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Empowering elementary teachers to explore critical literacy through drama-based instruction

Courtney J. Jensen

University of Northern Iowa

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Empowering elementary teachers to explore critical literacy through drama-based instruction

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The project concludes with teachers creating lesson plans based on their professional learning, and opportunities to share these implementation experiences and form action plans for their next steps following the workshops.

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EMPOWERING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS TO EXPLORE CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH DRAMA-BASED INSTRUCTION

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Division of Literacy Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Education

Courtney J. Jensen
The University of Northern Iowa
December 2016
This Project by: Courtney J. Jensen

Title: Empowering Elementary Teachers to Explore Critical Literacy Through Drama-Based Instruction

Has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the Master of Arts in Education

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Abstract

This research project comes in the form of a professional development project combining the theories of critical literacy for elementary students and drama as a form of arts integration in literacy instruction. The project consists of six workshop sessions intended for willing elementary school teachers looking to expand their thinking around literacy instruction. Participants experience introductions to both drama as an instructional approach by learning three specific strategies, including tableau, character interviews, and writing-in-role. They also learn about the basic elements of critical literacy by engaging in self-exploration and reflection, along with participating in research-based learning exercises intended to extend individuals' thinking about what critical literacy means for educators. The professional development combines these two areas of literacy learning by presenting opportunities for teachers to become the learners and experience a social issues children's book, *In Our Mothers' House* by Patricia Polacco (2009). While engaging in this children's literature, teachers experience what their students might experience by forming tableau, answering character interview questions, and writing through the viewpoint of characters from the text. Critical literacy prompts are provided throughout the interactive read-aloud of Polacco's (2009) text about a family with two mothers and adoptive children, who experience oppression from neighbors because of their family's makeup. The project concludes with teachers creating lesson plans based on their professional learning, and opportunities to share these implementation experiences and form action plans for their next steps following the workshops.

Key words: critical literacy, drama, tableau, elementary, literacy
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Introduction

Elementary classrooms today are filled with children of all different kinds of backgrounds (Leland & Harste, 1994; Vitulli, Santoli, & Fresne, 2013). These students bring a variety of life experiences to the classroom and come from many types of homes, religions, socioeconomic classes, family structures, ethnicities and heritages (Rothwell, 2011; Shosh, 2005). In addition to the diverse makeup of elementary schools, society is filled with controversy, strife, and difficult decisions and events. Because of the complex world we live in, today's generation of young children need opportunities to explore issues of critical literacy in the safe environment of their classroom, and they need to develop these critical literacy skills through engaging and empowering methods of learning (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2013; Rozansky & Santos, 2009). Drama-based learning experiences can provide this outlet for children and teachers as they begin to shift their perspective to one of a critical literacy mindset (Long & Gove, 2003; Medina & Campano, 2006). In order to empower students to become critically literate, teachers must first become educated on the meaning of critical literacy and instructional strategies that will function as the lens through which elementary students interact with complex issues (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013).

Critical literacy is a way of reading and interacting with the world around us through all kinds of text (Freire, 1970). This area of study involves actively interacting with texts in order to question issues of power, become aware of injustices, and be called to social action (Freire; Long & Gove, 2003; Stribling, 2008). For example, Hansen (2012) describes elementary students constructing persuasive writing pieces to advocate for world-wide changes they believed should take place. Kuby (2013) acted as a critical
literacy facilitator by encouraging her primary students to challenge the power imbalance taking place on their very own playground during summer school. These are just a couple examples of how critical literacy may be examined within the reading and writing classroom for elementary students.

Three big areas within critical literacy include examining texts to analyze author’s voice and multiple perspectives, using literacy to explore broad social issues, and using students’ lived experiences as a tool for incorporating literacy instruction (Janks, 2013; Stribling, 2008). These three areas of critical literacy are illustrated through Long and Gove’s 2003 study, which explored the use of literature circles and engagement strategies that encouraged fourth-grade students to become stronger in the area of questioning important issues based on rich literature. Long and Gove’s (2003) research suggests that when children are provided with support and the opportunity, their ability to question important issues and make emotional connections to the texts naturally led to critical literacy experiences (Long & Gove, 2003). This study, along with others that will be discussed throughout this paper, call on educators to question the belief that young children may not be prepared to interact with real-world issues that adults often consider inappropriate or too mature for children.

Long and Gove’s (2003) study is one of many examples that point out the importance of a high level of student engagement in order for critical literacy practices to be meaningful. In order for students to be highly engaged, students must learn through an appropriate learning mode that best fits their specific individual needs (Leland & Harste, 1994). Drama-based instruction is a field comprised of multi-modal learning that integrates visual, auditory, and kinesthetic forms of learning, therefore enabling as many
students as possible to be involved in the learning process (Cawthon, Dawson, & Ihorn, 2011; Kelner & Flynn, 2006; Rose, Parks, Androes, & McMahon, 2000; Shosh, 2005). Throughout the dramatic process, young children transform into active participants that possess ownership and control of their learning due to the amount of choice they are given, which sets the stage for the empowering and student-centered aspects of critical literacy (Janks, 2014; Kuby, 2013; Shosh, 2005). When students become actors in a learning space, they take on a variety of roles in which they are the ones making decisions, instead of being instructed explicitly by a teacher (Cawthon et al., 2011; Medina & Campano, 2006; Rozansky & Santos, 2009). Also, drama requires an all-or-nothing approach because students either are fully participating, or they are not participating at all—it’s nearly impossible to fake participation in this type of learning experience (Edmiston, 2007; Kelner & Flynn, 2006; Mages, 2006). Research suggests that the skill of working in groups is vital for students to possess, and group work can increase students’ ability to engage in learning (Shosh, 2005). Drama encourages collaboration on every level, and critical literacy involves respectfully debating and advocating around difficult social and cultural issues (Cawthon et al., 2011; Janks, 2013). Learning socially helps students take ownership of learning and form connections between the content they learn and real life relationships, leading to more lasting learning. Students today need to learn how to be cooperative individuals who think creatively and critically, which are skills that can be developed through drama-based learning and critical literacy practice.
CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH DRAMA-BASED INSTRUCTION

Review of the Literature

Drama in the Literacy Classroom

Defining drama and its strengths for critical literacy.

