# NEVER IN MY LIFE HAVE I LEARNED TO TEACH TO A PROGRAM AND NOT TO THE KIDS SITTING IN FRONT OF ME:

## CRITICAL PEDAGOGY MEETS RESTRICTIVE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

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## Abstract

The need for critical pedagogy instruction in teacher education programs is unquestionable.  However, what happens when teacher candidates *do* internalize and demonstrate a desire to enact socially just practices, and they are prevented from doing so because of their educational contexts? By using a single teacher candidate's narrative, this paper seeks to problematize the idea that effective critical pedagogy instruction is enough for preservice teachers to implement such changes in their classrooms. Even when pre-service and early career educators adopt critical practices, they may not be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to overcome institutional barriers that restrict the implementation of critical pedagogy. Because teacher candidates and novice candidates are positioned subversively, they are often unable to implement the critical pedagogy they may have come to value, which can lead to frustration, anger, loss of self-efficacy, and even a desire to leave the field.  This article seeks to consider what steps teacher education programs can take to increase the teacher candidates' critical pedagogy sustainability within restrictive institutions and structures.

*Keywords*: critical pedagogy, socially just practices, preservice teachers, novice teachers, teacher candidates, narrative, educational context, positioning

"Never in My Life Have I Learned to Teach to a Program and Not to the Kids Sitting in Front of Me:" When Critical Pedagogy Meets Restrictive Educational Contexts

# THE DIVISION AMONG US

We know the grim statistics. Despite positive gains, American Black students are still twice as likely and Latino students are still three times as likely as White students to drop out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Achievement gaps in testing, as measured by the NAEP testing program, remain stagnant in both math and reading with at least a 25 point difference between White and Asian students and their Black and Latino peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Schools in urban areas, where many Black and Latino children are served, have fewer highly qualified teachers teaching within their field and these teachers turn-over at a significantly higher rate, which only serves to perpetuate the gap between affluent and non-affluent, mainstream and marginalized cultures (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). We also know that, according to some estimates, by 2042, non-Hispanic Whites will no longer be the majority population in the United States and multiracial or mixed ancestry will define significant numbers of individuals of Asian, African, and Hispanic descent (U.S. Census, 2015). The true urgency of these statistics is realized when the gap is explained in terms of impact on students, their skill attainment, and access to future professions. When 17-year old Black and Latino children have the same level of achievement on standardized tests as 13-year old White children, they are leaving school less prepared with fewer marketable skills and greater chance to be in low-wage, limited-advancement jobs (Education Trust, 2011). This perpetuates the cycles of poverty and lower standards of living for people of color and it robs our society of their potential contributions.

While it is true more White children in terms of sheer numbers live in poverty, percentage-wise, children of color are still more likely to live in poverty and have less access to social institutions such as quality education, health care, and housing (McDermott, Raley, & Seyer-Ochi, 2009; Wright, 2011). This translates into less access to higher education, skill training, and degree completion that provide a gateway

to many professions. Individuals and classes with power create social, political, and legal "rules" and reify their power through institutionalized means that maintain social inequities (see e.g., Apple, 2006; Bourdieu, 2007). This means children from marginalized populations continue to be marginalized because of social and political constructs that reproduce inequities.

## THE OFT PROPOSED SOLUTION

A common solution for these ethnic, cultural, and economic divides within educational reform scholarship is for universities to provide coursework or for districts to provide professional development in whatever issue is of concern to the researcher (see e.g. Ford & Grantham, 2003; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Miller, 2010). Frequently in research findings, the responsibility for addressing the pervasive achievement gaps in the form of school reform, social justice, democratic education, multicultural education, and student achievement falls squarely on the shoulders of teachers and school personnel (e.g., Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Gardiner, Canfield-Davis & Anders, 2009; Jones & Enriquez, 2009). For example, Garcia and Guerra (2004) claim school reform efforts to close achievement gaps "often fail because of educators' unwillingness to examine the root causes of underachievement and of failure among students from low-income and racially or ethnically diverse backgrounds" (p. 15). On-going teacher training that encourages educators to experience cognitive dissonance (Garcia & Guerra, 2004), practice critical reflexivity and movement away from deficit thinking (Dray & Wisneski, 2011; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Miller, 2010), learn more about students' culture and lives (Ukpokodu, 2004; Walker, 2011), and retrain attribution of student behaviors (Georgiou, Christou, Stavrinides & Panaoura, 2002; Reyna, 2000; Stewart, Latu, Kawakami, & Myers, 2010) is highly recommended in much of the research literature on improving schools and student achievement.

