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**LIBERATION EDUCATION:
A STRIVE TO MAKE LITERACY INSTRUCTION MEANINGFUL FOR ALL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS & TEACHERS**

by

Cassandra K. Goodwin

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

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Dedications

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, Paul and Brenda Cheney, as well as my late uncle Sgt. Anthony L. Goodwin.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to all my professors and their guidance and help throughout the entire program and this research. I have acquired new knowledge, skills, and insight and, thus, feel like I am a better educator and human.

I would like to thank Brianna for starting this journey and completing this program together with me. I am glad that you have been by my side throughout this entire experience, and I am proud of both of us.

Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation to all colleagues that have supported me through this process and allowed me to learn from them.

Abstract

Cassandra K. Goodwin
LIBERATION EDUCATION: A STRIVE TO MAKE LITERACY INSTRUCTION
MEANINGFUL FOR ALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS & TEACHERS
2022-2023

Susan Browne, Ed.D.
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this conceptual research was to review literature on the implementation and the implications of liberation education in the elementary literacy classroom, specifically for students of color and white teachers in urban schools. This research discusses educational frameworks tied to liberation education and explores common themes that arise through the literature review. The importance of culturally responsive teaching, critical pedagogy, and multiliteracies pedagogy through literacy instruction is highlighted. Thorough teacher preparation, and active teacher engagement allow for student empowerment. Positive effects of liberation education through literacy for students and teachers are explored. Strides away from traditional teaching to reform education and move toward educational equity are highlighted.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“I cannot do this! I cannot do this! I cannot do this”, I sobbed in my car on the way home from work. I pulled over on the side of the road because the tears were streaming down my face so fast that I could not see anything while driving. I called my grandmother immediately. “Grandma, I think I am having a panic attack. I do not know what to do anymore. I try and I try, and I just cannot make it work. I don’t understand these kids, they don’t understand me, and don’t even get me started on their parents. All I want to do is help them by teaching them!” This was just one scenario that occurred during this first year of me teaching. Oh, how I vividly remember my painful beginnings as a teacher. I was a new young, white, female teacher entering the profession in a Philadelphia Title 1 K-8 school with majority Black students. The school had assigned me a fourth-grade position which I was not familiar with at all as the majority of my practical experience had been with lower elementary school students. During the Summer’s professional development prior to the school year, administration and fellow teachers had warned me that my class was one of the toughest groups of kids in the entire school as that year's students had displayed a variety of behavioral and academic issues throughout prior school years. As a first-year teacher, I was overzealous trying to prepare myself for what was to come not just academically but also how to connect with my fourth graders and overcome these “challenging” kids as described by these vetted and experienced colleagues of mine.

Significance of Research

The first semester of this first year of teaching was very tough for me. I felt unprepared, had a hard time making connections with the students, and was not ready for the challenges that I faced that no one had prepared me for during my teacher preparation in college in New Jersey. Such challenges included communication with parents, managing classroom space, teaching new curriculum effectively, overcoming stereotypes and prejudice (both receiving and having). Throughout the year, I slowly realized that in order for me to connect with my students, teach them effectively, bond with parents, and make my overall experience more enjoyable, I had to challenge myself to think about what it really meant to teach in an urban Title 1 school and who my students were outside of our classroom. I also had to challenge them to think about who I was outside of being the new, white, female, young teacher that was there to teach them.

As the year progressed, I got to know more about my students' interests, their families, their cultures, their day-to-day life and vice versa. I shared my personal stories with students, and we discussed how we were different but also alike. We talked about the beginning of the year and how they did not like me for reasons that seemed embedded in their thinking such as "this new teacher is just going to stay for 3 months and then leaves us." They had been through the cycle of getting a new teacher every school year or sometimes even halfway through the year. Students had learned not to trust their teachers and as a class unit learned how to have each other's back. I shared with them my feelings of fear and sadness in the beginning of the year and what my thoughts were on wanting to connect with them but not being able to. Together, we challenged each other's preconceived notions and emotions, and came to an agreement of mutual respect and

inquiring about our actions, motions, and reasons. Of course, we continued our process of growing and had times when we did not agree with each other or clashed, but without me knowing, we had created a third space inside our classroom. “Third spaces are hybrid spaces that bring people together” (Bhabha, 2004). Together we began to challenge the historical beliefs that students of color lack skills in the classroom. In creating a third space, the focus was on teaching curriculum and developing attitudes that welcome every student’s thinking and allow open conversations about power relationships within institutions such as classrooms and schools as well as society (Coleman, 2020).

Unfortunately, shortly after establishing a relationship with my students, the pandemic began, and I could no longer teach in-person. However, I continued to establish a positive relationship with my students over the online learning platform and understood the importance of creating a learning community in which students and teachers discard their prejudices toward each other and the concept of traditional schooling to create a learning environment that levels the playing field for students and educators. With a critical pedagogy approach to teaching and learning, together, we challenged ourselves, each other, and the institution as a whole allowing us to liberate ourselves through learning. This is a pedagogical term coined by Freire as liberation education or pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 1994). This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation (Freire, 1994, p.48).

Now, I am no longer a classroom teacher nor a worker in the education field. Therefore, this is no school site nor current classroom for this qualitative research. However, as a former teacher in an urban elementary school classroom, I feel strongly

about equity and accessibility for students of color. Furthermore, as a graduate student in this program, I also feel strongly about access to quality literacy instruction for all students. I reject the historical forces that have put Black students at a disadvantage in reading (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015) and hope to emphasize the importance of critical pedagogy lenses in literacy instruction such as Freire's (1970) to transform learning for students within the classroom, school, and society.

Research Problem

Historically, literacy curricula have promoted inequality and inequity for students and their academic achievement in elementary school classrooms, specifically students of color (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Freire (1970) expresses a need for teachers and schools to empower students in their own learning, "I must intervene in teaching the peasants that their hunger is socially constructed and work with them to help identify those responsible for this social construction, which is, in my view, a crime against humanity. Therefore, we need to intervene not only pedagogically but also ethically" (Freire, 1970).

