"	"Pretty much when I can say you feel like you've learned it. You feel like it."	Verbs suggesting knowledge as a fixed entity outside of himself: gather, process, have, have learned

Kyle	"The acquisition of new knowledge that you did not know before."	"Passed-down ideas from other people that aren't yours. So it's the relaying of ideas, I guess." [Researcher: So if you came up with your own idea, that wouldn't be knowledge?] "No- it'd be- to me… it wouldn't be knowledge. I came up with it. It's mine. If I were to pass it on to someone else, that would be their knowledge."	"When I try to do something that I've never tried before, for the first time, would be I guess how I know I learned something."	Vague nouns: something Noun and modifier choices that suggest knowledge is owned by others: acquisition, passed-down ideas from other people
Jigga	"I guess when someone asks you, or when you're being tested on that- like when you're being taught something, and you absorb all that, and later on, when you're being assess on, or when someone asks you that specific question, you're going to have to know."	"Knowledge is something that someone knows."		Passive verbs: are being tested, are being taught, absorb, are going to have to

Table 1: The Discourse of Technical Knowledge

DISCOURSE OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

Most students used the discourse of practical knowledge, indicating this to be the dominant discourse at Einstein High. The key features of the discourse of practical knowledge were students' ownership of the knowledge and the learning and a focus on applying that learning to their own lives. In addition to the personal application of the knowledge, students also talked about the ability to make interdisciplinary connections with the new knowledge/learning. Although students using the discourse of technical knowledge spoke about knowledge and learning as if they are valueless entities, students

in the discourse of practical knowledge shifted to speaking of the benefit of knowledge and that they are bettered by their learning. In this discourse, students talked about co-opting the learning for their own purposes so that the knowledge is no longer positioned solely in school. They also spoke about learning as a change that had occurred within themselves.

Student	**Definition of Learning**	**Definition of Knowledge**	**How S/he Knows When S/he's Learned Something**	**Notable Features of Discourse**
Young Ty	"Knowledge to your benefit."	"Something that you gain from- I don't want to say learning, but something that you gain from, I guess everyday life.	"'Cause it's something that you didn't know before."	Verbs: gain Phrasing indicating ownership: to your benefit Positive value of knowledge: benefit, gain
Blair	"I think you're learning when you're having fun." [Researcher: Okay. Always?] "Well, not always. I think when you're learning, you should be having fun, to rephrase it. Because I think if you're bored, you're not really absorbing everything that you can, but if you're engaged in it and you really want to know more, then that's the best way to learn."	"I think knowledge is just, not knowing everything, but knowing as much as you kinda want to know about the subject." [Researcher: What's knowing, then?] "I think knowing is having experience. At least, you don't even have to have the experience that you're learning about. Being able to relate it and explain it in other ways than it's being explained from what you've read or what you've heard."	"You know that you've learned something when you're able to explain it, I think. When you're able to explain it fully without stopping to think, and you're able to go on and on about the subject."	*Progressive verbs indicating ongoing process: are learning, are having* *Verb phrases indicating active, genuine process: not really absorbing, are engaged* *Personal connection: having experience* *Positive value of knowledge: fun* *Phrasing indicating ownership: knowing as much as you kinda want to know*

Summer	"Somebody teaching you something, and you put that teaching into a greater meaning… I feel like, in school, like we learn- we don't just learn like curriculum. We learn lessons. And I feel like in layers, because one day we're going to be in the real world. And I feel like, we're going to actually look back and like- not the exact lessons, but it's like, we're taking what we learned- well, what we were taught, and we're actually using it for something else…. Like in the books that we read and stuff, they have life lessons in there, and the way that we talk about it in class, it's like I can take that and apply it to real world situations."	"Knowledge is what we define it as being. If that makes sense. Like everybody has their own knowledge in something. And that may not be important to you, and it may not be important to me, but it's their knowledge of what it is." [Researcher: So are our opinions knowledge?] "I feel like our opinions are swayed knowledge. Like it's not actual knowledge, but it's something that we do know." [Researcher: Okay, so then what would be an example of knowledge?] "Like, facts I would say. Things that have happened. You can use that for knowledge, 'cause it's unbiased and it is what it is. I feel like that's better than just having your opinion."	"When we can take it, and we can put it into something else."	Phrasing indicating ownership: you put that teaching into a greater meaning, one day we're going to be in the real world, we can take it and we can put it Application of knowledge: we're actually using it for something else, apply it to real world situations Epistemic adjectives and adverbs of certainty: *actual* knowledge, *actually* using it