## THE NEED FOR CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

The purpose of this paper is not to dismiss the very real issues of preservice and novice teachers' possible lack of cultural competence or the need to provide instruction in and application of critical pedagogy.

It is readily apparent this knowledge construction is needed. Murdock and Hamel (2015) demonstrated that even with significant and immersive critical learning experiences, preservice teachers' conceptions of culture, race, and stereotypes can be very durable and even intransigent. Even after exposing their students to resources such as Chimamanda Adichie's (2009) "Danger of the Single Story" TED talk and engaging them in deeply reflective activities such as culture circles or an emic/etic simulation, their students still made statements such as:

- "Having an ELL student or a foreign student in your class should be a learning experience, not a hopeless challenge,"

- "Teaching discrimination should start at home,"

- "I don't think that all teachers need to address discrimination based on race because not every [geographic] area has that as a major issue,"

- "I honestly would not be comfortable teaching it [discrimination]... Even now when I am in class I get on edge when the subject comes up" (pp. 18-21).

These comments demonstrate the ongoing need to "unsilence the dialogue" (Delpit, 2012, p. 191) and challenge existing ideas of "othered" individuals. Shifting such entrenched paradigms continues to be a crucial part of the dialogue to ensure equitable learning environments for all children.

## THE NEED FOR SOMETHING
## BEYOND UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTION

This paper does not attempt to displace this position, however it does attempt to problematize what happens to teacher candidates who ***do*** demonstrate cultural competency and an ability to engage in socially just instructional practices. This has been one of the key questions in my longitudinal study following six preservice teachers as they become interns, teacher candidates, and early career teachers. What happens when we as teacher educators and they as teacher candidates do it right? We teach and model; they learn, value, and apply in university-monitored field placements. Can we assume the constructed knowledge and equitable practices from university coursework and

field experiences survive the multiple transitions and bridges from these individuals' role as "student" to their role as "novice teacher?" After two and a half years, I am discovering the answer is, "Yes, but..." Yes, my participants know and understand the importance of critical pedagogy and social justice practices, but because they are positioned in subverted ways as inexperienced learners, especially in their internships, they are often not at liberty to implement what they know. Yes, they theoretically recognize the importance and value of implementation, but they do not know exactly what critical pedagogy looks like in practice because it is often not modeled for them by professors or supervising teachers. Yes, they want to and are willing to put the time into implementing effective differentiation, flexible grouping, and multicultural curricula, but they are restrained and dictated to by pacing guides, excessive testing, restrictive or canned instructional programs, and coaches and administrators who operate under their own set of high stakes pressures (Morrison, 2013, 2014). If we teach it and they get it, why are there still problems? Because this issue does not exist in isolation. It is contextualized within much larger politicized and commercialized institutions with potentially competing agendas (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005).

In the United States, attempts to reform schools have been highly politicized, focused on global competition with countries out-performing the U.S. on international benchmarks and centered on forcing local school districts to improve instruction through standards and high-stakes assessments (Spring, 2006). Fear of repercussions has led to reliance on prescriptive curriculum and pre-packaged instructional programs often positioning teachers as technicians and managers of an ideology rather than critical designers within diverse and multifaceted constructs. Global, federal, and state policies overwhelm the educational sector with attempts to "fix" schools and are often responses to political and economic agendas, privileging of particular knowledge, and perpetuation of hegemonic practices (see e.g., Apple, 2006, Apple, 2011; Elmore, 2011; Spring, 2009). Preservice and new teachers are particularly susceptible to these pressures and expectations because they fear losing their jobs, being isolated or even shunned by colleagues (Liggett, 2011). Additionally, because of their recent entrance

into the field, most do not have an established sense of agency or enough practical experience to "envision how to pursue change within the context of teaching" (Liggett, 2011, p. 192).

