Student Responses to Critically Compassionate Intellectualism in Teacher Education for Social Justice

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Introduction

Enacting socially just practices in both the education of our future teachers and in how we study our work within teacher education should be a logical aim of any movement for social justice in education as a whole. Aligning my means with these ends has been an imperative underlying my work, as with many other scholars (Carter Andrews, Bartell, & Richmond, 2016; Conklin, 2008; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Picower, 2012). In this spirit, over the course of two years, I conducted critical qualitative practitioner and participatory action research on my use of critically compassionate intellectualism (CCI) (Cammarota & Romero, 2006) in the educational foundations course I taught at an urban Midwestern research university. Work with Latinx youth in the original CCI projects showed that its combination of critical pedagogy, authentic caring, and a social justice purpose fostered these students’ critical consciousness and deeper academic and life competencies, so it holds promising implications as a transformative pedagogy in the education of future teachers.

Remembering to honor the roots of CCI as a social justice project for ethnic minority high school students, I have expanded on the project in order to study how CCI can enrich the learning experiences of future educators, especially those from minoritized backgrounds and those who will end up teaching diverse students and/or in high-poverty communities. This is particularly significant for many teacher education programs where students largely come from more demographically homogenous locales and have had minimal exposure to individuals who are racially, culturally, socioeconomically, linguistically, ably, academically, and otherwise different from themselves. Literature shows that these students often resist or resent our efforts to enlighten them to the perspectives and experiences of marginalized PK–12 students with whom they cannot personally relate (Conklin, 2008; King, 1991; Matias, 2015). Simultaneously, catering our efforts to this majority further neglects minoritized teacher education students’ ways of being and knowing. Instead, CCI foregrounds these students’ needs and lived experiences.

While it is important to remember that many forces beyond teachers’ control contribute to the educational disparities experienced by students with socioeconomic, racial, and otherwise disempowered identities (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016), in a context where these students remain underserved, we must do our best to prepare teachers who are fully aware of these forces and ready to confront this reality. Specifically, in order for them to successfully teach and advocate for their future students, teacher education programs must nurture all pre-service teachers’ sense of their own and others’ humanity and inherent worth, co-empower them to
understand both the material and existential purposes of education, and facilitate their learning about the relational, social, political, historical, economic, and other structural contexts that influence the varied learning experiences of students in all settings. Examining the nature of teaching and learning as enacted through CCI illuminates some ways teacher educators—and by extension, our students—might become better conductors of as well as activists for socially just educational practices.

Because action research of this nature is context-specific, it is not meant to be generalizable, but can potentially be transferable to other teacher education contexts. The main purpose of this chapter is to make visible the kinds of behaviors and dispositions that resulted in my students’ being receptive to social justice messages and ideals, and to show how CCI principles facilitated this in my classroom. While the ways in which I enacted CCI are particular to my own character and positionality, to the groups of students and the program in which I taught, as well as influenced by countless other contextual factors, teacher educators reading this chapter will hopefully be able to envision similar ways they might put CCI into practice in contextually and personally meaningful ways.

As part of a larger project that also examined CCI’s influence on other aspects of my research and practice, here I focus on answering: How did students respond to my CCI policies, practices, and pedagogy, and how did this shape their engagement with concepts of social justice education? Findings show that students consistently did not resist efforts to help them examine their assumptions and acknowledge various social and educational advantages, but instead valued the respect and care they experienced through this pedagogical framework and were able to envision affording their own students the same dignity and support. They felt empowered to take charge of their own learning and goals, to become critically reflective practitioners, and to act as advocates and change agents for their future students. Regarding social justice ideals, they emerged much more aware of the complicated role that teachers play within society and in the individual lives of students. Simultaneously, I was able to enact my own moral vision of socially just teacher preparation, where my unconventional, reflexive, and compassionate pedagogy became assets to both my students’ learning and my own continuing growth as a teacher educator.

