How Can White Pre-Service Teachers Experience the Power of Literacy?

CHEU-JEY LEE
Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne

Introduction

TRADITIONAL LITERACY EDUCATION places a great, if not exclusive, emphasis on mastery of reading and writing. Whether one is literate is determined by how well one reads and writes. In contrast, critical literacy assumes a much broader meaning. Lankshear and McLaren (1993a) suggest that "literacy is best understood as a shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing" (p. xvii). They argue that literacy should not refer simply to the ability to read and write. It should be viewed as social practices and conceptions that are "already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as 'neutral' or merely 'technical'" (Street, 1984, p. 1). Therefore, literacy is not only social and ideological, but also plural and political (Giroux, 1993). It is also due to such diverse traits of literacy that literacy learners are suggested to harbor a critical attitude toward literacy or literacies (as there is more than one kind of literacy). Hence, critical literacy, according to Lankshear and McLaren (1993b), uses:

> texts and print skills in ways that enable students to examine the politics of daily life within contemporary society with a view to understanding what it means to locate contradictions within modes of life, theories, and substantive intellectual positions, *and to actively seek out such contradictions*. (p. 36, italics in original)

Literacy, viewed from this critical slant, is no longer a mechanical learning of certain skills, but a social act. It has a Janus face. On the one hand, it serves as a placeholder for dominant values, ideologies, stereotypes, and so on, which unfortunately are seldom questioned. In this sense, literacy can be used to perpetuate the oppression of the marginalized. On the other hand, literacy is empowering or liberating. It can be used to help the marginalized examine their status quo critically and thus empower them to change it. While most critical literacists are concerned with how to deliver the marginalized from oppression, little work has been done with regard to

whether the dominant are aware of the power they possess and how they can contribute to the empowerment or liberation of the oppressed. In fact, in "*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*," one of the most important works in critical literacy/pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1984) seems to be pessimistic about the role the dominant can play in liberation:

> It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. *The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves* [italics added]. It is therefore essential that the oppressed wage the struggle to resolve the contradiction in which they are caught; and the contradiction will be resolved by the appearance of the new man: neither oppressor nor oppressed, but man in the process of liberation. (p. 42)

It seems that the oppressed need to assume full responsibility for their own liberation while the dominant appear to have nothing to contribute. This perspective on liberation can be misinterpreted (though it is certainly not Freire's intent) to blame the victims (the oppressed) if liberation does not succeed. Yet is it true that the dominant are exempt from the process of liberation? Are they not responsible for the oppression and thus liberation of the oppressed? It is on this issue that I suggest we turn to critical white studies for insight.

Since Peggy McIntosh published her seminal article "White Privilege and Male Privilege," white privilege or whiteness has commanded a great deal of attention. White privilege is seen by McIntosh (1997) as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 291). McIntosh's reflection on white privilege has spawned a considerable interest in examining the issue of whiteness in relation to education. Research on this issue has branched into such fields as white privilege pedagogy (Lawrence, 1997; Lawrence & Bunche, 1996), culturally diverse education (Goodwin, 1994; Sleeter, 2001), anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000), and so on. While whiteness is brought to educators' attention, most work focuses on how to make whites aware of their privilege. This approach usually results in either a denial of white privilege or a sense of guilt with no way out. In contrast, work on critical white studies, according to Levine-Ransky (2000), explores how "whites initiate a dismantling of unjust and racist social relations or divest themselves from the power they embody in social institutions and help reformulate and replace our inequitable society with a truly democratic social order" (p. 272–273). It differs from other works on whiteness in that, instead of reducing whiteness to a physical feature attributed to a discrete population, critical white studies argue that "whiteness is more than the sum total of white privilege, white power, white ethnicity; [i]t is a phenomenon produced by and productive of social contexts of power" (Levin-Ransky, 2000, p. 285). In other words, critical white studies redirect our attention from individuals distinct from social contexts that render them meaningful to social and systemic relations that make whiteness possible. This approach replaces questions about the "who" of whiteness with those of "how" whiteness operates. It does not simply blame whites and causes guilt in them but provides a way for them to contribute to solving the problem.