For the purpose of exploring this position, I will focus on components of Rose's[*] narrative. However, it is important to realize that while Rose is one individual in one urban district, her plotline is similarly lived by other novice teachers, including my other five participants, across the entire country. These six individuals teach in the West, the Mid-Atlantic, and the deep South. They teach middle class, affluent, and poor children. They teach Native American, Black, Latino, White, Asian, and mixed race children. They teach kindergarten, first, second, fourth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. They teach gifted, ED (emotionally disturbed), autistic, learning disabled, and non-native English speaking children.  Since my participants are university trained in special education in addition to elementary education, they may be better equipped and more attuned to serving the needs of individual students, but this does not exempt them from the difficulties of implementing socially just practices. In fact, in some ways, because of their heightened awareness of the need to serve students as individuals, they experience greater and deeper frustration when they meet with barriers or resistance. All of them are having to cope with an inability to implement their university learning because of their teaching contexts including: ineffective and even damaging content coaches (Anne and Rose), constraining curricula (Rose and Bryan), and saturated high stakes testing (Rose, Adele, Maxwell). Rose's story serves as a representation of their transitional journeys.

## ROSE'S STORY

### COMING TO EDUCATION

Rose is a twenty-four year old first year teacher in an urban Mid-Atlantic school district. She is currently teaching fourth grade in a public charter where approximately one-third of the students identify Latino, one-third identify Black, and one-third identify White. She completed her teacher education program at a western university, but

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*All names are participant-chosen pseudonyms.

then conducted her student teaching for both elementary and special education in a different Mid-Atlantic state. She also carries an ABA certification for autism, which she earned on her own time. I have known her since 2011, when she was a student in my inclusive classrooms course and later in my Literacy II course. I have conducted interviews with her approximately once per month since November, 2012.

She began her story by explaining how she has always been focused on being a teacher. "I would say as a learner, I've always been a hungry student. I've always wanted more and more and more... I was one of the students who was very excited at the end of summer and very sad on the last day of school... I think I always kinda knew I wanted to be a teacher" (December 7, 2012). However, it was not until one particular experience that she decided to consider special education as a possible field. "A student that I came in contact with at high school had Down's syndrome. She and I became very close. I got to know her as a learner; got to know her as an individual. Her mom kept saying, 'You need to go into special ed. You need to go into special ed.' I didn't know if I had the heart for that, and she goes, 'Just try it.' My first year [in college] I took a special ed course and just seeing and learning about the different disabilities and the possibility of success and how a certain teacher can make all the difference; it really impacted me" (December 7, 2012).

At the beginning of the study, I asked Rose how she saw herself as a teacher and her self-expectations. She explained, "I expect to be a very positive teacher. I want to be a teacher that all of the students feel comfortable with and all of the students get a good experience from. I want to be the teacher that the kids look back and they say, 'I remember this teacher because she taught me,' not, 'because I hated that teacher.' My fear is to be a hated teacher, and I think because of that fear, I will not be one of those" (December 7, 2012). Even in her internship she was beginning to realize that her role as a teacher was not about pushing students into particular boxes but instead about honoring them as distinct individuals and giving them ownership over their learning. "I want to be the teacher the kids remember because I made a difference, because I made them better. Well, not made them better,

but I facilitated them in a way that pushed them to make themselves better" (January 16, 2014). This comment demonstrates how Rose has begun to internalize a broader view of "better;" that "better" is related to each child's lived experience and self-identity.

## EVERYONE DESERVES A CHANCE/IT'S GOING TO BENEFIT US ALL

Before her internships, I asked Rose to describe her philosophy of teaching and learning. She explained,

Number one is everyone deserves a chance, and number two, everyone, *everyone* can foster a love of some type of learning... We need to create this culture that school is about love of learning, not about 'You have to complete this worksheet and you have to read this chapter.' It should be about encouraging students to ask, 'Why,' and find out for themselves... It's about the experience of finding the answer, not about what the answer is itself. Teaching kids to utilize that experience is going to help them more as learners and students and people in the long run than just finding what the correct answer should be...It's about the kids becoming lifelong learners. And that's the really cool part as a teacher; I get to forever be a lifelong learner and a student because I'm going to continuously have new experiences and find new things and the kids are going to challenge me to know more" (December 7, 2012).