Process drama. Drama in the classroom typically takes the form of process drama, an exercise that emphasizes the process of taking on different roles and characters for the sake of learning instead of for the purpose of producing a final creation (Martello, 2001). This means that drama, as a collection of instructional approaches, allows students a highly interactive and complex entry point for exploring difficult social issues that are embedded within critical literacy. Heathcoate (1984) expands upon the definition of process drama by pointing out that drama should not be taught as its own separate content area but used as a vehicle to help learners engage in many different content areas and academic disciplines (Adomat, 2012; Heathcoate, 1984; Kelner & Flynn 2006; Medina & Campano, 2006).

Emotional connection and identity. Drama has the ability to open up the floor for conversations around issues of power and voice (Janks, 2013; Martello, 2001; Medina & Campano, 2006; Stribling, 2008). Several studies have found that drama has provided a safe environment where elementary students feel they can explore difficult issues (Belliveau, 2005; Medina & Campano, 2006; Rozansky & Santos, 2009). Medina and Campano’s (2006) study with 5th grade English language learner students found that participants in the drama process connected emotionally to what they were reading, while performing higher-order thinking skills that may otherwise not have been activated without the use of drama as an instructional strategy. In addition to forming strong connections to text-based issues, drama-based classrooms tend to be inclusive and safe.
environments where questioning and learning are encouraged (Belliveau, 2005; Rozansky & Santos, 2009; Medina & Campano, 2006). Belliveau (2005) examined the use of drama in helping students respond to bullying and problem-solving real-life scenarios they might encounter. The results showed that drama allowed students a space to explore their own attitudes and perceptions in a safe environment because through imagined dramatic role plays, conversations and possible reactions were tried out without consequence (Belliveau, 2005). These conversations allow students to discover, through engaged learning, different positions of power and the concept that no text or idea is neutral (Janks, 2013).

Adomat (2012) explored first-graders' use of drama to develop reading comprehension. The researcher found that these young children were more than willing to go past basic comprehension strategies and into issues of tension through the use of tableau, role play, and hotseating (Adomat, 2012). Adomat (2012) also found that students appeared to examine their own identity in relation to power structures naturally through the use of this style of learning. Both Greenfader and Brouillette (2013) and Medina and Campano (2006) found similar results in their studies with drama and intermediate level ELL students; engaging in drama-based instruction helped students explore their own identity and made their own cultural awareness and background more salient. By helping to understand and reflect on their own identities, students began reflecting on positions of power and made more lasting connections through learning because they could position themselves within the situations they were studying (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Medina & Campano, 2006).
Various learning styles. One of the strengths of drama as an instructional tool is its ability to work in different forms and encompass multi-modal learning (Adomat, 2012; Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Rose, et al. 2000). Leland and Harste (1994) discuss the importance of multi-modal learning and its abilities to reach many students because not everyone learns in the same way. Drama is one approach educators can take to meet the diverse learning needs of students of all ages because it is nonconventional, requires creativity and is kinesthetic in nature (Leland & Harste, 1994). Rose et al. (2000) found that the visual side of learning through drama helped fourth-grade students in their study connect to their reading through visual imagery based acting experiences. In addition to kinesthetic and visual learning associated with drama-based techniques, the combination of multiple learning modes has been shown to be especially powerful for English language learners (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Medina & Campano, 2006). Mages’ 2006 study, focused on cognitive theory as it relates to drama and reading comprehension, found that children who engage in spontaneous play and improvisation led to increased comprehension skills. The ability to learn actively and engage in social learning were also attributes that likely contributed to the student growth in this study (Mages, 2006). These studies show that the characteristics of drama-based instruction have the potential to reach students with a variety of backgrounds, learning styles, and personalities (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Mages, 2006; Medina & Campano, 2006; Rose et al., 2000)

Critical literacy instruction through drama-based strategies.

Tableau and body sculptures. One strategy examined by Adomat (2012), Medina and Campano (2006), and Rozanksy and Santos (2009) is tableau, where students
form frozen pictures with their bodies to kinesthetically create a visual image of a scene for their peers to observe. To form a tableau, students often work in groups to use their bodies to express their understanding of a scene from a story (Adomat, 2012; Medina & Campano, 2006; Rozansky & Santos, 2009). Students may also choose to form a tableau to extend thinking from the literal to the abstract, such as developing an idea about what could happen next, or what they wish or think a character or person should have done differently in a scene (Medina & Campano, 2006; Rozansky & Santos, 2009). Medina and Campano (2006) suggest that tableau can function as a strategy to transition from reading into writing. Medina and Campano’s (2006) study of drama’s impact on fifth grade English language learner students suggests that tableau can be used to promote writing from a character’s point of view, which is a skill that directly lends itself to critical literacy practices. Rozansky and Santos’ (2009) third-graders performed tableaus to create a message from the perspective of oppressed parties, another prime example of critical literacy taking place through the use of drama.

**Hotseating, interviews, and writing in-role.** Adomat (2012) and Medina and Campano (2006) emphasize the use of **hotseating**, a strategy that involves students taking on different roles and being interviewed from that point of view. Hotseating can take the form of learners being interviews as though they are the characters from a text (Kelner & Flynn, 2006). Adomat (2012) shows that students can use this as a springboard for writing in-role, a strategy in students use their experience of becoming someone else through **hotseating** to write from that unique point of view. Shosh (2005)’s high school students also took on the task of writing in-role through the eyes of a character or figure from history in order to take on different points of view and analyze feelings of
characters from their learning. For example, Shosh’s (2005) students wrote as if they were the family members of someone who left to go off and fight in the Civil War. Through the experience of taking on new perspectives, students could dig into the issues of social justice or power imbalances through critical literacy-based dramatic experiences.

Setting the Foundation: What is Critical Literacy?

Defining critical literacy.