**Critical Consciousness, Care, and Justice**

The theoretical framework for this study is built into CCI, consisting of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/1993), authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999), and a social justice curriculum and purpose (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). The original CCI framework resulted from several projects Cammarota and Romero enacted with Latinx youth in Arizona high schools to counter the injustices ethnic and racial minorities face in our education system. Findings from these
projects confirmed the importance of CCI’s conceptual trifecta when working toward educational justice with marginalized youth (Cammarota & Romero, 2006).

Critical pedagogy draws attention to the ways power is enacted in education, asserting that traditional hierarchies of power, privilege, and knowledge production perpetuate relationships of dominance and oppression in society at large (Freire, 1970/1993; Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2003). Instead, in critical pedagogy, students and teachers democratically negotiate knowledge creation and re-creation around issues relevant to students’ lived experiences, investigating the contextual and ideological forces that either maintain or disrupt the status quo (McLaren, 2003). Even when used with students who do not personally experience educational struggles, critical pedagogy still “poses a variety of important counterlogics to the positivistic, ahistorical, and depoliticized” (McLaren, 2003, p. 185) predominant forms of schooling, opening a space for all students to more deeply question, comprehend, and reflect upon existential injustices.

Valenzuela’s (1999) notion of “authentic care” is based on her work with Latinx youth who perceived their experiences of schooling as uncaring and “subtractive,” denying them any connection with their cultural and community identities and ways of knowing. She found teachers who uncritically maintained the colonizing effects of the dominant culture through curriculum, policy, and practice were not authentically caring, but merely aesthetically caring, claiming to care for students but limiting this care to ensuring student achievement while neglecting essential aspects of students’ humanity. Authentic caring instead means creating more meaningful, personal relationships with students, embracing and affirming their identities, and generally establishing a loving and genuine interest in students’ overall well-being.

Adding to Valenzuela’s framework in order to extend considerations of care and compassion beyond the original context of educating Latinx youth into this new context of teacher education, I have incorporated relational-cultural theory (RCT) and care ethics into my interpretation of CCI. RCT is a feminist theory of psychosocial development that draws attention to the impacts of culture on relationships, proposing that successful relational connections that lead to healing and growth are achieved through aspects of trust, mutual empathy, authenticity, shared power, and growth-in-connection (Miller & Stiver, 1997; Rector-Aranda, 2018; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006; Spencer, 2000). An ethic of care was first articulated by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), who proposed that moral choices should be motivated by emotion, empathy, and a concern for the cared-for (Noddings, 2012). Like authentic caring, which shifts our view of the traditional teacher–student affiliation, care ethics shift our view of moral responsibility from rule-oriented to relationship-oriented.

Finally, while “social justice” has come to mean many things to many people (North, 2006), in this framework, it very specifically entails conceptualizing the lives of marginalized
students “within the terrain of the changing political, economic, and social landscape” (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 83), through the study of difficult and important issues from multiple perspectives, and particularly aligning content, pedagogy, and purpose with students’ histories and lived experiences. A social justice purpose in CCI means aiming to effect changes in the larger structures that underserve these youth, and paying close attention to how schooling is implicated in perpetuating or interrupting enduring disparities.

**Coloring My Practice**

Whenever I discuss my use of CCI in teacher preparation, I feel it is crucial that I also remain conscious of and am able to justify using a framework first created on behalf of marginalized students of color with the students in teacher education classrooms who have generally been advantaged by their race, class, ability, and other privileged statuses in our culture. Because many current educational trends around multiculturalism and diversity have tended to “filter out the most radical parts” of theories that were first conceptualized by scholars of color (Matias, 2015, p. 8), I want to affirm that my use of CCI has been wholly unfiltered, and indeed, the most radical parts of the framework are what I have tried most to exemplify for my students. I believe my adoption of CCI has been further justified because it supports that small percentage of my students who do not affiliate with the mainstream, while offering all students an unambiguous model from which to draw ideas about how they might enact their own more humanizing pedagogies. My students are mainly college freshmen, with little beyond their traditional pK–12 experiences from which to fashion their ideas about what education should be. Most of the topics we explore and what I do are so very unfamiliar compared to the types of knowledge and pedagogy to which they have grown accustomed, fundamentally challenging their ideas about what “education” means, and what defines “good” students and “effective” educators.