Critical white studies offer an alternative that critical literacy hardly addresses. They argue that whites or the dominant can contribute to the liberation of the oppressed and that the solution does not lie simply in a psychological approach where whites are usually forced to confess their complicity in oppression but in a social approach where social media, conventions, institutions, systems, and so on should be examined critically. This study takes the proposition of critical white studies as a point of departure and argues that literacy as a social medium is fraught with power and therefore should be investigated critically. It also argues that the dominant (white pre-

service teachers in this case) can join the oppressed in empowering the latter through literacy education. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to show how teacher educators can help predominantly white pre-service teachers become aware that literacy is not neutral but political. Knowingly or not, literacy can be used to position one group in opposition to another (Leland & Harste, 2008). It is usually the dominant that are in a position to teach literacy. Yet white pre-service teachers are reported to have little cross-cultural knowledge and experience and are apt to perpetuate the mainstream culture if they are not fully aware of what they are doing (Gilbert, 1995; McIntyre, 1997). As a result, this study explores how teacher educators can design a curriculum that helps pre-service teachers experience, and reflect critically on, the power of literacy. It is hoped that through this experience the pre-service teachers can rethink the role they play in literacy education.

Context

At a Midwestern university in the United States, I have been working with pre-service teachers for three years. One of the courses I taught was titled: Critical Reading in the Content Area. It was offered to secondary education majors in the teacher education program. Critical literacy was one of the emphases I had for this course. The purpose was to help the pre-service teachers understand the power and politics of literacy, reflect critically on them, and implement a curriculum that could empower their future students. While there was little disagreement among the pre-service teachers that literacy serves as an avenue to success, they were not explicitly aware that literacy, including academic literacy, is also a product of the dominant culture and that it can be used to marginalize others. If the focus is only on teaching literacy to empower students without questioning what is embedded in it, there is a risk of perpetuating the dominant culture and continuing to marginalize the disadvantaged. Unfortunately, few of the pre-service teachers I taught were aware of the power of literacy. Without reflecting critically on what they would be teaching, their well-meant intent of helping the disadvantaged children could turn into the opposite. Yet the pre-service teachers as outsiders could hardly experience the power of the dominant literacy. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to make the pre-service teachers aware that literacy is not neutral but complicated with power relations. The results reported in this study were based on two semesters of working with a total of thirty-five pre-service teachers: twenty-five in the spring 2008 and ten in the fall 2008. Among the thirty-five, one was African American; three were Hispanic; and the rest were Caucasian. Clearly, they were a group of predominantly white pre-service teachers. It was hoped that if they could become cognizant of the power experienced by the disadvantaged, they would teach literacy differently in their future classrooms.

As an educator of Asian ethnicity, I had mixed feelings about the objective of this course, i.e., about making my students aware of the power, or more broadly white privilege, in literacy education. On the one hand, my skin color told me that I could take a third-person position and critique white privilege without being part of it. Sometimes, I even had to resist the "temptation" of acting like one of the victims of whiteness. I wanted to make my students aware of the power systemically bestowed on them, yet I did not want to make them feel that they could do nothing but take the blame hopelessly without knowing what to do. On the other hand, despite my skin color, I felt that I might as well join complicity in perpetuating the oppression of the disadvantaged if I knew how to help my students, though it was certainly difficult, yet kept silent. Not

making any voice in opposition to the status quo is equivalent to subscribing to the systemic trend that continues to privilege the dominant against the oppressed (Wilson, 2009). As a result, assuming a victim's role on the one hand or taking a third-person position and blaming my students on the other hand does not result in any positive action, nor does it exempt me from complicity in what has happened and is still going on. Specifically, using whites as "a straw man," does not help to change the status quo. However, looking at this issue from a social perspective proposed by critical white studies redirects our attention in a positive way toward unjust social systems (rather than individuals only) that should be reformed or at least questioned critically. And I believe this social approach to the issue of whiteness provides a promising alternative for my students to examine and teach literacy critically.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Now the question is how to come up with a pragmatic method that we can apply in examining literacy critically in our classrooms. That is, critical white studies discussed previously only suggest that white privilege should be investigated in a social context, yet what does this mean in particular to literacy education? How can literacy be examined socially in a classroom? To bridge this gap, I would like to appropriate Lewison, Leland, and Harste's (2008) model of critical literacy instruction, which offers a theoretical framework as well as a pragmatic approach to linking literacy instruction to social issues. Lewison et al. argue that literacy education should, for one thing, build on students' interests as a starting point and, for another, connect to the social dimension. Their model begins with the exploration of students' personal and cultural resources such as home literacies, popular culture and media, social issues books, etc. The idea is to know what students *can* do and use it as a starting point. This is in direct contrast with the traditional deficit-based instruction where we identify what students *cannot* do and try to remedy it. In deficit-based instruction, students are positioned as "receivers (and victims) of knowledge, not creators" (Campano, 2008, p. 145). A curriculum that focuses on what students can do makes them feel empowered while the one that targets their weaknesses further cuts them down. Another aspect of Lewison et al.'s (2008) instructional model is to link personal and cultural resources to critical social practices. Once the students' personal knowledge, interests, or issues are identified, they should be connected to a broader social dimension. Lewison et al. argue that "[i]n a critical curriculum we emphasize how understandings are never individual or autonomous—that they always have social, cultural, and political dimensions" (p. 19). Through this investigation, literacy learners are hoped to take a critical stance by consciously engaging, entertaining alternate ways of being, taking responsibility to inquire, and being reflexive (Lewison et al., 2008, p. 13–19). If students can relate what they learn in school to issues in their home and society, they will be engaged and literacy is no longer a subject to learn but part of their lives.