Research Purpose

Effective literacy instruction in the elementary school classroom has been long mentioned as a foundation for students' academic achievement in their education (Parker, 2022). Therefore, literacy instruction, its strategies and its implications in the elementary school classroom, are constantly reviewed and discussed. Research has shown that literacy instruction goes beyond students simply reading and writing, and the Simple View of Reading theory (Gough and Tunmer, 1986) has since been tremendously

challenged. Educators understand that the science of reading encompasses more components than decoding and language comprehension (Aukerman & Chamber Schuldt, 2021). In addition to the components discussed by researchers in the science of reading theory, researchers have contributed other factors to the successful teaching of literacy, specifically in the elementary classroom. Such factors include student motivation and engagement, student self-efficacy, and other social and cultural factors shaping literacy curricula. These various lenses are meant to challenge the history of these literacy inequalities in elementary schools.

As a former elementary school teacher in an urban school with the majority Black students, I have experienced the inequalities in literacy instruction for Black and particularly African American elementary students. I have seen the lack of a culturally responsive curriculum and the lack of liberatory education throughout my years of teaching and have struggled to incorporate that into my classroom as one teacher rather than as a whole school approach. Furthermore, I have experienced personal room for growth regarding critical literacy and other social learning theories.

Throughout my three years of teaching, I have experienced and struggled with teaching my former school's literacy curriculum to my fourth and first grade students. The literacy curriculum at the urban school is a scripted curriculum that does not take any social, cultural, or critical factors of students to motivate or engage them in the act of reading or writing into consideration. Throughout my time teaching at this school, I have tried to stray away from said literacy curriculum and implement an entirely English Language Arts block and curriculum based on students' needs and interests. This had presented its own challenges as I felt unqualified to take on such a great task.

The Story of the Research Question

The research idea blossomed during the reading clinic of summer 2022. During this time, I was completing the reading clinic tutoring at Rowan while also taking a class with my professors Dr. Browne and Dr. Lee to brainstorm a research question. During this time, I had found myself in a special situation as I had decided to not return to teaching for the new school year. Therefore, I was reflecting on why I had left teaching, how this could relate to my research, and what I felt strongly about while teaching and even after leaving the profession. I concluded that I felt strongly about how teaching in an urban elementary school classroom has helped me grow professionally and personally, and how it influenced my pedagogy throughout my time as a teacher. With the help from Dr. Browne, the theme of liberation education in elementary school literacy instruction emerged. After some development, the research question emerged: *What occurs when liberation education is integrated in elementary literacy instruction in urban classrooms? What are the implications of liberation education for white elementary school teachers? How do Black elementary school students respond to liberatory literacy instruction?*

How this Study will Unfold

This qualitative research is conceptual. As a teacher researcher, the research is grounded in a literature review guided by the research questions and its sub questions. Furthermore, this teacher research will be influenced by my own teaching experiences as a white teacher in a majority Black and African American urban school. Following this first chapter, the thesis is organized in four additional chapters. The second chapter will review relevant and updated empirical literature and some seminal works around the

research questions. Chapter three is a look into the conceptual framework and how it relates to the research topic and questions. Lastly, the fourth chapter will highlight major points of the research and its implications for practice and future research.

In order to collect data for this research, I read literature on liberation education, multicultural education, critical pedagogy, constructivism, student motivation, and other theoretical frameworks regarding literacy instruction in the elementary school classroom. Furthermore, I read literature regarding urban schools, student and teacher relationships, and critical race theory as it relates to liberation education and elementary literacy instruction. After reading literature on a variety of theoretical frameworks and other topics that relate to my research problem and question, I am narrowing down three to four primary frameworks that guide this study.

As I am reading and reviewing literature in regard to what happens when liberation education is integrated in literacy instruction in the elementary school classroom, I am collecting data to find answers to my research question and to support my research stance.

Once I have collected data through the literature review, the data will be analyzed by examining if there is evidence to show that liberation education has a positive impact on students and teachers in an elementary school classroom and if there are positive implications on the integration of liberation education in elementary literacy instruction. The analysis will examine patterns and themes that arise and how those relate to the research question.

I am hoping to contribute to the knowledgebase supporting that liberatory instruction has a positive impact on elementary students' academic literacy achievement,

their motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy. Furthermore, I am hoping to find evidence that it allows teachers to challenge their biases and prejudices toward student learning. I am hoping that the data analysis aligns with Freire's stance that "No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption." (Freire, 1970, p.54)

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Liberation Education as Way to Reform

Liberation Pedagogy begins with the understanding of this paradigm by teachers and how it reforms their classrooms into political spaces, and their educational practices into ways to reform schools and students' lives (Underhill, 2021). "With its commitment to community dialogue, cultural analysis and the lived experience of oppression, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is an anthropological critique of education and its possibilities. By engaging with communities through a people-centered pedagogy, Freire exposed how systems of education dehumanise and divide to ensure 'what serves the interest of one group disserves the interest of others (Freire, 1970, p.126) For teachers today, recognizing this power differential as a form of everyday violence when working within the formal educational system, begins with understanding John Dewey's position that education can never be neutral (Dewey, 1916; Apple, 2003) and is the foundation for committed and critically engaged practice" (Underhill, 2021 p. 401).

Vocabulary inspired by Freire's work can inspire and transform pedagogical practices and teacher-student dialogue (Eisner, 2008). For example, the qualitative study of a teacher of philosophy (Lewis, 2012) explores the usage of Freire's vocabulary as fuel to spark students' curiosity and their process of inquiry. Words such as 'fatalism', 'existential weariness', and 'epistemological quest' nudge students to engage in critical pedagogy practices, critical dialogue, and to emerge in deeper curiosity than the simple "I'm just curious, but..." curiosity. Lewis (2012) concludes that it is acceptable and necessary for students to emerge themselves in curiosity to sense the world around them

and to “remain attentive to the pensiveness between students and teachers” (Lewis, 2012, p.43). Furthermore, a study on 12 black, Latina, and Asian American women enrolled in a teacher education program highlight the use of liberating dialogue and vocabulary in relation to Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed and the women’s insights of teachers of color and the importance of critical pedagogy and interracial dialogue (Kohli, 2012). Through an interviewing process in a small group, Kohli (2012) examines the women’s positionality in regard to discrimination, worldviews, race within the workplace, and other paradigms framed by critical pedagogy and Freire’s theory of critical consciousness. Results of the study showed that interracial dialogue helped them in their development as critical educators of multicultural classrooms by sharing experiences and thoughts on ethnicity, language, and self-knowledge and self-pride. One participant, for example, expressed that hearing a perspective different from her own inspired her to want to learn more (Kohli, 2012).