“Critical literacy practices lead to the interrogation of the ulterior motives and below-surface ideas of all types of text, including visual, print, digital, and audio” (Ciardiello, 2004, p.138). Critical literacy education is a framework that focuses on empowering students through the questioning and engagement in intricate reading of literature around what may be considered controversial issues that require social action (Janks, 2013). Janks’ critical literacy framework has four dimensions, including power, diversity, access and design/redesign (2013). Janks argues that the four dimensions rely on each other and our job as teachers is to consider how we can empower our students to become active participants in society who work toward change that matters (2013). For example, when Hansen’s (2012) students were writing letters to immigration offices about their peers’ family members who they feel were unfairly detained, they were engaging in critical literacy. Janks (2013) also argues that critical literacy spans multiple content areas because not only is literacy a foundation of all subjects, but by applying a critical literacy perspective, students can more authentically engage in their studies. This means that critical literacy does not take place solely through teaching of the reading and writing core standards; in fact, critical literacy practice opportunities arise authentically in
social studies and science lessons (Hansen, 2012). For example, Hansen’s (2012) students learned about historical figures through informational texts before writing persuasively. Critical literacy can easily be embedded within an interdisciplinary framework to maximize student learning (Janks, 2013).

Freire’s critical literacy explanation includes the mindset that text is much more than words on a page, but instead includes the world around us (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) theorizes that humans become desensitized to the world around them when they become unaware of the events surrounding them. He was one of the first to propose critical literacy as a form of education in which teachers facilitated students’ thinking through the process of becoming more aware of texts all around us and taking action against oppression (Freire, 1970). Through critical literacy education, Freire (1970) proposes that teacher and student learn as partners instead of through an oppressive relationship expressing one of the very imbalances of power that critical literacy practices work to challenge. Since Freire’s (1970) work, many researchers have built upon this thinking and research (Ciardiello, 2011; Janks, 2013; Janks, 2014; Stribling, 2008). Stribling (2008) analyzed literature on critical literacy and summarized three big characteristics of current critical literacy practices: examining texts to analyze author’s voice and multiple perspectives, using literacy to explore broad social issues, and using students’ lived experiences as a tool for incorporating literacy instruction. These major characteristics will be addressed through the use of drama-based instructional strategies.

Wearing the Mask: Drama Meets Critical Literacy

Examples of critical literacy taught through drama

Tableau for oppression. Rozansky and Santos (2009) based their study on
Augusto Boal’s concept of Theatre of the Oppressed (1979) in which adults would enact scenes of situations in which they have experienced oppression. They use their bodies to form a frozen sculpture, similar to a tableau, called an “Image Theatre.” Rozansky and Santos (2009) applied this framework to third-grade students in order to help them build a more critical stance toward literature and social issues. Students acted out different scenarios in which they could imagine being in a situation of oppression, therefore allowing them to talk back and interact with authors, texts, and oppressive figures (Rozansky & Santos, 2009). By dramatizing scenarios related to their reading, children have the chance to begin problem-solving and working toward solutions to social justice problems by experiencing a form of reacting to authors, social figures, ideas, and a variety of texts (Medina & Campano, 2006; Rozansky & Santos, 2009). This experience sparked deep conversations between students as they worked to determine how they would create their Image Theatre, sometimes leading to disagreement and differing opinions on situations through the literature (Rozansky & Santos, 2009). By allowing young children the opportunity to take on new perspectives through dramatic tableau, students could begin to envision the type of action they could take in reaction to these issues of oppression and injustice (Ciardiello, 2011; Freire, 1970; Janks, 2013).

**Writing in-role for immigration.** In Medina and Campano’s 2006 study with fifth-grade English language learners, students interacted with picture books using theater techniques that helped them to make personal connections with the story through the process of imagining reality. Students made connections with the story by acting out scenes and potential scenarios based on the book, *My Diary from Here to There*, (Perez, 2002), which focused on issues surrounding the immigration process (Medina &
Campano, 2006). The students expanded upon their dramatic experiences by writing in-role, in which they wrote as if they were personally experiencing situations related to the text, giving them a voice about issues important to them, which is a key component of critical literacy (Janks, 2013). Students in this study learned more than simply comprehension strategies in this style of learning; they instead made personal connections to texts and felt empowered to take social action toward issues that mattered to them (Medina & Campano, 2006).

**Drama and critical literacy in literature circles.** Long and Gove (2003) explored the use of literature circles with fourth grade students and found that drama-based engagement occurred as a result of their critical literacy conversations. These fourth graders engaged in student-centered literature circles, a strategy in which small group reading is owned by the students as they take on leadership roles to facilitate their own thinking and book-club like conversations around authentic literature. During their literature circle experiences, students found themselves discussing issues of power, social justice, and ways to solve current problems (Long & Gove, 2003). In this setting, acting out scenes and taking on perspectives of oppressed parties through the use of drama transformed a traditional literature circle into a critical literacy experience for these elementary students. Critical literacy can, therefore, take place in a variety of settings, including within small group instruction (Long & Gove, 2003).

**Professional Learning for Critical Literacy through Drama**

**Characteristics of quality professional development.** Quality and effective professional learning for teachers require several important characteristics based on adult learning theory that include: choice in learning, ownership and relevance, social learning,
and opportunities for follow-up and reflection when implementing newly learned practices (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Lin & Ying, 2014; Vitulli et al., 2013; Vogt & Shearer, 2011). Vitulli et al. (2013) described a case study in which an arts integration professional development program was implemented with elementary, secondary and higher education teachers. The professional learning plan proved effective as it included social learning, a chance for educators to collaborate and construct meaning together, and learning was reinforced through individual mentoring (Vitulli et al., 2013). Vitulli and colleagues (2013) found that their study reinforced adult learning theory that an effective learning experience should be more than just a single workshop with no follow-up. Instead there should be multiple experiences for adults to interact with content and ideas along with the opportunity for implementing new ideas and reflecting.

Coaching can be a powerful piece of professional development because teachers can receive feedback and follow through on their professional goals after experiencing a variety of learning opportunities in other settings (Miller & Stewart, 2014; Vogt & Shearer, 2011; Vitulli et al., 2013). Miller and Stewart (2014) argue that coaching, particularly in the area of literacy, can enhance professional learning for teachers. Lin and Ying (2014) studied foreign language teachers in China and found that reflection on current teaching practices and experiences with new learning are key aspects of professional development in teachers. The idea of reflection helps teachers identify not only their strengths, but also areas of their teaching where they are interested in improving their practice (Marzano, 2012). Marzano’s book, Becoming a Reflective Teacher, provides insight into how teachers can focus their reflection around 41 instructional elements focused on best practice to enhance their learning. Marzano’s
(2012) model of differentiated learning for teacher's professional development is an example of the importance of individualizing professional learning for adults.