With this in mind, this study consisted of two stages. In the first stage called "critical awareness," the pre-service teachers were introduced to a few critical discourse analysis methods. They had to pick one of them as a guideline to critique a newspaper article, an advertisement, an email, or any other type of text of their own choosing. Giving them choices in selecting texts ensured that they could analyze texts of their own interest. This was also consistent with Lewison et al.'s (2008) proposition that a critical curriculum should begin with students' interests. In addition, the questions suggested in the critical discourse analysis methods helped link their

interests to social issues. The methods they could choose from included: the four dimensions framework developed by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), Janks' (1997) critical discourse analysis, Van Sluys' (2005) critical literacy practices, and a set of questions suggested by Conley (2008) to foster critical thinking. Lewison et al.'s (2002) four dimensions framework consists of disrupting the commonplace, considering multiple viewpoints, focusing on the sociopolitical, and taking action. It provides a step-by-step guide to analyze a text critically. Janks' critical discourse analysis is a tool that examines both visual and verbal signs. Therefore, her approach is ideal for analyzing written texts along with visuals such as pictures. Van Sluys' critical literacy practices involve asking a series of questions: Whose voices are heard? Whose are left out? Who is marginalized in particular situations? Who makes decisions? Who benefits and who suffers? Similarly, Conley's (2008) critical questions are summarized as follows:

- How are the meanings assigned to certain facts, characters, or events in a text?
- How does the text attempt to get readers to accept its information?
- What is the purpose of the text?
- Whose interests are served by the writing of this text? Whose interests are not served?
- What view of the world is put forth by the ideas in this text? What views are not?
- What are other possible perspectives on the information in the text? (p. 278)

Having some familiarity with methods they could employ to examine texts, the pre-service teachers were then invited to experience the power of literacy. I called this second stage "praxis experience." But how could the pre-service teachers experience it? According to Carspecken (1999), "praxis is about acting so as to recognize one's self through one's acts" (p. 113). In other words, the pre-service teachers have to act in order to experience power relations. Praxis is not simply about knowing, but acting in order to know more, and to take action to change what is not right. This notion of praxis is consistent with Freire's interpretation of praxis. Freire argues that praxis should comprise both reflection and action. Reflection without action is verbalism; action without reflection is activism. Specifically,

> When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated "blah." It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action. On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism*. The latter—action for action's sake—negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. (Freire, 1984, pp. 75–76, italics in original)

Therefore, understanding how to critique texts in the first stage is still on the level of the third-person position, i.e., on the level of verbalism. To be able to relate first hand to it calls for action, or more precisely praxis action. There should be an environment where the pre-service teachers can turn that experience into a personal one. "Language creation" and "lesson planning" in the second stage were hoped to help the pre-service teachers internalize and personalize this experience.

Stage I: Critical Awareness

Critical Discourse Analysis

In the spring of 2008, a group of twenty-five pre-service teachers were invited to pick a peer-reviewed journal article and critique it. The intent was to equip them with critical thinking skills that they could use to look into other texts. However, the feedback I received from them after this assignment was mixed. Some felt that they could think more critically through this exercise, yet many commented that they were unable to relate what they read to their daily lives. They did not believe that reading academic journal articles would be helpful for their future teaching careers. They wanted to read something practical that they could apply in their future classrooms.