Charly	"Learning is- a metaphor for experience. Like you never learn- like I said before, you never learn about life in school. Like, what you do learn, you learn about stuff that will help you to becoming a better person and having a better life."	"Knowledge is a state of mind…. You're only as smart as you think you are. So if you feel like, if you feel like you are smart, the most likely, you're smart. And if you feel like I'm not as smart as others, then, most likely, I hate to say it, you're probably not as smart as others."	"When I'm able to repeat it in the simplest of sentences. Like if I learned something today in English class, and tomorrow my mom asks me something about cooking, and I can repeat whatever I learned in English class to hear, and it had something to do with the way she cooked, I learned it."	Ownership: learning is a metaphor for experience, you're only as smart as you think you are Positive descriptors: stuff that will help you to becoming a better person and a better life
Zelo	"I think of learning as things entering into your brain and wrapping your mind around things that you have no idea happened, and understanding things that you didn't know, and what you did know, making it clearer to your mind."	"Knowledge is like… completely the opposite of ignorance, of course. 'Cause if you're like a baby and ignorant, you don't know anything, but when you grow up, you start knowing things… You start to understand things more. Knowledge is like… the full capability of accessing what something is and knowing what it means."	"When you feel like you can understand it. When you have your point of view, when you can access- when you can define it in your own way, not define it only in your own way, but… have the dictionary definition in your mind, but you don't have to be exactly the dictionary definition. It can be like your… way of interpreting what it is but still correct in your own words."	Verbs: entering, wrapping, understanding Phrasing indicating ownership: when you can define it in your own way, making it clearer to your mind

Table 2: The Discourse of Practical Knowledge

Notably, Summer contrasted school to the real world in her response. She had an abstract view of the application of her knowledge; she believed that she will use it, but she did not know when or how.

Although no student's discourse was fully located in one realm or another, a few students bridged the discourses of technical knowledge and practical knowledge without predominantly leaning towards one

or the other. Although they used passive verbs and vague nouns to describe learning ("taking in some sort of knowledge"), they also drew on some of the features of the discourse of practical knowledge.

Student	Definition of Learning	Definition of Knowledge	How S/he Knows When S/he's Learned Something	Notable Features of Discourse
Tizzy'Mac	"Taking in some sort of knowledge. And using that in the fu- in your life."	"Something I learn or was given…. Uh, like information. Like, uh, something that changed my opinion or state of mind or something that I was doing differently."	"When I feel accomplished. And I feel as though I can use it to succe- to exceed in something else in life."	*Features of technical knowledge*: Verbs: taking, was given Vague wording: feel, something else in life *Features of practical knowledge*: Verbs: using, changed, doing differently
Silky	"Being able to interpret without whatever teacher's… Like, uh, understanding what the- what their lesson is. As long as you have a basic gist of what they're saying, then you've learned."	"I think knowledge is being able to apply what you've learned. Into any situation you need. That's basically it."	"When you can apply it to me. Then you know you've learned it. I know I've learned to break down an engine and put it back together when I've actually- when I've actually applied the skill, I can do it."	*Features of technical knowledge*: Verbs: being able, understanding Lacking ownership: what their lesson is, a basic gist of what they're saying *Features of practical knowledge*: Application: being able to apply, actually applied the skill Ownership: into any situation you need it, apply it to me

John	"I would define learning as getting information and using it to help you." [Researcher: Can you give me an example?] "Getting information and using that information to help you do other things in life, like you may learn one thing in English, but it may help you in math or something."	"Already learning things or some people could classify it as power or something like that… The more you know, the more- some people say, the better you'll do in life. I don't necessarily agree with that, but…. Because you could not go to school, and you could still be successful in life. It's not like, just because you go to college, you, you know, you're going to get a nice job everywhere."	"Um, if you go back to it and you still remember it, and you're able to do it later."	*Features of technical knowledge:* Verbs: getting, remember, do Nouns synonymous with knowledge: Information Vagueness: things *Features of practical knowledge:* Interdisciplinary connections: you may learn one thing in English, but it may help you in math Positive descriptors: may help you, be successful

Table 3: Bridging the Discourses of Technical and Practical Knowledge

I asked Silky if he thought standardized tests were a means for applying knowledge. He responded:

> I don't think that's a way of applying knowledge, because I know if you- some things, if you see it a certain amount of times, it gets repetitive, and then you'll memorize it. But, and of course in our school, we have to like make projects about it and show like different outside-of-the-box ways to show that we've learned it. So I think that- I don't think you've really learned it until you've shown that there's other ways to complete, you know, like- there's other ways- aaah. I don't think you've shown that you've learned it until you figure out other ways to show that you've learned it besides just writing it down on a paper and handing it in.

This example further shows his locating knowledge in the practical sphere: he devalued mere memorization of knowledge, a process he believed comes about through repetition. Instead, he used the binary that McLaren (2007) introduced: in his school, knowledge is the opposite of technical knowledge because the students "make projects" and "show like different outside-of-the-box ways to show that we've learned it." Additionally, he suggested that learning need not occur in just one way and that the more creative our approaches to the learning, the deeper our knowing. However, he still talked about a vague "it," suggesting that he was not entirely clear what he was learning: a skill, a concept, an idea, or a theory.

DISCOURSE OF CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Only one student's discourse of learning and knowledge approached the realm of critical knowledge. Like other students, Joeann did not solely use this discourse but also spoke from the discourse of practical knowledge.