Freire’s liberation pedagogy can be tightly knit to the paradigm of multicultural education as the fusion of Freire’s critical pedagogy approach through reading, interpreting, and addressing issues of multicultural materials can reform educational structures and practices (Akkari, 2001). A qualitative analysis of Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed examined Freire’s ideas within modern society and classrooms and how this relates to the lens of multicultural teaching (Maviglia, 2019). Maviglia (2019) examines the similarities between Freire’s ideas with the perspective of an intercultural teaching approach and concludes that the combination of both paradigms can enable a pedagogical approach that aims to reform educational structures and creating educational spaces that

will “promote dialogue, democracy, peaceful coexistence, starting from the motion of cultures rather than their elimination through assimilation” (Maviglia, 2019, p. 391).

Engaging students in liberatory pedagogy establishes a connection between education, democracy, and a political philosophy that leads to the reformation of society and results in a path to equality (Kohan, 2018). In a qualitative study, researchers examined the relationship between educational practices based on Freire’s paradigm and the evolution of thinking about education as a pathway to reform political, economic, and social movements in Brazil over the years (Nascimento, de Lima, & Ruckert, 2021). With the collection of data through a literature review of bibliographic surveys, researchers observed positive changes in education and progressive development of schools as social institutes based on Freire’s educational practices. Indicators for positive development include an educational shift of a more active role within critical learning and involvement in social matters, the teaching of awareness of cultural and political structures, and the usage of literacy as a method to investigate social, cultural, and economic issues. The researchers conclude their study by highlighting the importance of understanding historical context to become “aware”. “In this sense, education is configured to emancipate the subject through reflection and action on his own reality, since awareness cannot occur without the action of reflecting and the action of acting” (Nascimento, de Lima, & Ruckert, 2021, p. 17). In an essay analyzing Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of liberation, researchers Cortina and Winter (2021) also reiterate the significance of engaging students in Freire’s pedagogy in regard to ‘transforming an unjust world’. Furthermore, the essay highlights the importance of the collaboration between learners and teachers to spark self-liberation (Cortina & Winter, 2021).

Critical Pedagogy and Critical Literacy to Challenge Institutional Systems

Empowering students to think critically about the text they are reading, is an important tool that can be used by teachers to make literacy instruction meaningful (Freire & Shore, 1987). For example, a qualitative study of eight educators (Yousef & Zahra, 2019) explored in what ways critical pedagogy creates emancipatory spaces for preschoolers, kindergarteners, and first graders through the exploration of critical narratives. The results of the focus group study showed that teachers need to counter an authoritarian disposition in education with a different narrative where children are seen as people who construct their own knowledge rather than as empty vessels that are filled by others.

The concepts of critical pedagogy and liberation education as a wheel to help the oppressed fight back to regain lost humanity by teachers, students, and society forming new relationships in which all learn together is discussed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire's idea of Problem-posing Education (1970) transforms students and teachers to become active roles in making critical connections between world problems, dialogue, and acting upon them (Freire, 1970). Hence, knowledge will unbecome being transmitted one-dimensionally (Yousef & Zahra, 2019). An example of undoing such knowledge construct was the critical literacy study on water scarcity and the use of water bottles in a classroom which explores how a critical teaching approach can reshape teachers' literacy pedagogy and involve students in the world around them by questioning their society (Janks, 2014).

In order to take a critical pedagogy approach, implement liberation education into an elementary school classroom to make student learning meaningful, and to construct

knowledge two-dimensionally, diversity needs to be affirmed. “If we believe that all students are capable of brilliance, that they can learn at high levels of achievement, and that the cultural and linguistic resources they bring to school are worthy of respect, affirmation, and solidarity, multicultural education represents a far more principled approach for our schools than does monocultural education” (Nieto, 1992). For example, a quantitative study in a large urban school district sampling 12 elementary schools using the Multicultural Teaching Observation Instrument (MTOI) reported that while teachers seemed overall supportive of all their students and their learning, the integration of students’ culture in daily learning and teaching practices scored lowest scores (Saldana, Hersholt, & Waxman, 1997).

Critical pedagogy serves as practice to help students own their opinions and voice them. It allows them to participate in dialogue with their teacher and explore their own lives. With the creation of such dialogue between teacher and students and the idea of allowing students to critically think, critical pedagogy illuminates all the educational implications of liberation education (Shih, 2018).

Culturally Relevant Education to Achieve Educational Equity

Funds of Knowledge

Culturally Relevant Education connects to the Funds of Knowledge approach to education. According to Funds of Knowledge, educators should value and incorporate all of the home and cultural knowledge students bring to the classroom into instruction, curriculum, and learning opportunities (Hogg, 2012). Like Funds of Knowledge, Culturally Relevant Education emphasizes the idea that “culture” is a “vehicle for learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 161). Not only do culturally relevant teachers

“acknowledge” what students “bring into the classroom,” but they work towards the “incorporation of homes as knowledge resources for curricular development” (La Serna, 2020, p. 402). In their research, Morrison et al. (2008) argue that culturally relevant teachers demonstrated cultural competence through: “reshaping the prescribed curriculum” by allowing students to share resources from home, “building on students’ Funds of Knowledge,” and “encouraging relationships between schools and communities” (p. 437-440). Therefore, when teachers believe in a culturally relevant approach to education, they value each student’s Funds of Knowledge. Students can “critique the knowledge represented in the textbooks” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 162). Literacy teachers need to understand the significance of these types of practices so that they can fully practice Culturally Relevant Education.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, developed by Ladson-Billings (1995b), proposes that educators should approach teaching and learning in a way that dismantles social inequities rather than maintaining norms that objectify learners as “different” based on their diverse backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (1995b) conducted research grounded in sociolinguistics and cultural ecology based on the “long history of African American educational struggle and achievement” (p. 468). In her proposal, Ladson-Billings (1995b) discusses that past research has found that “successful African American students” succeed “at the expense of their cultural and psychosocial well-being” (p. 475). She also notes that she understands her potential bias due to her “vested interests in the African American community” as an African-American woman (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 471). Within her multi-phase research approach, Ladson-Billings

(1995b) worked with eight teachers who were parent-selected and principal-approved over three years (p. 471). Ladson-Billings's qualitative research cycle consisted of ethnographic interviews, observations, and videotaping of the teachers. Finally, in the last phase, the "teachers work[ed] together as a research collective ... to view segments of one another's videotapes" and discuss their findings (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 472). Through the qualitative data and collaborative research-based conversations, Ladson-Billings could identify what made these teachers and students succeed and develop a culturally relevant pedagogy.

The Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy consists of three proponents based on Ladson-Billings's collaborative research. Ladson-Billings (1995b) states, "A theory of CRP would necessarily propose to do three things - produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who can demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order" (p. 474). There are specific actions teachers must take and concepts they must understand to embrace CRP. Firstly, culturally relevant teachers examine their "conceptions of self and others" by believing that all students can be successful, understanding that pedagogy is constantly evolving, viewing themselves as community members and striving to give back to the community, and acknowledging students' background knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 478-479). Secondly, culturally relevant teachers consider how "social relations are structured" by fostering strong social environments through the development of "connected" relationships with students, founding "a community of learners," and "encourag[ing] students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 480). Lastly, culturally relevant teachers address their "conceptions of

knowledge” by viewing knowledge “critically” and understanding it is “not static” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 481). Regarding knowledge, culturally relevant teachers should also be “passionate,” “scaffold” students’ thinking, and utilize numerous forms of assessment (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 481). When teachers hold these beliefs, foster these social environments, and use these knowledge-based practices, they embrace the key principles of CRP which betters society for all, not just those who have been underserved and victimized.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive teaching argues that explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting educational needs of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 1995). Geneva Gay’s literary works highlight educational inequality and argue that culturally responsive pedagogy liberates students by allowing for equal learning opportunities for all students. “The visions, missions, and agendas of multicultural education can be described, [simultaneously], as “borderland” and “transformative”. They are borderland because they speak from within, about, and for the margins (borderlands) of mainstream social and educational policies, procedures, and practices. [...] Consequently, knowledge of, respect for, and promotion of cultural diversity are essential to effective preparation of education for democratic citizenship” (Gay, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, providing pre-service teachers and teacher educators with opportunities to learn and practice culturally responsive pedagogy is of significance. An investigation of undergraduate juniors’ and seniors’ perceptions of their personal and professional readiness for culturally responsive teaching (Moore, Giles, & Vitulli, 2021) concluded that pre-service teachers feel positive and personally ready to teach culturally responsive;

however, professionally do not feel confident enough. They wished that more opportunities to implement culturally responsive teaching would be present in their undergraduate program. Furthermore, a faculty team of three teachers in Australia analyzed graduate teachers and how the 80 graduates draw on their practices as classroom teachers as they make their transitions to teacher education (Diamond, Wescott, & Molloy, 2021).

Like critical literacy, culture serves as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore, teachers using critical pedagogy in their classrooms, also need to incorporate culturally relevant teaching considerations and practices to make student learning meaningful for all students. Such considerations and practices include: all students can be successful, knowledge is not static, capitalizing on students' strengths, and taking responsibility for student success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In her work *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* (1995), Gloria Ladson-Billings describes, "A next step for positing effective pedagogical practice is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities in schools." (p. 469) Therefore, multicultural literature as part of culturally responsive and culturally relevant teaching can influence the literacy achievement of Black students (Walker & Hutchison, 2021). By restructuring the classroom library and using multicultural literature, students' participation in an eighth-grade urban school classroom of 17 African American students was enhanced and their MAP scores were significantly higher (Walker & Hutchinson, 2021).

“Children's talk, inside and outside of the classroom, is a powerful means of furthering their understanding of the world” (Hynds & Rubin, 1988, p.40). Language development and its effects on literacy as well as oral language habits need to be understood in order to use the culturally responsive teaching approach and to teach toward educational equity (Heath, 1983). In an ethnographic study focused on children in two different communities, one predominantly white working-class neighborhood and one predominantly Black working-class neighborhood, deep cultural differences arise that are traced back to the children’s language development in each of their communities (Heath, 1983). However, language diversity in the classroom is suppressed due to the inequity within the classroom and schools and the imbalance of marginalized students to white teachers (Delpit, 2000). Therefore, addressing language diversity in the classroom is important to culturally responsive teaching. Teachers need to support students’ cultures through their language and integrate the language they bring from their personal lives into the language conducted inside the classroom (Delpit, 2000).

With the shift to multicultural education and the need for culturally responsive teaching, the question arises: are preservice teachers prepared to teach? In their research study, Alicia L. Moore, Rebecca M. Giles, and Paige Vitulli (2021) examined how prepared graduates are to work with diverse students, personally and professionally. In their study *Prepared to Respond? Investigating Preservice Teachers’ Perceptions of their Readiness for Culturally Responsive Teaching*, they collected data from junior and senior students majoring in Elementary and Special Education using their prepared Culturally Responsive Teaching Readiness Scale (CRTR). As they examined the scale, Moore, Giles, and Vitulli concluded that preservice teachers are made aware of cultural diversity

during the program and have positive attitudes toward CRE (personal readiness) but feel a lack of opportunity to develop their professional readiness. Therefore, the study concludes that CRE continues to challenge teacher educators (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) and that collaboration in preparing CRE for preservice teachers is vital (Moore, Giles, & Vitulli, 2021).

Professional readiness for multicultural education is further explored in *Stories That Teachers Tell: Exploring Culturally Responsive Science Teaching* by Jamie Wallace, Elaine V. Howes, Arthur Funk, Sean Krepski, Maya Pincus, Susan Sylvester, Kin Tsoi, Caity Tully, Raghida Sharif, and Samantha Swift (2022). Through observations, conversational interviews, and meeting notes, their empirical study implicated that CRE can translate into science classrooms by using your experiences as a teacher as they apply to class material through specifically storytelling. However, this skill also continued to grow their expertise in CRE over several years of teaching (Wallace, 2022).

Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (1995b) discusses a potential reform to pre-service educator coursework, “rather than add on versions of multicultural education ... that serve to exoticize diverse students as ‘other,’ a culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 483). Houchen (2013) argues, “professional development practice could provide teachers with the structure, knowledge, and access needed to solve problems arising within their own domains to the benefit of their local community and student population” (Houchen,

2013, p. 110). Educators at all levels, pre-service, novice, and veteran, need training and education in these frameworks to implement them with fidelity.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is a necessary component of educating and learning. It is an ongoing mission that requires meaningful research applications and thoughtful guidelines for its implementation. When teachers are given the opportunities to reflect on the idea of multiculturalism and cultural relevance in their curriculum, progress can be made in this pursuit of equity in education. In their book titled *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*, Paris and Alim (2017) take on the questions, “What is the purpose of schooling?” and “What is the purpose of schooling in pluralistic societies?” and designed a stance to reorganize discussions and foster logical outcomes based on the essential need for positive change (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 3). They see CSP as an integral part of schooling experiences. In their work with CSP, Paris and Alim (2017) seek to inform education systems and influence curriculum designers that equity must be at the heart of all teaching and learning. They believe that “equity and access can best be achieved by centering the dynamic practices and selves of students and communities of color in a critical, additive, and expansive vision of schooling” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 3). CSP is necessary for the betterment of a society built initially on values of freedom and equality. “Instead of being oppressive, homogenized forces, CSP asks us to reimagine schools as sites where diverse heterogeneous practices are not only valued, but *sustained*” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 3).

Student Engagement through Multiliteracy Pedagogy

Moving past traditional reading and writing instruction and toward multiliteracies and new literacies is of importance when integrating liberation education in elementary school literacy instruction. Liberation education calls for a shift away from the industrial model of school and toward a more constructivist approach for students to find a more active way of thinking to construct their own meaning of the world around them. In *Towards a New Learning: The Scholar Social Knowledge Workspace, In Theory and Practice* (2013), Cope and Kalantzis promote this new age of learning by proposing seven principles shaping more meaningful learning for all students. In an early childcare after-school program research, students and teachers partook in a makerspace project about ocean conservation and water scarcity. Through maker literacies, materials, and playmaking, they discover that the pursuit of learning is of greater importance than the outcome (Burke & Crocker, 2020). They were given the opportunity to create a third space to aid their emotional connections and responsibility with a community-based topic, hence, liberating them to act.

Preparing pre-service teachers to use new approaches of learning through the use of multiliteracies and new literacies is important in order for them to then appropriately use technology and share their understanding with their students (Luke, 2000). This was achieved in a study through project-based learning across different subject areas including reading, writing, art, and music. Pre-service teachers explored cross-curricular teaching while using multiliteracies, thinking creatively and critically (Sefton, Smith, & Tousignant, 2020). The study concluded that there were challenges of conducting project-based learning over different subject matters but that it allowed for pre-service teachers to

challenge their skills and prepare for multimodal teaching. Multiliteracies pedagogy and new literacies pedagogy preparation for pre-service teachers also serves as a tool for pre-service teachers to discover diversity and socio-cultural understanding by engaging in multimodal texts (Castro-Garces, 2021).

Conclusion

Existing empirical studies and educational articles show the positive impacts on teachers' professional development by challenging them to learn and challenge themselves using new critical pedagogies that move away from a teacher-direct learning approach. Furthermore, literature shows the positive effects of students' learning through pedagogies that emancipate them from institutional stigmas and instead tries to achieve educational equity and access for all students. Shih's empirical study explores the influence of Freire's life experiences on the development of his idea of liberation education (Shih, 2018). While there is a variety of literature on the importance of critical pedagogy and critical literacy, culturally responsive teaching in literacy, multiliteracies pedagogy, and new literacies pedagogy in the elementary school classroom, there are a limited number of studies on liberation education implemented in elementary literacy instruction. Therefore, it is vital to analyze the existing empirical studies on the educational approaches framing liberation education in elementary literacy in addition to the studies about liberation education itself to conclude answers to the research question.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Frameworks

This research is guided by a variety of major lenses and theories that work together to answer the research questions that ask, the main theory shaping the research question is the social learning lens as liberation education falls under this lens. In addition to liberation pedagogy, critical pedagogy, critical literacy, critical race theory, social constructivism theory, social-cultural theory, and sociolinguistic theory work together under the social learning lens. In addition to the social learning lens, the cultural lens furthermore guides this research study. Under the cultural lens, the theories including multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy work together with other theories to answer the research question. Lastly, the affective lens connects to the other lenses to answer the research question of this study. The affective lens theories include student motivation, student engagement, and student self-efficacy. While all these different educational theories somehow tie to liberation education, the four educational approaches tied closest to it and discussed in the literature review are *culturally responsive pedagogy*, *critical pedagogy*, and *multiliteracies and new literacies pedagogy*.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Successful teaching requires planning, time-management skills, classroom management skill, pedagogical methodology, and the mastery of content knowledge. These skills and practices contribute to the classroom environment and affect student learning. This is a given. Nevertheless, to be an effective teacher, educators are fully

prepared when practicing culturally responsive teaching. Explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting the needs of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 1995). Teachers can support all students if they a) acquire detailed and information about the specific ethnic groups in their classrooms, b) learn about the cultural values and traditions among ethnic groups that they teach, and c) acquire knowledge of the contributions of different ethnic groups to a wide variety of disciplines. These are the pillars of creating cultural responsiveness in classrooms and supporting students of all backgrounds. It must be located, learned, and woven into the preparation programs of teachers and classroom instruction.

Culturally responsive teaching is action-oriented and demonstrates high expectations (Gay, 1995). It uses imaginative strategies to create a successful learning environment where diverse learners can thrive. Additionally, cross-curricular communications involve careful teacher preparation programs that address communication styles of ethnic groups so teachers can be informed and understanding of cultural differences and how they function in their classrooms. *Multicultural communication competency*, the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across a variety of cultural contexts, is an important goal and component of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 1995).

Critical Pedagogy

Concerns about dehumanization and oppression in society have led to the idea of a critical pedagogy approach in the classroom. When speaking of the idea of dehumanization, Freire distinctively talks about people that have turned domination over others into a desirable object. Conversely, the oppressed are the marginalized people

within society that are the healthy core of humanity needing to now integrate with this flawed society when they should, instead, fear not, and challenge the oppression that they have been placed in (Freire, 1970). Freire sees this as a struggle that needs to be overcome within a variety of social justice topics including the educational setting.

Critical pedagogy proposes a teaching approach that helps teachers and students to build a new relationship with each other to overcome the idea of the oppressor and oppressed and, furthermore, emancipate themselves from the confines of societal ideas. “The pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization. Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man or woman who emerges is a new person, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all people. Or to put it another way, the solution of this contradiction is born in the labor which brings into the world this new being no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 48-49).

Through the posing of a societal problem, students and teachers, together expose challenges, feel an obligation to act upon the problem, and engage in active comprehension and awareness of the problem and its challenges. With this active participation of posing problems and acting upon them by reflecting, students and teachers are engaged in making personal connections and thinking critically which will, then, lead them to want to commit to solving the problem. Once commitment is affirmed, more problems are being posed, having students and teachers fully engage in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970).