Accordingly, I modified this assignment substantially in the subsequent semester. Two adaptations were made. First, more guidance was provided. The four critical discourse analysis methods discussed previously were explicitly taught, and examples of how to do an analysis were provided in class. The pre-service teachers were given the option of selecting one of the methods they preferred in doing text analysis. They could even combine two or more of the methods in analyzing their text. Second, the pre-service teachers could also choose the text they critiqued. There was no limit on the type of text selected as long as they were able to relate to it. These changes were implemented to respond to the feedback I received from the students in the previous semester. They also fit in with Lewison et al.'s (2008) model of critical literacy instruction discussed previously, i.e., beginning with students' interests, issues, or resources.

The texts chosen for analysis comprised topics ranging from sports to politics. Some pre-service teachers were interested in articles reporting on the 2008 presidential campaign. Some chose to examine advertisements with regard to computers, cars, and weight loss diets. In what follows, I will discuss in detail an analysis completed by Rachel (a pseudonym), one of the pre-service teachers, as an example to demonstrate how this exercise helped them become aware that literacy is not neutral. Rachel, a mother of two children, examined an article on tennis lessons from a tennis magazine. Below is an excerpt from her critical discourse analysis report.

An Excerpt from Rachel's Report

I enjoyed the article because I am also a parent of young tennis players who is trying to learn my appropriate role in the development of their game. I relate to the joys the game has brought to the later years of my life and the desire to strongly encourage my children to devote heart and soul to the sport. But personal interest aside, this article lends itself especially well to critical discourse through practices that invite questioning in Van Sluys' (2005) framework as well as utilization of visual signs as described in Janks' (1997) article.

Beginning with the cartoon illustration which enhances the article, one can't help but notice the visual signs of the clichéd caricatures which convey the attitudes of the article's subjects. For example, the father is meant to look surprised and innocent as the mother figure angrily sneers at him while the son appears enthusiastic and focused on tennis. The father and son are dressed identically in tennis whites uniting them in sport as the mother is fashionably un-athletic looking in her tight tank top and jeans. Conspicuously absent is the daughter, Taylor, twin of the boy. On the wall there are three mirrors—a large masculine rectangle, a smaller masculine rectangle, and a feminine oval shaped one. Again, there is no sign of an additional feminine oval representative

of the other child, Taylor.

The article itself is a personal narrative which conveys one man's passion for tennis and his suppressed desire to pass his obsession on to his son. Notice in the first paragraph the author states that he promised his wife that he would not force tennis on to "them" referring to both his children, the twins. It is at this point that one must ask, according to Van Sluys' framework, "Who is left out?" "Who is marginalized?" The answer to this is clearly the female half of the twins, Taylor. Just like the visual signs in the cartoon unmistakably leave her out of the family, Taylor is almost completely omitted from the discussion after the first paragraph of the article. The only exception to this is a passing mention of a puzzle session which is interrupted because of excitement over the perceived tennis aptitude of Declan (the son). The female half of the twins is totally marginalized. She is put aside and there is never a mention of attempting to spark an interest in her for the beloved sport.

On the other hand, while this father is clearly leaving out his daughter, he does include his son's voice in the article. While it is true that at the time the article was written, Declan was a toddler, his father, the author, does include direct quotes from his son. Through the quotes, the author conveys his son's desire to play the sport, "…he turned to me, beaming, and said, 'Tennis!'" "…I took him to the International Tennis Hall of Fame where he yanked a set of children's tennis whites off a rack in the gift shop, handed them to me and said, 'you buy me this?'"

A Note on Rachel's Report

First of all, Rachel chose this article for analysis because it related to her personal interest—tennis. It was something she and her children could relate to and enjoy. This is again tied to Lewison et al.'s (2008) model—beginning with students' personal interests. Then Rachel examined the article from two angles: its illustrations by using Janks' method and its text by using Van Sluys' method. She cleverly combined these two methods and used them as guidelines for her critical discourse analysis of the article. They also served to locate her personal interest in a social and cultural context, another aspect discussed in Lewison et al.'s (2008) model. In her report, Rachel explicitly pointed out the gender stereotypes (e.g., boys are meant for sports while girls are not) taken for granted in the article. She supported her argument by citing the author as well as analyzing the illustrations in the article. Through this exercise, Rachel began to understand that texts are not neutral but imbued with power relations and gender stereotypes.