When learning about critical literacy and arts integration, several important considerations should be made. Vasquez et al. (2013) focus on the importance of teachers reflecting on their own life experiences and identity. These authors claim that teachers must become critically literate beings themselves before they can teach the mindset of critical literacy (Vasquez et al., 2013). This involves becoming vulnerable and reflecting on the ways power and privilege play a role in each teacher's life (Vaquez et al., 2013). Vaquez et al., (2013) also provide examples and strategies for how teachers can learn through this process, which will be discussed later. Stribling (2008) mirrored this thought based on their study, expressing that teachers need to explore texts through a critically literate lens before they begin similar explorations with their students. Ciardiello (2004), however, also points out that teachers need a model for critical literacy and its implementation. Because teachers need guidance and support in beginning a practice that is likely new to them, strong professional development experiences should be a part of their learning (Ciardiello, 2004).

Plan resources.

_A Dramatic Approach to Reading Comprehension._ (Kelner, 2006) is a resource written by Kennedy Center teacher-artist, Lenore Blank Kelner, about strategies that can be used to deepen comprehension skills in elementary students through drama-based instruction. Kelner (2006) describes the arts integration model and provides justification for the use of using drama as a tool to improve reading skills for students. Specific strategies and action steps for implementation are outlined in the book such as how to
help students analyze characters in a text, explore and describe setting, and reflect on reading experiences through writing. Kelner (2006) also provides prompts and teacher scripts to help the process get started.

In Kuby's (2013) book, *Critical Literacy in the Early Childhood Classroom*, the author describes a personal case study in which she tried incorporating critical literacy practices into a summer reading program with 1st grade students. Kuby's (2013) book includes narrative reflection around her own progress toward becoming a critically literate individual and how her personal experiences impacted her identity. The components of critical literacy and theoretical justification for implementing inquiry learning with young children are described, and Kuby (2013) defends the concept that young children are capable of inquiring and exploring their own critical literacy capabilities.

Vasquez, Tate and Harste's (2013) book, *Negotiating Critical Literacies with Teachers*, relates to Kuby’s (2013) as it also describes the importance of *autoethnography* for teachers—the process of learning about one's own identity and how it impacts their teaching. This resource focuses on providing information for exploring critical literacy with teachers to prepare them to explore this new mindset with their students (Vasquez et al., 2013). Vasquez et al. (2013) provide anecdotal examples of critical literacy exploration, along with pedagogical exercises and additional resources that can be used as teachers begin their own journey with critical literacy. They base their ideas on the theory that no text can be considered neutral, and the book focuses on guiding practicing teachers toward that understanding (Vasquez et al., 2013).
Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys’ (2002) article, *Critical Literacy for Novices and Newcomers*, includes two case studies of real teachers as they begin implementing critical literacy practices in their professional environment. The authors describe the difference between novices, those who have learned about critical literacy but are still beginning to try this in their practice, and newcomers, who are completely new to the critical literacy framework (Lewison et al., 2002). The article shows the ways that each teacher illustrates important elements of critical literacy within their practice.

**Summary of Literature Review**

The research on drama-based instruction shows that learning through movement, creativity, and taking on new perspectives has the potential to strongly impact student learning in the areas of literacy (Medina & Campano, 2006; Rozansky & Santos, 2009; Vasquez et al., 2013). In addition to drama as a learning vehicle for basic content learned in schools, drama can also be influential when engaging in critical literacy practices in the classroom (Long & Gove, 2003; Rozansky & Santos, 2009). While these two instructional concepts combine to form quality learning experiences for students, educators who would function as facilitators of this type of learning require quality professional learning to become equipped with tools needed to guide this learning (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011). This project aims to provide a framework for delivering professional development to teachers based on the combination of research in the field on drama-based learning, critical literacy, and quality professional learning for adults.
Methodology

The process of collecting pertinent literature and refining the focus of this professional development project began at the beginning of a three-year masters program in Literacy Education at the University of Northern Iowa in 2014. Building on a collection of trainings and resources as a classroom teacher in an Artful Learning school, I began to explore literature while developing a basic literature review in an Advanced Literacy Studies course about how drama can positively impact literacy instruction. Throughout the masters program, a variety of courses with relevant research, content, and theories that related to this topic helped me to further refine the focus for this project into how several drama-based instructional strategies can enhance critical literacy instruction for beginning teachers of critical literacy. In this section, I will describe the process of building a research base for this project, along with the steps that were taken to develop this professional development project.

Artful Learning Background

Since 2012, I have taught at a public elementary school in Des Moines, Iowa, that is a certified Artful Learning school, which follows the learning model created by Leonard Bernstein. Artful Learning is a concept-based learning model focused on arts integration and the use of inquiry learning. While teaching at this school, many opportunities for professional learning using arts-based skills and strategies were presented to me for use in implementing an Artful Learning classroom environment. Before beginning my teaching career, I had almost no experience in the world of drama and theater. Through the implementation of drama in the classroom in my new position, I saw the power of this teaching method and how it engaged students at a deep level. Over
the past five years, I have participated in countless multimodal teaching professional
development sessions, arts integration learning experiences, Artful Learning unit writing,
and other trainings that enhanced my understanding of drama strategies to enhance core
instruction.

Beginning Research

During my first semester in the Masters in Literacy Education program, our
professor encouraged us to explore an area of literacy of interest to us and develop a basic
literature review of just ten pertinent articles within our topic. While learning how to
process research at the graduate level, along with recognizing some of the existing
research on drama and literacy, I found that this was an area I was very passionate about
developing. My first literature review focused on the general area of drama in the
classroom instead of any specific strategies, along with a general definition of literacy as
I included comprehension, fluency, writing, and speaking and listening in this literature
review. While I knew I would eventually need to narrow this focus, I was excited about
the direction of this introduction to our research for the program, and kept this seed in the
back of my mind as I experienced other learning along the way.