Dialogue is one tool that helps to engage in this active cycle of problem posing education. Dialogue helps students and teachers to become active participants in the learning process by reflecting and thinking critically. It is vital that the teacher takes charge in this to empower students to think beyond the margins and engage in critical thinking about themselves, their classmates, and their classroom in relation to society (Freire & Shor, 1987). Critical Literacy (discourse) is another tool to utilize to empower students to think about how language and written text are linked to power and struggle (Street, 1993). “A discourse is a sort of ‘identity kit’ which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions in how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (Gee, 1996, p. 526). This also applies to *multicultural communication competency* (Gay, 1995), understanding discourse across cultures, and *multiliteracies and new literacies*, making sense of digital media and multimodal texts (Gee, 1996).

Multiliteracies and New Literacies Pedagogy

“If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, one could say that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, & Gee, 1996, p. 60). Multiliteracies pedagogy ensures students’ learning and designing social futures by moving past traditional reading and writing instruction and towards multimodal texts (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, & Gee, 1996). New literacy pedagogy helps students evolve alongside new literacies such as digital literacy, media literacy, or social media literacy by learning how to decode a diversity of literacies (Luke, 2000). With the incorporation of these social learning approaches, student learning

shifts to a new age of learning in which teachers encourage students to construct their own knowledge through actively engaging in multiliteracy discourse (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013).

Connections between Frameworks & Liberation Education in Literacy

Each of the four educational pedagogies are connected through the emphasis of the student as the active learner. Oppression and freedom are features of self-knowledge and the human understanding of history, culture, and society; therefore, students need to actively participate in their learning experiences (Freire, 1970). “For the oppressed, as individuals and as a class, to discern the truth of their nature, identities, and situation requires the achievement of a kind of knowledge that reaches behind the way things are to grasp the way things came to be” (Glass, 2001, p. 18). Liberation education allows students on a path to critically thinking and developing knowledge of themselves as beings, as well as others around them and the society that frames each individual (Freire, 1970). Culturally responsive pedagogy, critical pedagogy, multiliteracies and new literacies are tools that support students in this constructivist learning approach.

Furthermore, each pedagogy focuses on the need for the teacher to empower students in their learning. Educators need to be prepared to understand the experiences of their students to engage in their own critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1985). Therefore, pre-service teacher courses and professional development should help teachers develop in multicultural pedagogy and the use of technologies (Luke, 2000). “[...] critical educators need to develop a discourse that can be used to interrogate schools as ideological and material embodiments of a complex web of relations of culture and power, on the one

hand, and as socially constructed sites of contestation actively involved in the production of lived experiences on the other” (Giroux, 1985, p. 23).

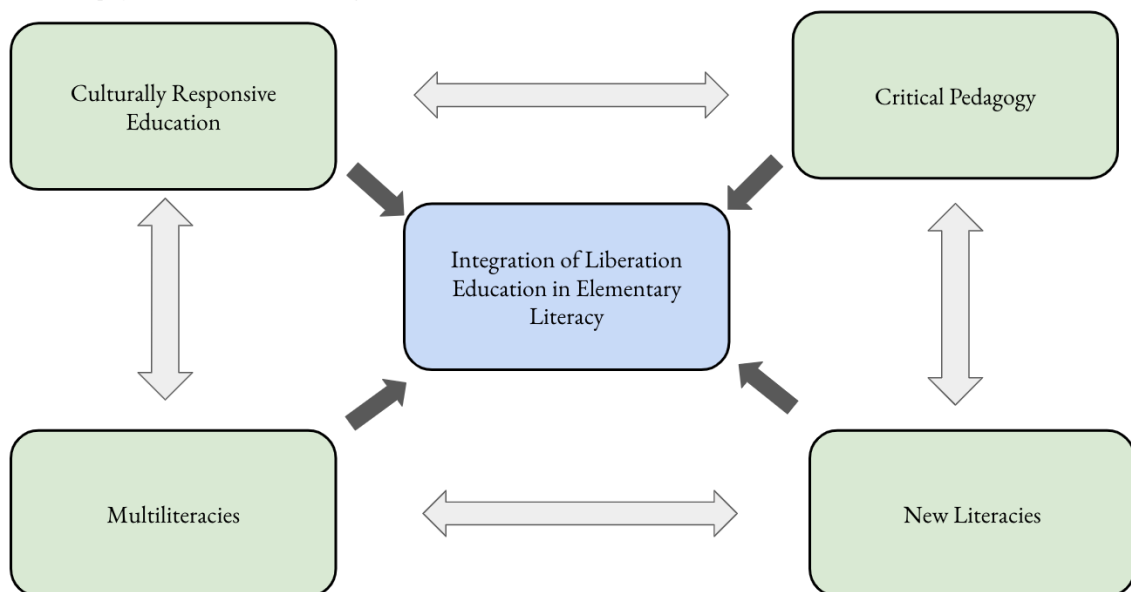
Lastly, each pedagogy also focuses on the use of literacy to effectively engage students in their learning. Multiliteracies is the usage of multimodal texts such as word and picture. New Literacies include the usage of digital texts in various forms. Critical Pedagogy is made possible using critical literacy, and culturally responsive teaching can be achieved through the use of multicultural literacy.

Through the symbiotic connections of the four pedagogies and the combined usage of them, liberation education is integrated in the elementary literacy classroom.

(Figure 1) “People confront and negotiate the everyday world using a diversity of literacies with which to decode the multiple and densely layered environment of symbolic and iconic, cultural and social semiotic meaning systems” (Luke, 2000, p. 429).

Figure 1

Mind Map of Liberation Education Integration



A Conceptual Framework

Data from the literature review suggest that approaches such as culturally responsive teaching, critical pedagogy, and the use of multiliteracies and new literacies support liberation education in elementary school classrooms. Specifically, literacy plays a key role in teaching each approach, and therefore, achieving liberation education. Seminal works by Sonia Nieto (1991), James Paul Gee (1996), and Carmen Luke (2000) discuss the importance of literacy and discourse. It is through each respective literacy that culturally responsive teaching, the use of multiliteracies, and new literacies, as well as critical pedagogy, transform into meaningful teaching approaches. Teachers should select literary materials that will engage students in meaningful engagement with the text. Meaningful learning for all students allows for engagement in critical thinking in regard to themselves, their classmates, their school, and their society, ultimately leading to freedom for all students. The recurring theme of literacy is important in regard to the research question of what happens when liberation education is implemented in the elementary literacy classroom in an urban school setting.