Stage II: Praxis Experience

Language Creation

The "language creation" activity as a critical incident was meant to help the pre-service teachers turn their theoretical knowledge into personal experience. The pre-service teachers were divided into eight groups. Each group was asked to create their own language that represented the meaning of the statement, "I enjoy this class; it is critical." Each group was allowed to use the English alphabet, pictures, numbers, or any other symbols to denote the meaning of the statement. The only restriction was that their native tongue, English, should not be used. For example, several groups decided to use the English alphabet, a total of twenty-six letters, as their

basic linguistic units to create their own languages, yet any meaningful English words such as "enjoy" and "critical" could not be used to represent the meanings of "enjoy" and "critical" in English.

After each of the eight groups came up with a language to represent the statement, two groups were combined into one, and a total of four larger groups were formed. Again, each group's task was to come to a consensus on what symbols they would use in their languages to represent the statement. Then the process was repeated; that is, four groups merged into two even larger groups to discuss the languages they agreed upon. Finally, the entire class gathered together, and only one language was put forth to represent the statement. This final language was called "the Standard Language of the Class," which was regarded as the "standard" way of communicating the meaning of the statement. Everything else was considered "non-standard" and should be prohibited. At the end of the activity, the pre-service teachers were asked to reflect on the following questions:

- Was the language the class decided to adopt the same as the language of your first group?
- How did you feel throughout the entire process?
- How did you feel when your language was changed or even not used at all?
- Did you feel marginalized?
- Did you feel power and politics involved in language creation?

Each pre-service teacher was then given an index card on which to write down his/her feelings about the entire process without having to respond to each of the questions listed above. Following are samples of what they had said categorized and presented thematically:

Marginalization. Some of the pre-service teachers felt that the language creation process they experienced put some voices in the center but others in the periphery. Sometimes they had to agree with other people simply because they wanted to appear agreeable. They began to understand that the so-called standard language is nothing but a product of the workings of power.

- I thought that the activity showed the difficulty of creating one standard language. Someone will eventually be marginalized no matter how many times the language changes.
- I feel this has an important meaning. We don't know how complicated and degrading this could be. No one likes to be left out.
- Confusion and frustration. It made me want to settle for other people's language just to be agreeable and to end the controversy.

Language superiority. Some felt that a certain language is considered superior to others for no specific reasons. Here *superiority* is a relative term and reflects the other side of *marginalization*, the theme discussed above. It suggests that superiority of one language results from marginalization of others.

- This activity definitely shows how much people differ on the idea of language and how difficult it is to agree on one convention. Although nobody was being entirely serious, there was a lot of "my language is superior" going on. Unfortunately, this mirrors real life. Hopefully, we can change that!
- Awesome! It demonstrates (generally) how society perceives their ownership of a lan-

guage as superior. Great activity!

Triumphal hurrah of winners. Of course, some were "lucky" enough to have their language chosen as the final version for everyone. They jotted down the triumphal hurrah of winners. Yet according to my observation, those who had their language chosen were usually vocal throughout the process. They moved around frequently either to explain what they meant by their symbols or to "talk" others into their ideas. Once in a while, body language such as fist waving could even be seen though it was done in a joking manner.

- I like my language! "We made it." "Awesome!"
- I feel happy. New lang = fun. Champions! Whoohoo. Supreme winners. Booyah!

It can be inferred from the pre-service teachers' responses above that their attitude toward literacy was different at the end of the activity. At least, they began to understand that power and politics were embedded in literacy. I asked the class to write down their final version of language on the board. I told them the symbols they had on the board were the "standard" language on which everyone agreed. Yet when I randomly picked a symbol from their language (for example, a smiley that was supposed to mean "like") and asked them, "Why not something else but a smiley?" they made a few guesses and then referred the question to the one who created the symbol. The answer was, "I don't know. I guess I liked a smiley." In response, I reminded them that one person's preference may evolve at least in this case into a norm that becomes taken for granted. Through the activity, their mere knowledge was transformed into a personal experience. It was through this praxis act that the pre-service teachers better understood the power and politics of literacy.

Lesson Planning

The lesson plan was a follow-up activity where the pre-service teachers had to incorporate what they had learned throughout the semester, write a lesson plan, and present it to the class. There was no specific format for this lesson plan except that they had to show how it could help their students think critically. The pre-service teachers were free to choose a subject area they wanted to teach. Though not required, they were encouraged to do this project in a small group. To avoid taking up too much of their after-class time for this project, approximately one and a half class meetings were set aside for each group to brainstorm for ideas and discuss the project. Each group had to show what they accomplished during the group consultation meeting with me though they might not finish everything.