Student	Definition of Learning	Definition of Knowledge	How S/he Knows When S/he's Learned Something	Notable Features of Discourse
Joeann	"I feel like learning is capturing someone else's insight the way you would capture it. And like, if everyone's learning the same thing, I feel like, everyone would understand it the same but yet different."	"I feel like knowledge is a state. Well, learning was sort of a state of mind. And knowledge- knowledge is sort of like that, too. Because the way that things are, the way how we think things are- that's what we call knowledge. Like, it's the way we think things are. It's the way- like, when people say facts, it's because we made them facts. It's all based on what- how- umm. Like how, I don't know. How we perceive things."	"I feel accomplishment in myself, I think. I feel, when you've learned something, in school, at least, and it's smart, like, it's factual, and yeah, then I feel like I've accomplished something for my own good- that I will know more about life. And that it will help me about life."	Phrasing suggestion relationship between knowledge and subjectivity: the way you would capture it, everyone would understand it the same yet different, how we think things are – that's what we call knowledge, how we perceive things

Table 4: Partial Discourse of Critical Knowledge

Joeann's discourse is most markedly different from the other two dominant discourses in that it focuses on the subjective nature of knowledge. Joeann recognized a sense of accomplishment in herself when she knew she had learned something, and she could see how that learning would connect to her life. Despite these markers, Joeann did not fully locate her understanding in the discourse of critical knowledge, as she did, for instance, not conceptualize question-asking as learning or imagine how her knowledge equipped her to be an agent of change.

NOTIONS OF SUCCESS

In the end-of-the-year interviews, I asked the students if they felt they'd been successful in English class. Their responses were further indicative of their understandings of learning and of their conceptualization of their own education. Although Einstein High attempts to de-emphasize grades and instead emphasize the learning process, many of the students used grades as the sole or primary criteria for judging their own success in English class. When asked about her success in English class, Paige replied, "Basically just like my report card. I had an A and two Bs so far in her class, so I feel successful." Summer said, "Yeah, I feel like I did better than I thought I was doing to do." When I asked her to elaborate, Summer replied, "Like, I finished all of my projects on time. I did most of my homework, except for days I wasn't here and stuff, but I finished all of my assignments and stuff. And stuff like that." Although Summer's discourse on learning was mostly situated in practical knowledge, she spoke here from the discourse of technical knowledge, positioning learning as school-based and teacher-initiated. Her ownership, as demonstrated by the personal pronoun "my," is of assignments, projects, and homework, all of which have been teacher-assigned.

Some students conceptualized their success differently, and most of these students, when discussing their understandings of learning and knowledge, positioned themselves within the discourse of practical knowledge. Although many of them mentioned grades, they offered other markers of their success. For instance, Blair said, "I think I was successful. Not just because my grades- 'cause they were fine. But I

think I was successful because I know I got my- what I wanted to say out, and I know that people listened, and I know that I would listen when they were talking, so I think that's important." Like Blair, other students prioritized their commitment to sharing their opinions and being heard by their classmates over the grades they received in class. One student, Jigga, also spoke about meeting the goals he'd set for the year and of learning more than he had the previous year. The responses showed that some students did not depend on Tamara's input or grades to determine their success but that they have instead reflected and been critical of themselves.

DISCUSSION

Although the students in this class speak thoughtfully about their understandings of knowledge and learning and offer concrete examples of what they've learned in their English class this year, they fall short of speaking about knowledge and learning in the ways that critical pedagogues might hope. For instance, none of the students think about questioning as actual learning; most instead still see knowledge as a fixed entity, not something that they themselves create. Ellsworth (2004) argues for the importance of thinking of knowledge "in the making", to conceptualize knowledge as something alive that we are in the process of rather than as a "thing made" (p. 1). To do so with our classes requires explicit discussions of learning theory. Part of this discussion might include means for conceptualizing success in critical pedagogy, as well as an explicit discussion about the history and implications of grading students. If we are to expect this way of learning, markedly different from the way of learning described in policy documents such as the Common Core standards, to have meaning in our students' lives, it is helpful if we discuss the shift that is occurring in the classroom with the students. Additionally, these students will be the living representatives of the work we've done in our classrooms; if the students themselves cannot articulate this different way of learning, we have lost much of the power we might otherwise have in responding to policy and policymakers.

Another feature of the discourse of technical knowledge is that the students assume that their experiences reflect unquestionable,

unalterable characteristics of school, of knowledge, and of learning. For instance, Chris assumed that if the institutionalized practice of grading students were removed, students would no longer be motivated to learn and to produce, although they would also have reduced stress. Durst (1999) writes, "...students who wish to learn a form of literacy that will both make their lives easier and help them become more successful in their careers are following in a long tradition of American pragmatism" (p. 3). In other words, the students' focus on technical knowledge is tied to a history of American pragmatism that assumes that education is directly tied to career aspirations rather than to any personal interests or greater societal benefits. Additionally, hooks (2003) claims, "…education is so often geared toward the future, the perceived rewards that the imagined future will bring that it is difficult to teach students that the present is a place of meaning. In modern schooling the messages students receive is that everything that they learn in the classroom is mere raw material for something that they will produce later on in life" (pp. 165-6). When students felt that grades above anything else would determine their educational success, they were then beholden to the teacher's expectations, with little room for renegotiating or repositioning what counts as knowledge and learning or for reimagining education. Further practice and empirical research should explore how we can help adolescent students develop critical ways of knowing through their engagement with critical pedagogy.

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