Importance of Literacy & Discourse

The empirical studies reviewed in this research are findings of what happens when students engage in liberation education through literacy. Yousef & Zahra (2019) explore the positive impact of critical narrative for elementary school students. Through critical literacy, students are able to construct their own knowledge. Janks (2014) explores how critical literacy can reshape how students see the world around them and question it, and Walker & Hutchinson (2021) describe the positive impact on student

achievement in literacy through culturally responsive teaching and the use of multicultural literature.

Importance of Teacher-Student Dialogue

In addition to the importance of literacy, the studies also discuss how two-dimensional dialogue within the respective pedagogies have a positive impact on teachers and students. In his study, Shih (2018) examined how dialogue between students and teachers allows students to think critically and construct knowledge, and teachers to actively participate in their students' learning. Hynds & Rubin (1988) as well as Heath (1983) furthermore explore the importance of teacher-student dialogue through the perspective of language acquisition and development within and outside of the classroom. Both studies conclude that language diversity needs to be addressed by celebrating and integrating outside language into the classroom rather than suppressing it and making students feel threatened to use language as a tool. Lisa Delpit (2000) ties the importance of teachers supporting language diversity within the classroom to Freire's idea of liberation education. She describes, "Individuals can learn the "superficial features" of dominant discourses, as well as their more subtle aspects. Such acquisition can provide a way both to turn the sorting system on its head and to make available one more voice for resisting and reshaping an oppressive system. This is the alternative perspective I want to give to teachers of poor children and children of color, and this is the perspective I hope will end the paralysis and set teachers free to teach, and thereby to liberate. When teachers are committed to teaching all students, and when they understand that through their teaching change can occur, then the chance for transformation is great" (Delpit, 2000, p.166).

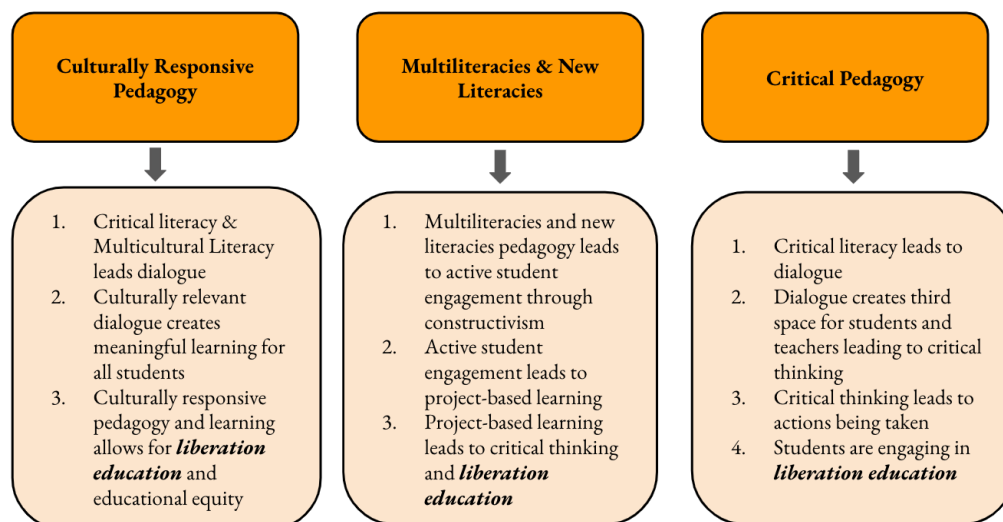
Importance of Project-Based Learning

Next, the empirical studies highlighted how project-based learning helps students think critically and emancipate themselves by constructing their own knowledge. The study conducted by Burke & Crocker (2020) concludes that project-based learning is significant in itself as the pursuit of learning takes forefront. Furthermore, Sefton, Smith, & Tousignant (2020) explore the positive impacts of project-based learning around multiliteracies on pre-service teachers growing an understanding of diversity and socio-cultural issues.

Figure 2 shows the theoretical process of how each pedagogical approach leads to liberation education through the above-mentioned themes: literacy (discourse), two-dimensional dialogue (teachers-students), and project-based learning. Each respective learning lens serves as a tool for educational equality and equity for all students by critically examining and understanding society.

Figure 2

Process of Liberation Education through Different Channels



Importance of Teacher Preparation

Liberation education only occurs when a teacher plays an active role in not just teaching but participating in learning. Teachers take part in the two-dimensional transaction with students through problem-posing pedagogy (Freire, 1970) Several studies highlight the importance of proper pre-service preparation and professional development for teachers in regard to the educational frameworks tying liberation education together. The study by Moore, Giles, and Vitulli (2021) measured that pre-service teachers generally feel personally ready to teach culturally responsive but wished for more opportunities to implement teaching practices. Studies by Diamond (2021), Moore (2021), Houchen (2013), Luke (2000), Sefton (2020), and Wallace (2022) discuss the importance of teacher preparation and professional development and conclude that while teachers draw on their personal and classroom experience to engage in liberatory classroom practices, they need to be allowed more opportunities to develop their professional readiness. Such opportunities can include but are not limited to observations of other teachers, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, and practice activities inside a classroom with students. It can be concluded that, similarly to students' positive impacts of project-based learning, teachers also advance their readiness through such learning.

Empowering Students & Promoting Equity

It is vital for teachers and schools to empower their students in their learning and promote access and equity for all students to achieve liberatory education. Nieto's ethnography (1992) allows her to conclude that if educators believe that their students are capable of high achievement and make them feel affirmed and respected, schools will be

more successful serving all students. Studies such as the one by Saldana, Hersholt, and Waman (1997) support that teachers are generally supportive of their students' culture and diversity and that with the integration of culturally responsive teaching, students' test scores rise. Educators including Gay, Delpit, and Heath stress the importance of teachers supporting and empowering their students by affirming their culture, diversity, and language. Furthermore, literature by Cope and Kalantzis (2013) and Burke and Crocker (2020) propose empowerment of students and the promotion of educational equality through the use of multiliteracies and multimodal learning. Generally, it can be concluded that a transition away from traditional reading and writing instruction and toward pedagogies that embrace, respect, and affirm students will allow for a shift in Freire's imbalance of the oppressor and oppressed (Freire, 1970).