In the following summer learning segment, I participated in an Educational
Research course which informed me of many more strategies for effectively processing
and analyzing research in the field of education. Different types of research were
explored and defined, and this helped me to more deeply understand the research I was
collecting in relation to this topic. Learning how to use Google Scholar, keyword
searches, and strategies for exploring resource sections of useful research articles all
became approaches I would continue to use while collecting research and deciding which pieces to keep and eliminate.

**Introduction to Social Justice**

During a masters course focusing on sociopolitical and multiculturalism in children’s literature, I found my strong passion for critical literacy and engaging in important conversations around social justice with elementary students. In this course, we read a wide range of children’s literature along with research articles that explored issues of misrepresentation and power imbalanced within children’s books. Some of the research we processed also included examples of working with what may be considered controversial issues within literature with young children, including books and lessons that addressed issues of race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and other issues that are often ignored with elementary aged children. The power of this learning was significant to my practice, as I began informally trying elements of critical literacy in my fifth grade classroom. It was during this work that I recognized my passion for integrating the use of controversial topics into learning with elementary students, though I was not sure at the time what approach would be best for this.

In another masters course focusing on curriculum, more learning about critical literacy theory and how to approach this as an education professional was provided. Our cohort experienced this course through a variety of multimodal learning experiences which resonated with me due to my background in arts-based teaching. During this course, I realized that critical literacy and social issues could be examined with young students, as we engaged with Kuby’s (2013) text about her experiences engaging primary grade children in critical literacy. I collected a variety of relevant resources during this
course that are a part of this project, including both Kuby's (2013) work and Vasquez et al., (2013) professional resource on engaging teachers with critical literacy. While deepening my own professional understanding of critical literacy, I began to see how this could be connected to my research down the road in relation to using drama. I set aside the resources we used in this course, planning to use them in some way as I knew I wanted to create a professional development plan using drama-based instruction with critical literacy.

**Professional Development Facilitator**

While in the process of refining my research focus and doing coursework I changed roles in my building, moving from fifth grade classroom teacher to instructional coach. As a professional learning leader in our school, I knew that I wanted to push myself to create a professional development plan for my research project, as it fit in line with my current practice and professional goals. My former principal, facilitator and liaison for most of our Artful Learning and arts integration professional development, encouraged me to branch out of my comfort zone and learn all I could about how to develop effective professional learning for adults.

A summer course focusing on different approaches that might be taken by reading specialists in schools provided resources for implementing effective professional learning for adults. This learning, combined with a full year of implementing a variety of professional development approaches with my colleagues, has helped me to focus on elements of influential learning for adults. While partnering with a new principal during the 2015-2016 school year, I began learning from experience how to plan for and facilitate professional development for an entire staff, small groups and professional
learning communities, and individual teachers. I continue to observe teachers and their responses to professional development to find out what works best for teachers, along with providing follow-up learning and coaching, which is shown to make professional learning more influential and have a lasting impact on professional practice.

Many of the learning approaches used in this professional development plan stem from systems that I have experienced with positive results with our current staff. Several times, we planned sessions for teachers to self-guide their inquiry while presenting a wide range of resources around a topic. In addition to flexible inquiry and learner-centered professional development instead of lecture, our professional development also included frequent opportunities for active participation for teachers and strategies they could prepare to implement by experiencing the strategies themselves. We also focused on allowing time for planning action steps is important for implementation, along with encouraging frequent reflection and a growth mindset and individualized follow-up through coaching conversations and professional learning community goal-setting.

Creating The Project

The previous experiences that have been shared illustrate the journey that has influenced the focus of this research project. Throughout these experiences, I continued to narrow down the resources needed for the literature review for this project with the help of my advisor and second reader, along with feedback from colleagues. With their feedback, I was able to narrow down the resources that aligned with the research question about how elementary teachers can use drama-based instructional strategies to implement critical literacy. I chose to focus on just three approaches that use drama to engage in critical literacy through the in-depth look at one children's book, *In Our Mothers' House*.
(Polacco, 2009). I chose to focus on tableau, writing-in-role, and character interviews based on the alignment of these strategies with the elements of critical literacy, as critical literacy involves taking multiple perspectives and acting on social issues. These three strategies provide a launching point for critical literacy conversations, with a social issues book that can provide opportunities for critical conversations.

For each of the six workshop sessions, learning goals for the entire program along with smaller learning targets for each specific session are included to focus the learning for participants. This is an example of modeling best practice and providing rationale and purpose for the learning for each session. To begin creating the plan and collecting materials that fit with each session’s goals, I began by writing these learning goals and separating the targets into six separate sessions. I created six slideshow presentation documents to begin to organize my outlines for each session, which is the approach I take now as I lead most of our building’s whole-group professional development currently. Using this slideshow approach helped me to see the overarching plan at a glance, and through the development of these I was able to specifically expand upon different learning targets where necessary and add appropriate materials or learning activities as needed. At the end of each workshop, the focus for the next meeting is previewed to show connections between the work being done at each session.
The Project

This professional development program will take place within six workshops for elementary teachers in both the primary and upper grades. The workshops will build upon each other and begin with introductions to the research behind critical literacy and drama-based instruction. This program would ideally take place across the span of a school year in order to allow opportunities for participants to apply new learning and bring back questions and reflections throughout their progression of learning. However, the six sessions are flexible and may be adapted based on learner need.

After an introductory workshop through self-guided inquiry, participants will focus on self-exploration and discovering the basics of drama that will be the foundation of their teaching and learning in later stages. In the third and fourth workshops, participants will learn by doing as they become the students. Participants will learn two major instructional strategies that incorporate drama and literacy to explore critical literacy practices within Patricia Polacco’s (2009) children’s book, *In Our Mothers’ House*. In the final two workshops, participants will develop their own instructional plans to prepare for implementation and reflect on their application of new learning.

Throughout the entire six-session professional development program, the overarching learning goals for participants will be presented, which are as follows:

- Describe the key theories behind critical literacy and how it impacts education
- Identify and implement drama-based instructional strategies through the use of children’s literature
• Combine drama and critical literacy theories to develop ready-to-use lesson plans that encourage elementary students to engage in critical literacy through quality children’s literature

• Reflect on your personal identity and how those qualities impact your practice and how you learn best

At the beginning of each workshop session, the overarching learning goals for the professional development program are presented, along with the smaller learning targets that will guide the learning taking place during that particular session.