The subject areas covered in their lesson plans included social studies, math, art, and language arts. The contents were diverse, but one thing in common across all the lesson plans was the demonstration of an awareness that texts are not neutral and have to be examined critically. For example, one of the groups had two people: one in art and the other in math. They designed a lesson that cleverly integrated art and math. The idea was how different shapes could be created by using circles. The lesson plan began with an art lesson that described how to use circles to draw shapes and ended with a math lesson which focused on the understanding of different terms such as "isosceles triangle" and "parallelogram." Through this integrated lesson, art was no longer considered only artistic but logical. Nor was math only logical but artistic. Mathematic

shapes were formulated through artistic circles, yet artistic circles had to be drawn through mathematic measurement. Students were allowed to come up with their own definitions of the shapes they created and discussed how certain shapes were named in math and how those names differed from the definitions they invented. Through a lesson like this, mathematic definitions are not considered unchangeable truths but examined closely to see from what the definitions are derived.

When the lesson was presented to the class, it provoked much discussion, especially on the issue of giving definitions or more generally—naming. For example, the pre-service teachers wondered who decided that the term "parallelogram" should be used to represent a four-sided plane figure whose opposite sides are parallel. The discussion was extended to include such questions as "Who has the right to name something or someone?" "What does one's name represent?" "Do we have a choice of our own name?" Some of the pre-service teachers even connected naming to the language creation activity they did and considered it political, especially when some voices were excluded in the naming process. It was exciting to see how they linked issues to a social, cultural dimension and learned to examine them from a critical slant.

Conclusion

This study began with a discussion of what critical literacists have achieved for the marginalized. It argued that while most of the work in critical literacy focuses on how to free the marginalized from their status quo, little research has been done regarding how to make the dominant become aware of the power of literacy. It also argued that without an explicit awareness and personal experience of the power, the dominant can hardly understand the importance of teaching literacy critically, let alone empowering the marginalized. As a result, it is not enough simply to work with the marginalized in an attempt to change their status quo. Empowering also calls for working with those who are in an advantaged position. The idea is that if those who are in a privileged position can experience the workings of power in literacy education, they will become more sensitive to what marginalized others have been through.

Hence, this study was concerned with the exploration of a curriculum that helped a group of predominantly white pre-service teachers experience the power of literacy. The curriculum was divided into two stages: critical awareness and praxis experience. In the first stage, the pre-service teachers were introduced to a few critical discourse analysis methods. They were required to employ one of the methods to critique a text of their own choosing. In the second stage, they were engaged in a language creation activity where they experienced how the language they created was excluded in the final form. In the end, they had to design and teach a lesson that reflected what they had learned from these two stages.

The dominant are often juxtaposed against the oppressed in the effort toward empowering the latter. Yet this study suggests that both groups can contribute collaboratively to the empowerment of the oppressed. For collaboration to happen, the dominant, or the white pre-service teachers in this case, need to see literacy education from a different perspective. They need to put themselves in the shoes of the disadvantaged and experience what they experience. Herbert Kohl (2002) calls this experience "attunement":

> Teaching requires listening, not merely to your students but to yourself being listened to. Simple assumptions about who students are, what their experience has been and what

their current conditions and motivations are all require "attunement." (p. 159)

Before we can attune ourselves, we need to first acknowledge that there is a difference between ourselves and our students. The difference, unfortunately, is usually difficult to detect as it is systemically normalized and becomes elusive of our awareness (Foucault, 1979). This is especially true for those who are born with and used to the privilege that society bestows on them due to their gender, race, socio-economic status, etc. Therefore, while literacy education is taken for granted by educators as a springboard to success, it may be viewed as a way of marginalization and resisted by learners. This is why Kohl reminds us that we need to be attentive to how our teaching is perceived by our students. It also echoes what this study attempts to call our attention to: empowerment through literacy education lies in a critical awareness of as well as a praxis experience of the power of literacy.

About the Author

Cheu-jey Lee is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne. He is also the co-editor of the *Scholarlypartnershipsedu* journal. He teaches methods courses in language arts and critical reading. His research focuses on literacy education, philosophy of educational research, and educational inquiry methodology.

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