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Summary

There is a strong body of literature, including seminal works and empirical studies, on the importance of critical pedagogy and critical literacy, culturally responsive teaching in literacy, multiliteracies pedagogy, and new literacy pedagogy in the elementary school classroom. Throughout this research, I have concluded that such pedagogies are important frameworks relating to Freire's concept of Liberation Education. Therefore, it was vital to analyze literature on liberation education and related frameworks to find answers to my research question: What occurs when liberation education is integrated in elementary literacy instruction in urban classrooms? What are the implications of liberation education for white elementary school teachers? How do Black and African American elementary school students respond to liberatory literacy instruction?

As mentioned above, based on this conceptual study, it can be concluded that culturally responsive teaching, critical pedagogy, and liberation education are symbiotically linked. Literacy, dialogue, and project-based learning emerge as the three main practices that support liberatory pedagogy. Furthermore, multiliteracy and new literacy pedagogies are a necessity for students to effectively navigate through 21st century multimodality and engage in reading, discussions, and action driven learning that is grounded in them constructing knowledge for themselves and asking questions about the world around them.

Next, an examination of the related literature showed that pre-service teacher preparation and continued professional development plays a key role in successfully equipping teachers with a toolbox to enact culturally responsive teaching, critical pedagogy, and multiliteracies pedagogy.

Lastly, the research suggested how liberatory teaching practices lead to student empowerment, engagement, and student achievement by creating equal opportunities for all students, thus reforming educational practices and policies.

Limitations of Study

Throughout this research process, it was difficult to find any explicit literature on the impact of liberation education on white teachers. However, some literacies highlighted the power struggles between white teachers and marginalized students. For example, *Other People's Children* (2000) explores language diversity in the classroom and how it is often ignored due to the dynamics of white teachers and students of color (Delpit, 2000). Additionally, there was research on the importance of giving pre-service teachers opportunities to practice culturally responsive and critical pedagogies. However, there was no distinction between white and non-white teachers.

Secondly, the study did not bring forth any direct mention about liberation education in elementary literacy. However, research around related frameworks support the positive effects of liberatory education in literacy, specifically for students of color. Specifically, Walker and Hutchinson's (2021) study showed how multicultural literacy improved middle school students' participation and test scores improved. It can generally be concluded that critical pedagogies in elementary literacy can have positive impacts; however, the research showed limitations on the emphasis on elementary classrooms.

Lastly, the main limitation of this study is that the research question and the sub questions would lend itself to an empirical study conducted by a teacher researcher. Being able to study each question in an actual urban elementary literacy classroom would allow for detailed data findings and analysis. This literature review only offers a glimpse into the effects of liberation education on literacy teachers and students in an urban elementary school based on existing studies, other literature reviews, and seminal pieces.

Implications for Teachers & Practice

This research highlights the shift away from traditional teaching practices and towards the incorporation of pedagogies that frame liberation education in elementary school classrooms and other grade levels. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be ready and prepared for teaching through cultural, critical, and social lenses. Thus, teacher readiness programs and professional development should not just discuss these pedagogical frameworks but also allow teachers for opportunities to practice inside classrooms, reflect on their personal experiences and its relations to each framework, and support space for teachers to share and learn from each other. *Some critical thinking on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and its educational implications* is a great example of reflection on personal readiness (Shih, 2018), while *Stories That Teachers Tell* exemplifies how professional readiness in teachers can be built (Wallace, 2022). With their personal experiences, professional preparedness, and active participation in emancipatory classroom practices, teachers and educators will create a learning environment that promotes educational equality and equity by opposing historical power structures, thus promoting educational reform.

Implications for Future Research

Based on the limitations of this study, there is space for teacher researchers to conduct empirical studies on the impact of liberation education in an urban elementary school classroom, specifically in literacy. Furthermore, there is space for teacher researchers to conduct empirical studies on the impact of liberation education on white teachers, specifically white teachers teaching in urban schools. Lastly, educators should continue to track and analyze data on student achievement, engagement, and motivation of students of colors that are being taught through liberatory pedagogy in literacy compared to traditional literacy practices.

Conclusion

Paul Freire introduced the concept of *Liberation Education*, also called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in 1970 with hopes to shed light on inequalities and struggles within society. He specifically pointed out the power struggle between oppressors and oppressed. He argued that his idea of pedagogy of the oppressed would reshape society as he knew it to create social justice (Freire, 1970) Since Freire's seminal work, other educational theorists have published their works to reshape education to support equality and equity for all students. Such theorists include Sonia Nieto, Lisa Delpit, Geneva Gay, Ira Shore, Henry Giroux, Bill Cope, James Paul Gee, and Gloria Ladson-Billings. Each of these educators have written on the importance of liberatory education through different pedagogies to reform education and society.

Based on a wide range of empirical studies conducted by educators and teacher researchers, there is strong evidence that liberation education in the elementary literacy classroom has a positive impact on students, including students in urban classrooms, and

specifically students of color. There is evidence that students have higher engagement in learning and care more about their academic success when participating in literacy practices and texts that promote students' cultures, diversity, language, as well as allow for critical thinking. Students become critical thinkers who reflect on their learning and how it relates to society by engaging in critical literacy which poses problems and asks how problems can be solved by taking actions.

Through the use of critical literacy, multicultural literature, and multiliteracies, students and teachers engage in meaningful dialogue and active participation - thinking and reflecting on the beliefs and perspectives they possess on a variety of values. Together, students and teachers create a more liberating learning space that translates into their environments outside of classrooms and school walls. Students are empowered by the support of their teacher and the supportive space that is being created through liberatory practices. Student engagement and motivation increase leading to higher student achievement.

While liberation education has been promoted over more than 5 decades, and there being plenty of research promoting the positive effects of critical pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and the usage of multiliteracies to help students navigate language and its meaning, the pedagogy of the oppressed seems to still be a progressive approach to teaching. Freire argues, "A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of recreating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover

themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement” (Freire, 1970). Therefore, it will be important teachers and educators are properly prepared and trained for such pedagogies and become active participants in reforming educational policies and practices, ultimately, becoming advocates for educational equity and their students. To conclude, this study has shaped my teaching practices by guiding me toward a more culturally inclusive and equitable understanding of teachers and students as learners within the classroom and society.

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