Because CCI is an anti-oppressive pedagogy meant to alleviate racial/ethnic inequities, in my classes we also pay specific attention to the role of race in the U.S. institution of education through an overall curriculum and pedagogy meant to sensitize my students to the historical and modern injustices disproportionately borne by students of color. Like others, I believe this content and purpose should be included across teacher education curricula rather than isolated to a single “multicultural education” course (Matias, 2015). I have therefore incorporated it alongside the other foundations curriculum in this course, which is additionally aimed at raising students’ awareness of educational injustices based in ability, gender, SES, sexuality, religion, and so forth.

**Modes of Inquiry**

Four semesters of this research represented four action research cycles of action and reflection if viewed broadly, and many micro-cycles throughout each semester as I navigated...
students’ implicit and explicit responses and made constant adjustments in all the myriad choices I had to make as an instructor (Hill, 2015; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). Throughout, CCI and my action research stance dictated that the research remain intuitive and organic. It was also imperative that the research not alter or interrupt students’ regular course experience since the primary purpose of examining these concepts was for students to benefit from improvements to my pedagogy and curriculum. To triangulate and get the most detailed impression of students’ needs and reactions, I used several qualitative data forms, of which the following were analyzed here: anonymous early-term feedback via open-ended prompts; semi-structured interviews and individual meetings at the end of the course; open-ended end-of-course reflection questionnaires; and the anonymous written response sections of formal course evaluations. For example, end-of-course reflection questionnaires asked:

1. How did the relationship with your peers help or hinder your learning in this class?
2. How did the relationship with your instructor help or hinder your learning in this class?
3. How was your experience in this course different or similar to other courses?
4. What ONE THING about this course do you wish all courses had?
5. Did you feel comfortable communicating with your instructor for this course? Please explain.
6. What ideas have been most important to you and your learning this semester?
7. What aspects of the course have been most supportive of your learning?
8. What aspects of the course have interrupted or hindered your learning?

My personal data included planning and observation notes, syllabi and other curricular artifacts, and critical reflective journaling using Napan’s (2011) Questions for Co-Creative Inquiry. For the participatory action research component, students in two classes did a Photovoice project near the end of the semester, a method in which participants are no longer the subjects but the creators of inquiry through their own photography and a group analysis process (Janesick, 2014) (See image below depicting collaborative analysis and discussion of themes from the Photovoice during class).
Another participatory method we used was Group-Level Understanding (Raider-Roth et al., 2019; Vaughn & Lohmueller, 2014), an anonymous, student-driven approach for them to make meaning of their evolving learning and to assess course content and practices.

While the majority response reflected an overall positive student experience of CCI, there were, of course, that handful of students for whom the course did not appear to have much impact on their thinking or ways of seeing things, who failed to successfully complete the course despite my very deliberate academic and relational supports, who maintained resistance to ideals of socially just education, and so forth. Some of their own perspectives on this are difficult to account for with specific evidence because not all gave formal consent for me to use their artifacts in my study, so this is a limitation to the examples I am permitted to disseminate. However, as a practitioner, I was still able to reflect on the types of barriers these students encountered and continually try to address these discrepancies in new iterations of my practice.

**The Student Response**

As mentioned in the introduction, the main goal of this chapter is to illuminate how the theoretical tenets of CCI influenced my personal practice, and how this helped my students move from having minimal consciousness of social justice concepts at the beginning of the course, to a place of deeper awareness and having gained the dispositions to act on these ideals by the end of the course. While my specific procedures are not presumed to be directly applicable in either my students’ future practice nor the reader’s, I share them in order to show examples of how I
implemented CCI, and in what ways my students consequently changed their perspectives and mindsets and are now primed to imagine more just practices in their future work.