"Everyone deserves a chance" is a compelling philosophy for her classroom decisions, and Rose enacts it in many ways. For example, at one point in her student teaching, she was teaching shapes and some of the students were not understanding while others already knew the material. She had to make some adjustments on the spot. She described her actions as "So then, how in the midst of your lesson...are you going to extend for them? 'You try to draw the shape for me and label it. You keep writing while I'm waiting for everyone else to just think about it.' Then you have the kid who doesn't really understand what's going on. You go stand by them and you find a friend that helps explain it" (January 20, 2014).

In another instance, Rose explained the challenges she faced with two English language learners and how her university instruction helped her to better teach to their needs.

[The professor] came in and taught us a biology lesson in Spanish. She said, 'Now that's what you're doing to your ESL kids.' She goes, 'Now watch this,' and she and another professor team taught and did the same lesson but used lots of modeling and explaining vocabulary in two languages and posted the vocabulary with pictures. I was like, 'Oh, at least I get the gist of what's going on now.' So it's not like I'm bored and have no idea and I'm just looking around like 'I don't know.' Anyway, that's what's going on in my classroom; the two [ELL] girls are just like 'I don't know. We're just here. We're going over our sight words for the thousandth time.' It's been really nice for me to have them in my small group because it's challenged my teaching... By the time I taught my third or fourth lesson, I was having them understand what 'quantity' meant, what 'compare' meant, what 'greater than' or 'less than' mean and how to use them on a number line. One of the girls -- she is from Puerto Rico -- got it. She started raising her hand and participating because she understood and even though she can't say some of the numbers that high in English, I said, 'Just tell me them one at a time, so like 52, say 5 2 because she knows up to, I think, 20... Then I would repeat the number back to her in English so she could practice... I'd point to things and say, 'Tell me about it in Spanish, and then I'll tell you in English. We'll work on it together, and I'll pick up some Spanish, and you'll pick up some English.' So for the word 'multiply,' because they had to find the multiples to divide, I wrote the word out, wrote the symbol, and wrote an example so every time I say the word 'multiply,' I pointed to it with my pen so they would know what I was talking about, and they caught on" (February 16, 2014).

Sometimes her philosophy that everyone deserves a chance caused conflict with other teachers. At one point during a practicum experience, Rose was working with a second grade teacher who, in her opinion, was not reaching all the students with his methods. "I decided I really wanted to backtrack, build some really solid ideas and then move forward. One day, he pulled me aside during my lesson, and he

said, 'Stop teaching to everyone and just teach to the high learners.' I said, 'I can't believe you just said that to me.' So, I continued with my lesson the way I had planned it because I felt that was best... I did not want his poor ideas reflected upon my teaching. I don't know how happy he was with me, but I was like, there are people who don't know or understand why teaching to the kids who may be a few levels down is going to help everyone. It's going to benefit us all" (December 7, 2012).

It is apparent Rose has internalized conceptions of equity for children regardless of readiness level, dominant language, affluence, special need, ethnicity, or other perceived difference. She sees them as special individuals, each with value to contribute, and it is her responsibility to encourage their experiential learning.

## WE'VE KILLED IT/ I CAN SOMEHOW MAKE IT BETTER

As Rose progressed through her internships, she became increasingly frustrated with the amount of testing required and the lack of critical thinking in which students were engaged. The conflicts and tensions between her core philosophy of "everyone deserves a chance," her university instruction, and her school-based contexts began to emerge.

But at the end of the day, do the kids take anything home? And think about it further. We're not creating learners, and we're not creating a love of learning. We're creating people who can take a test. We're creating people who can, you know, if you give them three answer choices, they can pick one. That's what they can do, and it's sad. You can see it in their writing... There's no process of 'How do I feel about this? Do I know that this is a good resource? Maybe I have a connection outside of this text that I don't agree with this text.' There's none of that going on. There's no creativity. We've killed it. Gone. It's gone... We can't ask them to think about it or relay any opinion because they're so afraid of being wrong; they just want the right answer, and if they don't have the right answer, then they give up. And then they're done. And then what does your data show? That they didn't learn anything. We don't know that because that wasn't an answer on the test (January 16, 2014).

