

Dissertation Title: Learning to Question the World: Navigating Critical Discourse around Gender and Racial Inequities and Injustices in a Second and Third Grade Classroom

Candidate: Chris Hass

This qualitative study, situated within a critical theory frame (Friere, 1970; Grant, Brown, & Brown, 2016; hooks, 1994; Kincheloe, 2008), explored the ways elementary students engaged in and constructed meaning from critical classroom discussions exploring inequities and injustices as related to gender and race. The questions guiding the study were: (1) How do my students construct meaning during class discussions regarding issues of equity and injustice around gender and race?, (2) What role do I play in constructing, shaping, and maintaining opportunities for students to create meaning during these discussions?, and (3) What tensions do my students encounter when engaging in discussions about gender and race? The participants for the study were second and third grade students. Data sources included class recordings, photographs, student work, field notes, interviews, lesson plans, and my reflective teaching journal. Constant comparative approach (Glaser, 1965) was used to analyze the data. Findings demonstrate carefully developed opportunities for critical classroom discourse supports students to observe, question, and critique oppressive social practices enacted upon marginalized communities in the United States. The tensions emerging from a diversity of perspectives and relationships within the classroom complicated these discussions while also providing data from which new curriculum could be developed. The broader implications from this study propose a need for classroom teachers to create spaces within their classrooms where students can learn to not only question the world but develop an ability and willingness to engage in critical discourse alongside others in an effort to create an informed citizenry willing to confront issues of

oppression (Fifer & Palos, 2011; hooks, 1994; Long, Souto-Manning, & Vazquez, 2015; Macedo, 2006).