So much more emerged from the data than can be described in this space, therefore, a purposeful selection of themes and examples of students’ responses are presented here. These findings fall into somewhat of an arc that is built on relationships, flows through the students’ course experiences, and ends up in their important learning. Recognize that within and between each topic there is a lot of overlap among the concepts and students’ responses, suggesting that rich educational experiences cannot be easily reduced to discrete particulars, and that multiple factors interact in this kind of teaching and learning—which also reinforces the need for frameworks like CCI that provide a holistic approach.

**Relationships**

Overall, students valued and felt that many relational aspects of the course were uncommon, such as the amount of freedom and time to work with and learn from peers, the fact that I sat with and talked to them like equals, or the ability to approach me about anything and trust that I would value their ideas or be compassionate to their needs. Findings around authenticity and vulnerability, confidence and safety, trust and respect, and care and engagement follow.

**Authenticity and vulnerability.** From day one, I go against norms that assume teachers and students should maintain strict personal boundaries, instead attempting to help students feel at ease by sharing a lot about myself, especially my vulnerabilities, and asking to learn more about their lives and experiences beyond school. I believe this transparency and “being real” are the kinds of actions transformative pedagogues must take to show our students the value in authentically engaging with their future students, which is especially important when they are teaching students who may face challenges many of us cannot even imagine enduring. I proceed similarly throughout the semester to model the sharing of personal experiences, ideas, and opinions, and invite them to do the same—importantly, without judgment or correction from me, only further question-posing when appropriate—pointing out how instructors do, indeed, have human lives and minds of their own.

*Having such a level relationship without fear of always being told I was wrong really helped me be more honest with myself which helped me figure out more about who I want to be as a teacher one day.*

Educators of already vulnerable students’ whose identities have been marginalized by mainstream norms must realize how mutual empathy through the disclosure of vulnerability can actually lead to stronger levels of respect between students and their instructors.

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I wish I could have a honest and personal relationship with all my professors because sometimes people are just having a rough day and need a break. Some professors don’t even know your name they just know you by a clicker number or a ID number. I think that the personal relationship shared made me more willing to connect with the teacher and the class.

The assumption that teachers cannot love or share their lives with students is based on a culture of separation in which we are taught to be competitive and self-protect, rather than to collaborate, connect, and share our real feelings or the most authentic parts of ourselves (Jordan, 1995; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Confidence and safety. Students attributed their feeling self-confident in the space of our classroom to the relationships they were able to build, both with their peers and with me.

I felt comfortable to speak my mind and be engaged in discussions with my peers which was crucial for my learning in this class. I never felt intimidated to share my opinions around my peers.

Some described this as feeling “safe” or similar terminology. I do not necessarily connect these statements with formal notions of “safe space,” in which guidelines for dialogue across difference are devised that can actually inhibit a lot of the “unsafe” talk necessary to truly get at topics of injustice, and which have a tendency to privilege the dominant groups’ ways of feeling safe. Instead, I follow Sensoy and DiAngelo’s (2014) “less-orthodox adaptations” (p. 8) of the typical safe space guidelines, which I think contribute to the feelings students describe while retaining a focus on finding comfort with our discomfort.

Trust and respect. In our class, trust between students and myself, students and their peers, and students’ trust in their own funds of knowledge (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006) create a context of shared power and respect in which students felt confident enough to explore intimidating topics, attempt creative modes of conveying their learning, and otherwise test unfamiliar waters. Students found the trust and respect they received “refreshing.”

I usually never have professors who care what I think or believe in. This instructor was different. She showed me how she really respects me, and this made me respect her and what she teaches in class.

I believe it is this trust and respect that made it possible for students to explore their own privileges, assumptions, and other positionalities without getting defensive, as so much of the literature says our mostly white, middle-class pre-service teachers tend to do.

I also make it clear to students that I believe they are capable of thinking deeply, acting for themselves, and learning in their own ways. All policies, assignments, and other requirements

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for which I am able to offer options are negotiable (within the constraints of our program requirements). This means anything from encouraging students to propose variations on how they complete a project, to letting them be responsible for their own attendance. This also translates into mostly flexible due dates, individual and collaborative projects in place of tests and quizzes, and extensive qualitative feedback instead of quantitative evaluation of their work (Kohn, 2012). I believe these policies also helped mediate the potential that students would “tell me what I want to hear” for the sake of their grade.