Workshop #1: The Basics: What is Critical Literacy? What Does Learning through Drama Look Like?

Learning targets for this session:

• Describe the meaning of Critical Literacy and its importance

• Understand characteristics of drama-based instruction

• Preview strategies for setting up a drama-based learning environment

Introductions using drama.

To introduce participants to each other and begin to set the tone for drama-based, student-centered learning, an arts-based strategy adapted from Artful Learning, Inc. (2002) will be used. For this exercise, participants use two separate notecards to write a verb and an adverb. This particular prompt asks them to write a verb that they did the past weekend, and an adverb describing how they did that thing during the weekend. Then, the verb notecards and adverb notecards are shuffled together. The facilitator passes out
one of each to participants, leaving each member with a new combination of a verb and adverb. In partners, the participants will act out their new verb-adverb combination so that the rest of the large group can guess what they are acting out. As each person performs, partners will introduce each other to the group. This sets up the environment to be one that is fun, engaging, and involves taking risks while we become actors.

**Reading on multimodal learning.**

For the rest of the workshop, participants begin to explore what makes multimodal learning, particularly through drama-based instruction, so powerful for learning. Leland and Harste's (1999) *Multiple Ways of Knowing* will be read and processed in groups as a way to provide rationale for teaching for multiple learning styles before individuals engage in an inquiry style learning around critical literacy and drama-based instruction.

**Inquiry centers: Critical literacy and drama-based learning.**

To model inquiry learning and self-guided exploration, participants will move through two stations full of resources they can explore around the two major areas of critical literacy and teaching and learning through drama. At each station, there will be a collection of articles, books, and videos that participants can engage in as they begin to define these foundational areas of learning that will be vital to understand in later workshops. Learners will track their thinking with new learning and questions to consider on a simple T-chart graphic organizer. The goal is to spend approximately one hour at each station, with a break between. However, if learners are self-guiding this may take longer or shorter than planned; adapt accordingly.
At the end of each workshop, participants will preview the learning that will be the focus at the next session. They will also reflect back on how they met the learning targets for this session as a way to summarize their major learning from the day.

**Workshop #2: Examining Our Personal Identities and Positioning Ourselves as Actors**

Learning targets for this session:

- Deepen our understanding of personal identities and how our identities shape our everyday lives
- Identify auto-ethnography and how it relates to critical literacy instruction
- Understand the characteristics of a drama-based learning environment

The major focus of this workshop is to work from the inside out by encouraging the teacher-participants to look inward at their own personal values, privileges, identities, and attitudes. In addition to the focus on personal reflection on identity, participants will be introduced to a drama-based instructional framework that can allow them to set up drama in their classroom.

**Autoethnography.**

To focus on deepening the understanding of each individual’s personal identity, several activities around autoethnography will be utilized through a variety of learning modes. It will include reading an excerpt from Vasquez et al. (2013) about the definition of autoethnography and how studying ourselves is a vital first step to engaging learners in the critical literacy process. Participants will read the article independently and as a small
group, record their thinking about autoethnography using an arts-based strategy, the See/Hear/Feel chart (Artful Learning, Inc., 2002). This strategy is useful for engaging the sensory aspects of an idea, as learners record what inward reflection and the benefits of sharing and processing one’s own experiences and beliefs. This also models another arts-based strategy that can be implemented alongside drama-based strategies to enhance the sensory details of writing in-role or performing a kinesthetic tableau, both of which will be explained in later workshops.

Vasquez, a prominent writer on critical literacy education, presents a naming exercise that can be utilized with teacher-learners in the process of preparing for critical literacy (Vasquez et al., 2013). Participants will fill out a notecard that acts as a nametag, listing as many titles as they can think of for themselves. The handout excerpt from the book will be used to provide direction to the naming process. After listing some of the titles or names they go by, they will also list names they may sometimes be called but feel do not accurately describe them. In partners, the teachers will share their responses and engage in conversations around those descriptors.

To continue our thinking on our personal identities, the teachers will watch a video on privilege, which demonstrates a social experiment where individuals move forward or backward steps based on different privileges or injustices they have had to face in their life (Thomas & BuzzFeedYellow, 2015). Using provided reflective prompts, participants can react to the video as a way to share their thinking about the video. While this overview of critical literacy and our own identities will be brief, teachers will need to continue this self-reflection as teachers who live critical literacy moving forward.

The drama-ready environment.
One of the things that may prevent teachers from engaging in new practices involve not knowing how to set up the routines and management that come with a new strategy. This is how this section of professional development will support teachers. By learning how to define students as actors and equip them with the skills they need to be successful, teachers will have resources to use to begin implementation of drama in their classroom through this management set-up.

The Actor’s Toolbox is a piece of the Acting Right curriculum (Focus 5 Inc., 2012) a curriculum created to function as not only a behavior management system, but as a program for setting up drama to occur frequently in one’s classroom. Students learn about five tools that actors need to learn in order to be successful. These five tools coincidentally are also required of learners, showing the students that as students they are also performers and actively participate in their learning. In this section of the workshop, teachers will receive materials and practice the use of these five tools interactively so they are ready to teach their students the five tools of the Actor’s Toolbox.

The five tools include the actor’s body, voice, imagination, concentration, and cooperation (Focus 5 Inc., 2012). A physical motion can be used by the whole group to signal each of these five tools, and as a group the teacher and students must define what each of these tools means for their classroom. The actor must control their body by using it for the purpose it is intended for—whether that means keeping hands to yourself for younger students or using your body actively to perform a drama. Actors must equally control their voices, not meaning they should avoid talking but instead use their voices with purpose—speaking respectfully and about the topic at hand. Imagination, concentration, and cooperation are all about encouraging thinking outside of the box,
using our brains, focusing on our work, and working well together to achieve our common goals.