She also became frustrated with the teachers within her internship for their passivity and acceptance of the status quo even though she recognized the pressures they daily encountered. "Why are we teaching them to take a test? It makes sense seeing it because these teachers are held to that, and I see the worry in their eyes about not getting instruction time with these tests coming up. I feel for them, but at the same time, I'm looking at them like, 'If you would've thought outside of the box at the beginning of the year, even if we lost instruction time, your kids **are thinkers and they're smart**.' But they're so concerned with their scores, it's terrible. It gives me a headache. It's terrible... Everyone says the first three years of teaching are the worst because you're getting into it. But I feel like the teachers that I see in the school that I'm in right now that have been there longer, that's the worst because all you're doing is the exact same thing you did the year before... *I can't change the world, but I can somehow make it better*" (January 16, 2014).

At this point, while Rose was struggling with reconciling her instructional philosophies with the realities of her school context, she was still able to maintain a positive outlook - "I can't change the world, but I can somehow make it better." She still felt empowered to make a positive difference in children's lives, partly because she saw herself as a temporary intern who would be leaving this context after completing her requisite 10-weeks. Once, she had her own classroom and her own students, this situation would no longer be an issue for her to muddle through. She would be able to teach every child in the equitable ways she envisioned using her teacher education program constructions to meet each child where s/he is.

## I AM SO EXCITED/THE MORE I LEARN ABOUT THEM, THE MORE I HATE THEM

In summer, 2014, Rose was hired as a fourth grade teacher at an urban Mid-Atlantic public charter school. One of the first things the school did was to send Rose for a week's worth of training in Singapore math, a highly renowned program that emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills for students. It relies on understanding and application of math concepts rather than rote memorization and drills (Brown, n.d.). She returned feeling a little

overwhelmed but also elated to begin her own teaching journey. "I have loved every second of setting up my classroom and have attached pictures for you. I am so excited to meet all my kids, but terrified about some of the rumors I hear about certain families. I also have a lot expected of me as a teacher that teaches a tested subject. I have an instructional coach that is amazing, and I am so happy to have her! Everyone has been welcoming and I have made a lot of friends and allies... I just want so badly to make a difference in my first year and not just keeping my head above water... I have a lot on my brain these days and try to remember that this is what I have always dreamed of and I have achieved a really big goal" (personal communication, August 18, 2014).

Unfortunately, within a few months, Rose's enthusiasm plummeted as administration and curriculum coaches have altered her math program and required her to use Direct Instruction (DI) program for spelling, which she teaches in addition to the departmentalized math. Direct Instruction is defined on its website as "a model for teaching that emphasizes well-developed and carefully planned lessons designed around small learning increments and clearly defined and prescribed teaching tasks" (www.nifdi.org). A key conflict for Rose has arisen because while she is expected to teach the Singapore Math program, which encourages divergent thought, the rest of the school teaches reading and literacy through the DI program, which encourages convergent thought and response calling. "[I] don't agree with the philosophies of the school... I think these kids are nowhere near where they need to be because of these programs... The kids who don't get it, they'll memorize it eventually, but ultimately, there's no applying. There's no real learning going on. And I don't even teach Direct Instruction, but I see the effects of it when I go to teach because Singapore is completely opposite. Now they're [the administration and coach] trying to change my program to make it look more like Direct Instruction. I feel like my hands are so tied... I'm at this internal conflict of do I do what I know is r`ight as a teacher in my own philosophy of teaching, or do I just do what gets me by and will get people off my back. I don't want to teach that way" (January 19, 2015). As a new teacher, Rose is limited to the degree which she can counter existing

structures within her school. As she has progressed through her first months, she has continued to experience situatio`ns that challenged her ideals of individualized and socially just learning.

She describes the experience of teaching with Directed Instruction as surreal and disingenuous. The curriculum is "literally a book. You read the blue words, those are your [the teacher's] words, and then you say, 'Get ready' and snap, and the kids are supposed to respond... It's the weirdest thing I've ever seen... The first couple of weeks, I'd say 'Get ready,' and I snapped, and they all repeated it back to me. I was like, 'This is the coolest, the weirdest thing I've ever seen' because in any other classroom, if you said that, they'd look at you like you were crazy. But that's how trained these kids have become. They don't even think about what they are saying... It's like this weird control thing. You know how teachers are. I can make them all say a word with a snap of my fingers. At the same time, it's the creepiest thing you've ever watched" (January 19, 2015). They present the image of drones programmed to respond to a cued word and a finger snap, something that might be seen in a dystopian young adult novel rather than a representation of effective critical pedagogy.