*I actually spent more time trying to make it as good as possible before turning it in and really upped the quality of my work.*

While some might wonder about the objectivity of such a system for ensuring a “level” playing field, especially in light of the standardized forms of assessment so dominant in education today, students actually expressed that they thought this individualized approach was more *fair* and *effective*, allowing their achievement to be based on their own growth rather than on comparison or competition with classmates. I also provide a lot of structure for those students who want it, and students always have the option to receive traditional instructions and grades for everything they do, an option that even the most self-proclaimed extrinsically motivated students never exercised and without which, they seemed delighted to discover, they did as good or better work.

*Not only do these policies alleviate an immense amount of stress for students—which may be one of the most repeated appreciations in their feedback—I am also able to trust in my own understandings of education, prioritizing my compassion for students as human beings and their authentic expressions of learning and engagement.*

*Overall, my relationship with my instructor I think was built on mutual trust that we would both complete our work and put effort into learning together, and I think this really helped my learning throughout the course.*

Overly regulative practices and policies that prevent students from questioning, challenging, exploring, and experimenting are, from the perspective of critical pedagogy, the epitome of oppressive education—a means of privileging the kinds of docility and conforming that maintain the status quo. Rather, because I uphold my values by trusting students to make the most of their learning, they live up to that trust, and also learn to trust in themselves.

*While we still had responsibilities and work to do, this course felt a lot more self-lead in that I could get out of it whatever I put in, and it is my responsibility to learn rather than the professor forcing the information upon the students.*

In place of banking methods, this trust entails another kind of vulnerability from instructors—acknowledging the possibility that what we think is the most important idea or the best way to do something is not always necessarily so. Because of the trusting and respectful relationships we
had built, students were able to trust in their own abilities to create knowledge and wanted to extend their existing thinking in new directions and do their best work.

**Care and engagement.** Care in this class was perceived as my compassion and concern for the overall wellbeing of my students, care for their genuine learning that went beyond their achievement, and care for the subject matter that made students want to care as well.

*I truly believe I tried my hardest in this class because I knew the instructor cared about my learning which made me care about my growth as a learner.*

Returning to the earlier topic of authenticity, students could tell that my care for them and their learning was a priority and was genuine.

*Most of my other courses are very strict and have little to no compassion. This instructor showed so much love and care for her students inside and outside of the classroom and I do not receive that from a majority of college professors. I felt very comfortable sharing my opinion in class which is very difficult for me to do in other courses.*

My approachability also facilitated students’ greater engagement with learning.

*I never felt weird asking her questions, often times instructors or professors are really intimidating and it scares you away from asking questions which is stupid because the professors and instructors are there to help you learn and if you don’t feel comfortable talking to them that stinks because that affects your learning.*

I had apprehensions that my sensitivity or relaxed policies might inhibit students’ levels of commitment and engagement, which I always candidly discussed with them early on. Overwhelmingly, students showed the opposite response, stating that is was precisely these policies that made them want to turn in assignments in a timely fashion, come to class, do their best work, fully participate, and so on.

*I was never bored, stressed, or frustrated during class and I think that is a big part of why I never procrastinated with assignments and always came to class because it was actually enjoyable.*

My solicitation for feedback in all data forms included space for students to tell me what interrupted or hindered their learning. The interesting thing about their responses to these questions was that students typically took responsibility for these hindrances, such as for procrastination, or attributed such interruption to other students, such as others’ lack of preparation or contribution. They admitted that while certain assets of the course could also be drawbacks, they tended to conclude that this was “on them,” and that the benefits far outweighed the negatives.
The Course Experience

Students expressed the most enthusiasm about having their voices heard, exploring alternative perspectives, and our student-centered policies, activities, and assignments. These prominent aspects of the course included a calm learning environment, emphasis on student voice, agency, and questioning, discussion and collaboration, field experiences in urban youth spaces, and reflection and reflexivity.