There are games that go with the tools of cooperation and concentration, focusing on teaching these as skills explicitly the same way that we practice other academic skills (Focus 5 Inc., 2012). Participants in the workshop will experience both the concentration circle and the cooperation game, both of which can be used with students to further define the use of these skills. The concentration circle involves holding a token of some kind while fixating on a focal point, while different levels of difficulty are added (Focus 5 Inc., 2012). If the student loses their concentration, the teacher takes their token. The class may not move onto the next level until all students in the class keep their concentration. The cooperation game is about forming groups and what to do when we encounter a challenge—are we someone who steps forward or steps back (Focus 5 Inc., 2012)? Participants will be given multiple prompts about how to form groups—and sometimes there will be someone left out of a group. When this happens, discussions about the strong choices students made helps everyone understand that we have to compromise in group work. This game will also be experienced by the teachers in the workshop in order to provide them with strategies to use as they implement drama-based learning in their classroom.

Workshop #3: Digging into Instructional Strategies: A Critical Literacy Lesson through Tableau

Learning targets for this session:

- Know the characteristics of a tableau lesson
• Understand how critical literacy practices can be implemented with a children’s book

• Apply new learning to current practice

**Review of actors’ toolbox.**

To connect learning from this workshop with the previous one, the facilitator will lead the participants through a review of the Actors’ Toolbox (Focus 5 Inc., 2012). The five tools—body, voice, imagination, concentration, and cooperation—are not only skills that people must use to engage in tableau, but they are also management tools and elements of a common language to use when engaging students with drama in the classroom (Focus 5 Inc., 2012). This will be done briefly as the opening warm-up activity for the workshop, by signing the contract as the participants review each of the five tools.

**Steps in a tableau: Think/share/plan/create.**

Before engaging in the tableau experience, participants will need an overview of the main steps that will guide learners as they create tableau. The Acting Right curriculum (Focus 5 Inc., 2012) uses four main steps: think, plan, share, and create. Before beginning tableau, groups should be formed and a topic for their tableau challenge should be prepared. The cooperation circle is a great strategy for grouping students, while also setting the tone for compromise and awareness of others’ needs before a learning experience that requires strong group work skills (Focus 5 Inc., 2012). To illustrate the four steps of the tableau process, participants will be slowly walked through each step as they actively form tableaus around this simple challenge: Show one of the four seasons.
While in cooperative groups, the first step of the tableau involves being given a prompt by the facilitator, if not having a topic already decided upon as a group. The members in the group use this as a silent time for each person to individually begin their thinking about the content being explored through this content. By having individual, quiet think time, students have a chance to consider their own thoughts before immediately jumping into group work.

After thinking about their ideas independently, the next step to follow will be to share their ideas. It is important to teach students that all members in the group should have their voice heard. This takes practice, and will likely take a lot of modeling and reinforcement of positive examples of listening to each other’s teammates. Once all voices have been heard, the group begins to plan as they must cooperatively decide on a tableau to form—a frozen picture with their bodies, in which several important characteristics must be included.

During the plan stage, group members must all participate and be involved in the invention and formation of the tableau. Participants in the tableau should focus on: using every single person in their group, making one picture together with several parts (not each person creating their own frozen picture), and including a variety of heights or levels in order to be aesthetically pleasing to the audience (Focus 5 Inc., 2012). Because this is an introductory lesson in drama-based teaching, these are the surface-level drama elements that will be encouraged by participants. As teachers become more familiar and comfortable with drama, they can add additional coaching and dramatic elements for their students as their work with tableau progresses.
Finally, the group must create their tableau. Typically, the facilitator of tableau gauges how much time each group needs to be ready to perform their tableau for the rest of the group. The facilitator can give a final countdown so that all groups are prepared with their final details. Encourage each member of the group to be aware of what their tableau is showing, as anyone may share a narration about their tableau for the audience. As groups freeze into their tableau pictures, call on different groups to share their tableau. Other groups should be watching and providing constructive feedback to the other groups, as participants can often learn just as much observing than performing.

After participating in the process of forming a tableau, everyone will engage in small group discussions to reflect on the tableau experience. Several reflective prompting questions will be posted for individuals to use if they need a starting point for discussion, however these are just guiding questions and participants can discuss whatever is meaningful for them. The facilitator will be available to participate in reflective conversations, offer answers to any questions participants might have, and to be a sounding board for ideas for implementation.

**Multiple perspectives within children’s literature.**

To truly understand the potential within critical literacy practices, individuals will engage in guided critical literacy exploration of a children’s book by forming tableau. This provides participants with a hands-on, engaging way to understand how drama-based learning can lend itself to critical literacy conversations. Patricia Polacco’s *In Our Mothers’ House* (2009) will be read collaboratively and interactively, as groups will stop each time they see a prompt on a page and respond using tableau. To begin this process, there are several specific places in the text where stop-marks have been placed to prompt
learners to reflect on a given scene using tableau. The focus of this experience is to facilitate the process of thinking through multiple perspectives. As with any authentic critical literacy practice, this is simply a guide, as authentic conversations and questions will likely arise during this process as learners begin to own their thinking.

The first stop-mark in the text is simply meant as a warm-up for the groups as readers. Participants are asked to show a tableau that might help the audience peek into the book’s family’s home on a typical day. This begins warming up the students’ five tools from their Actors’ Toolbox (Focus 5 Inc., 2012), as they start synthesizing their reading by creating a scene or possible day in this family’s life. By seeing each of the other group’s tableaus, the participants are reinforcing the character traits and characteristics of this family by visually seeing ways the family acts together.

As the collaborative read-aloud of this text continues, several stop-marks are placed in strategic places where certain characters are either discriminated against or experiencing an unjust balance of power. While these scenes in the book are marked, there are certainly many places where learners may choose to stop and respond to the text, whether that is through tableau or writing or simply discussion. The critically literate classroom will evolve in this way naturally, so as the book is read together, the facilitator will allow for detours along the lesson plan when critical literacy practices arise naturally.