The school environment in which Rose is operating conflicts with what she has learned from her university teachings as well as her field experiences, which is both confusing and frustrating. "The more I learn about them [the DI programs], the more I hate them.  In all my college experience, it was always like 'You don't want to do a lot of direct instruction.  The kids need to figure things out on their own, and they should be engaged in the material.' The kids are not engaged in these programs, and it's not helping them be successful, free-thinking individuals" (November 8, 2014). "I feel so badly for these kids because they are not getting prepared for their future. What I took away from my internship the most was needing to prepare 21st century learners" (February 28, 2015).

In an attempt to provide students with the reteaching opportunities they need and the stimulating engagement they crave, Rose turned to implementing centers in her classroom against the curriculum's requirements. However, as she tried to put them into practice, her curriculum coach rerouted her claiming the students' test scores instead

required her to do "mini lessons every day to get them caught up and master these skills... and more worksheets so they can do something independent every day" (January 19, 2015). This philosophical disagreement has eroded Rose's relationship with her coach. While originally she was grateful for the coach and thought her to be "amazing," Rose now says, "I don't trust my coach, which is a whole other level of insecurity I have" (January 19, 2015). She feels the coach is undermining her efforts and judging her rather than helping her to mediate these overwhelming tensions. "[The coach is] forcing me to give this crap to [the kids], making them feel like they're worthless, making me feel like I'm worthless, and you're going to tell me that based on this test ... I need to teach them how to do a seventh grade standard so they can be done with the book" even though they are fourth graders (February 28, 2015).

## NEVER IN MY LIFE HAVE I LEARNED TO TEACH TO A PROGRAM AND NOT TO THE KIDS SITTING IN FRONT OF ME

The most recent interview I had with Rose was only a few days ago at the time of this writing, and while she has been struggling with navigating a difficult context all along, she is now in the throes of despair doubting herself, her occupational choice, and her future in education. She is caught in dilemmas of her ethics versus her ability to survive in a seemingly hostile environment.

My friend and I were talking about this. We always talked about like, 'I would never be that teacher [that hands out grades]; you earn your grade.' But here's a whole school giving out grades so that we won't hear about it [from administrators and coaches]. So really, there is no mastery in the school. It's all a big façade. Sure, they 'mastered' it. They got pretty close, and I pushed them up. Or they didn't get close, and I made them retake it until they got a 90 for the same test. It's absurd. I'm literally miserable every day that I'm there. And it's awful feeling like I can't teach them, and that I'm just teaching them how to do a worksheet or take a test. I can't move on.  I can't hit my standard. So my next favorite part is they told me, 'Well, just go back and reteach the first book until the kids have hit mastery.' Okay, it's March, so you realize I probably won't get to my second book this

year at all which means they will not have finished the second, third, and now fourth grade math curricula... You set me up for failure because they didn't finish their third grade program. They didn't finish their second grade program. Never in my life have I learned to teach to a program and not to these kids sitting in front of me.

I feel like I'm unlearning what I learned in college. It's awful. It's like this is not what I was taught to do, and I was well trained. At no point in my college experience or in my internship was I told [to teach this way]... This DI program is not conducive. 'This is what you're teaching today, and don't, ***don't*** try to do anything else. And I hate it. I hate every minute of it. I hate that the kids don't think for themselves. I hate that I'm not allowed to make decisions based on what I know about the kids. They're not a mold. You can't fit them all into one. So I'm frustrated. I literally had dreams last week of walking in and just quitting because it was just [trails off]. I would never do it, only because I know what it would do to the kids at this point in the year and what it would do to my team. The other two ladies I work with are wonderful and fabulous and I would never do that to them. But in terms of the administration and the coaches; this is the worst experience of giving leadership I've ever seen. Like it's awful... I'm sick of hearing about [DI] -- model, lead, test, model, lead, test. I do, we do, you do.  I do, we do, you do. No, because for some kids, 'you do' comes a lot later... I'm sick of it. 'How do you know they got it? How do you know they got it?' I don't know because your tests don't work and you won't let me make my own. I don't know if they know. It's so damned absurd (February 28, 2015).