Calm learning environment. Students attributed feeling at ease, calm, less stressed, comfortable, engaged, motivated, interested, and so on to the overall student-centered feel of the classroom environment, the ease of relationships between students and with me, and the relaxed policies and ways of learning.

I think that this is the only class I have ever taken where I didn’t feel a little nervous walking in the door each day. It had a very calm and relaxed feel to it and I really appreciated that. I feel like it really helped me learn the material because I wasn’t constantly on the edge of my seat feeling like I was missing something or doing something wrong.

Students were able to enjoy the environment of our classroom because they were not intimidated or constantly worried about repercussions for their actions. They felt like they mattered, their presence was vital to our classroom community, and what they had to say was important, which made them want to be there.

Voice, agency, and questioning. Students very consistently cited the ability to voice their ideas and opinions, to make their own choices about their learning, and to question previously taken-for-granted knowledge and ways of seeing education as essential to their ability to construct new knowledge in the course. Given the current era’s emphasis on developing students’ “critical thinking skills,” it was interesting to hear that the critical aspects of the course were what students considered the most novel.

I liked being able to develop my own ideas and opinions for subjects rather than being told the instructors opinions of the story and being expected to agree with it. This has helped me to learn and dig deeper and find a greater meaning in my learning. I was able to discover things for my own, rather than just think about one persons ideas and not dig deeper to develop my own.

Considering that social justice educators are often accused of indoctrinating their students to their own liberal or radical perspectives, this shows that when we simply present the evidence, foregrounding multiple perspectives and options for understanding a phenomenon, students are perfectly able to choose for themselves. This kind of problem-posing (Shor, 1992) particularly
sets the stage for students to comprehend marginalized perspectives as part of their own process of discovery.

Most classes just view the facts to students, are asked to memorize it, and apply it on a test. But this class challenged our own thoughts, allowed us to think about overlooked minorities and how they feel about education, and for once we were allowed to question the education system.

This form of criticality was different than mainstream views of critical thinking, which focus too much on the technical aspects of deconstructing passages of information, rather than questioning that information and its validity in the first place, comparing it with one’s own experience of the world, and judging its contribution to a just society.

Discussion and collaboration. The types of questioning just described were facilitated by the course’s use of discussion and collaboration in place of lectures and exams. Discussions and the ability to hear other people’s ideas and perspectives were common responses when students were asked what was different or most important about this course.

Open ended discussion, because sometimes it’s just the teachers ranting the entirety of the period and by the end everyone just has the same views as the prof. which doesn’t make for the greatest thing.

Students particularly liked that we discussed topics relevant to their personal experiences of education, as well as to the contexts they would themselves face as teachers.

We talked about real world situations and approached education at a realistic level, so it provided for an interesting class with controversial discussions and topics.

Throughout the semester, each class included small or large group discussions, activities, and cooperative projects. Establishing caring relationships between us all made it easier in these activities for students to venture out and say things they would normally keep to themselves. I want to note, however, that I also never require students to speak in the way that some instructors do in order for students to receive participation credit, because there are many types of participation that need to be honored besides the privileged mode of speaking publicly.

Field experiences. Students in this course also engage in ten hours of service-learning field experience (Tinkler, Hannah, Tinkler, & Miller, 2015) in local schools and other youth settings that serve racially, economically, and otherwise disadvantaged students in the urban neighborhoods surrounding the university. Here they are able to take the foundational topical and theoretical knowledge they have gained in the course and turn it into action with and on behalf of actual students. This connection of theory to practice is vital in order to avoid reinforcing pre-
service teachers’ potential deficit mindsets about students in these settings (Gorski, 2016). The field experiences helped them develop personally meaningful views on teaching.

Students respond very well when they trust the person helping them. The students taught me patience, understanding, and perseverance, everything necessary, in my opinion, to be a good teacher.

In a connected observation assignment, students critically examine their taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning, using description vs. interpretation to explore alternative explanations for everyday student behaviors.