While it appears that Rose is still attempting to advocate for her students, her resolve is weakening. "I'm given no power here. All my power has been zapped. My energy is gone. I'm losing my will to fight back" (February 28, 2015). In fact, we are close to losing her as a promising young professional in the field. "I got into this profession for those students. I came in trying to be a positive influence on their lives, and now, this is where I'm at, and I don't like the teacher that I am right now... I just wanted to be a teacher. I don't want to be president; I don't want to be a superhero; I just want to be a teacher, and it's crazy that it's this hard just to do that" (February 28, 2015).

The one thing Rose hoped for at the beginning of her promising journey was to be the teacher students remembered positively because she helped them to foster their own growth and potential. Now, after just five months of teaching, she laments, "I can't imagine what [the students'] memories are going to be like. I hate even thinking I'm going to be a part of that. That's not what I want to be. That's not what I got into the profession to be" (February 28, 2015).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

As I stated earlier, the purpose of this paper is not to challenge whether we need social justice coursework in teacher education programs. We absolutely do. Rose's inner turmoil is occurring because she **has** constructed a socially just consciousness. Her university learning and field experiences have been effective in developing her sense of moral imperative to teach all children in respectful and genuine ways. It has become interwoven into the fabric of her professional identity exactly as social justice learning should be. But because she is in a context where she has been unable to implement this pedagogy she values, she has moved from anger ("It's absurd.") to helplessness ("Just tell me what to do.") to a loss of self efficacy ("I hate the teacher I'm becoming.") to complete despondency ("I feel worthless.").

Rose is one of my best. I have taught a lot of teacher candidates and I have observed a lot of teachers. Rose is, without a doubt, one of the most conscientious and committed young educators I have encountered, and yet we may lose her from the field. And that breaks my heart to even consider. There are thousands of children who need her, who could find hope and success under her caring wings, and because she is unable to implement critical pedagogy, including the problem-posing education models for which Friere (1993) advocates, they may never have the opportunity to fly with her.

So what do we as teacher educators do to keep Rose and so many others like her from blaming themselves and doubting their professional choice?  The easy answer is to say schools and districts need to move away from high accountability testing, packaged curricular programs, and legislated policies.  However, these actions are not usually

within our control as teacher educators, and they are often not within school personnel's control either. Therefore, we have to begin addressing what we *can* control -- understanding teacher candidates' and novice teachers' positioning within their educational contexts. They are in a subverted role because they 1) lack knowledge of personal, political, and institutional plotlines that existed before them so they are reliant on others to provide procedural information, 2) experience "transition shock" (Cochran-Smith, 1981) as they learn how to apply their university training in a multitude of ways simultaneously, and 3) depend on others to give them positive observations and evaluations to get or maintain their jobs. Interns and novice teachers are trying to gain professional competence while also surviving (Crosswell & Beutel, 2012; Loughran, Brown & Doecke, 2001), and because of this, they often keep their heads down and press on to avoid confrontation as a coping mechanism. It is problematic when novice teachers accept the status quo without question at the expense of students who would benefit from critical paradigms and practices. It is even more problematic when they *do* question it, as Rose has, and they are made to feel helpless and worthless for it.

What the university teaching has not provided for Rose is explicit instruction to manage restrictive structures. If student teachers are to resist the socializing forces that can hinder innovative and creative instruction, they need to be explicitly taught how to maneuver and adapt their training and paradigmatic conceptions of critical processes within the confines of standards, prescribed curriculum, and mandated policies. This does not mean universities should teach programs such as Lead 21, READ 180, or Direct Instruction. It is impossible and improbable to address the specifics of every programmed curriculum student teachers may encounter. However, it does mean universities need to help preservice teachers examine ways to blend, integrate, and mold existing structures to enact critical pedagogy and socially just practices. Programs that help interns integrate mandates and strategies with critical pedagogy and social justice would assist in their ability to retain these deep concepts through their transitional experiences and into their first years of teaching. This is crucial because what teachers learn in their initial forays into the education field have the power to

shape their effectiveness, their practices, their identities, and ultimately, their intention to remain in the field (Gore & Thomas, 2003; Grudnoff, 2011). Otherwise, Rose, and other promising novice teachers like her, will become statistics themselves.

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