Reflection and reflexivity. Almost weekly reflective journal assignments are also central to students’ overall learning, especially for those quieter students who explore more of their thoughts in this private space in which the students and I dialogue. For each journal, students are able to answer a prompt or choice of prompts, or to write an open-ended personal reflection on that week’s topics. Prompts encourage them to explore their own varied positionalities of privilege and vulnerability, to connect topics to their personal experiences, and to think about how these positions and experiences have influenced their assumptions about teaching, learning, and learners.

This course taught us to not be self-centered and not take education for granted.

In my responses, I pose questions for them to think further about the ideas they express and how they express them.

She not only affirmed what I was doing was correct but she also challenged my opinions and how I supported my opinions. It developed my debating skills as well as myself as a learner.

Through these journals I was able to see, which students corroborated, that their thinking evolved and their consciousness of the complexities of education increased.

Important Learning

Because my main aim in this chapter is to illustrate some ways students arrived at important learning around topics of social justice in order to offer options others may be able to translate into their own transformative pedagogical strategies, here I only briefly inventory the learning products students considered most important from their time in this course. From my own vantage point, students showed an increasingly critical awareness, frequently discussing the importance of classroom relationships, supporting diverse perspectives, thinking outside the box, and otherwise pushing up against educational and societal norms. They clearly grew in both their ability to recognize relational connection/disconnection and educational justice/injustice, and to envision change through their own purposeful thinking and future action. Importantly, they made
a lot of connections between these forms of consciousness and specific aspects of how I operated and what we learned or did within the course.

Students themselves said they were able to apply their learning to figuring out what kinds of teachers they want to be in their future classrooms. They now better understand the importance of forming close and caring relationships with and between students. They are able to recognize their own positionalities, assumptions, advantages, and vulnerabilities, and to better comprehend issues of equity that impact underprivileged students, schools, and communities, as well as how teachers and systems have the power to perpetuate or disrupt these inequities. In place of difference- and color-blindness, they now want to fully recognize and value the diversity of students’ identities, backgrounds, abilities, knowledges, and lived experiences. They believe that students’ self-expression, criticality, and engagement are as important as their measurable achievements, and teachers must create learning environments that are conducive to supporting the total wellbeing and growth of all types of learners. They acknowledge that there are a lot of challenges both students and teachers face, and that it is educators’ responsibility to be proactive in confronting these challenges, rather than feign neutrality or complacently accept situations as given and unalterable.

**Conclusion**

*I have had teachers that complain about the system and explain that they don’t want to do it that way but they never change anything.*

The student quote above both troubles me and reaffirms the importance of this work for educating future teachers. Our students, perhaps more than in any other field, need to see what they are learning put into action. An instructor who is clearly critical of the very things he or she is expected to do, yet fails to ever do anything to change the situation, is setting an example to students that teachers are basically powerless—powerless to truly question what we do and why we do it, and powerless to change things that do not work or do not align with our personal philosophies about what education should be. As teacher educators, we must hold ourselves to a higher standard. When we do feel powerless, we need to discuss this with students transparently. We need to give them the opportunity to help us figure out what does not work and to envision alternatives, and we need to actually implement those alternatives ourselves to the greatest extent possible. I recognize that not every change is possible, and not all problems even have solutions, at least not in some contexts, but we need to talk to our students about these complexities. If we complain but then do nothing, we are reinforcing a “that’s just the way it’s always been done” mentality, rather than showing future teachers that improvement and innovation are always possible.
I also recognize that the majority of education instructors are constantly assessing and re-creating their pedagogy and content, and thus, what I have endeavored to do in this project is not something revolutionary. Hopefully, the value of this work will be in its naming and making visible the kinds of things social-justice minded instructors in particular can do, and to show through concrete examples what actually worked to help me achieve the goals I have set for my teacher candidates. Specifically, I wanted to show some evidence that CCI could be a worthwhile pedagogical framework for use in teacher education so that readers may decide whether this is a transformative pedagogy they can see adapting to their own settings.
References


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CCI IN TEACHER EDUCATION


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