Workshop #4: Digging into Instructional Strategies: Following Up with Writing In-Role and Character Interviews

Learning targets for this session:

- Know the characteristics of character interviews
• Know the characteristics of writing-in-role

• Understand how critical literacy practices can be implemented with a children’s book

• Apply new learning to current practice

**Character interviews.**

At the beginning of this fourth workshop session, individuals will take a moment to revisit their tableau experience with Polacco’s *In Our Mothers’ House* (2009) in the previous session. A brief re-reading of the picture book will take place, in order to participants to re-engage with the text and recall the important emotions and events within the story. This will set the tone for the next drama-based learning experience, becoming a character from the story and responding to interview questions as that character.

Before beginning character interviews, some basic tips for implementation will be shared the facilitator. Kelner and Flynn (2006) encourage teachers to build up their own host character to bring out each time this type of learning occurs. This engages students and encourages them to reach outside their comfort zone as they again become actors that learn through drama. Kelner and Flynn (2006) also suggest a host name and show, props, noise-makers to signal when the show is beginning, or any other props that add to the imaginative element of this experience.

Similar to tableau, there are several stop-marks in the text where prompts are noted and directions are given to the learners. Workshop participants will be the students, as they use dramatic elements to become different characters in the story and respond to
interview questions from the host. Build upon students' knowledge from the story by prompting them to think about how this character might respond to these interview questions. Reinforce their acting skills by questioning what their character’s facial expression might be, what their voice could sound like, what body language they might be portraying. After several students respond to one interview question, switch roles and encourage them to become another character in the story. Follow the stop-marks in the presentation with interview questions.

**Writing-in-role.**

After the character interviews, allow participants to informally reflect on the experience. How did their thinking change about these characters? How did taking another perspective through an interview useful to their processing of the themes of this story?

To reinforce the idea of taking multiple perspectives, participants will choose from a list of prompts and write as though they are one of the characters from the story. The character interview activities experienced previously should have gotten them thinking about their feelings to certain situations, along with giving a voice to the oppressed parties represented in this book. As with all critical literacy learning, allow this experience to evolve based on the learners’ needs, interests, and abilities. If they want to share their writing, allow an authors' celebration and encourage them to read or act out their writing. If learners have a different idea about their writing, other than the prompts listed, encourage them to pursue it. The workshop participants, as well as elementary students who this strategy may be used with, have the ability to come up with their own
way to respond on paper to the issues presented in this book. Perhaps the idea of taking social action will come about authentically, through this exercise.

At the end of this workshop, each individual will reflect on the strategies they have learned so far and how this might affect their current practice. The next steps in the workshop involve creating learning experiences that use their professional learning, so encourage ongoing reflection about where these strategies and instructional theories could be relevant in their teaching contexts.

**Workshop #5: Call to Action: Developing Lessons You Can Use in YOUR Practice**

Learning targets for this session:

- Understand drama-based instructional strategies as they apply to critical literacy

- Be prepared to implement lessons with opportunities for critical literacy using drama-based strategies

Critical literacy is based on the belief that learning is about taking social action, therefore part of this professional development program involves recurring opportunities to reflect on ways to take action and use learned strategies in their teaching. By teaching through the critical literacy lens, teachers are already taking social action by giving students a voice in important issues. To review how to be a leader of social action, participants will read and interact with the Solution Tree’s handout, “Leader versus Social Justice Leader” (Scanlon & Theoharis, 2015) to reflect on how they can transform their behaviors as leaders in their professional settings.
This workshop will be structured as an open-ended inquiry, where teachers have time and resources to create lesson plans that implement their drama-based strategies and critical literacy components as learned in the previous four workshops. Using their current curricular resources and Common Core standards, the participants will work together to analyze currently created lesson plans and invent ways to add a critical literacy and/or drama-based spin to that lesson. Teachers will also be encouraged to create a lesson using drama and critical literacy from scratch to use with their students. Examples of texts that are based on social issues will be presented for teachers to pull from, based on the lessons they are creating. The main goal of this workshop will be to leave with plans to implement new learning immediately into their practice, even if they may have been implementing pieces of their professional learning from this session along the way previously. At the next and final workshop participants will share about their implementation, reflect on their learning throughout the professional development process, and plan next steps in their journey of critical literacy and drama-based instruction.

**Workshops #6: Reflecting on Our Learning: How Did It Go? What Needs to Happen Next?**

Learning targets for this session:

- Reflect on implementation of new learning
- Summarize major learning points from this professional learning experience
- Prepare action steps for enhancing current practice
Best practice in professional development involves reflecting on learning, along with continuous learning by planning next steps and implementing meaningful follow up for learning based on individual learning needs. Participants will have a chance to summarize their learning and pull out major learning points from their experience with this professional development program. This final workshop will remain very open-ended as a block of time used to share the experiences that were implemented, along with engaging in interactive reflection and constructive feedback with peers. During this session, next steps will also be planned, including the need for coaching services where appropriate and hopes for where this new learning might fit into the participants’ current and future practice. In order to model the focus on continuous learning, participants will read and process the article by Lewison et al. (2002) that illustrates some examples of teachers that are new to critical literacy implementation. During this session, next steps will also be planned, including the need for coaching services where appropriate and hopes for where this new learning might fit into the participants’ current and future practice.
Implications and Conclusion

This professional development project was developed based on the question: How might elementary teachers use drama-based instruction to engage in critical literacy? The professional development workshops that focus on drama and critical literacy address this question by providing resources, learning experiences, self-guided inquiry, and ready-to-use strategies that elementary teachers can use to begin their critical literacy practice in the classroom. Elementary teachers can explore the use of critical literacy by engaging themselves in drama-based learning, in order to learn tableau, character interview, and writing-in-role strategies that can serve as launching points for their critical literacy implementation. By participating in workshops where guidance and support are present, teachers will have the materials and resources needed to start their journey in critical literacy, along with expanding their thinking about what effective instruction can look like through the use of drama.

By developing this project, I was given many authentic opportunities to engage in informal self-study by examining my professional progress in terms of delivering high quality professional learning. As I look back, I realize that my understanding of professional development has shifted from a presentation-delivery style to more inquiry-based. This professional development program is simply a tentative guide, as I have come to realize that the most influential professional learning results when the facilitator is continuously responsive to the learners’ need, in the same way that we expect teachers to differentiate instruction for their students. It was difficult to plan just six sessions, knowing that the group of participants that engage in this professional development is the most significant variable in what and how materials will be used and explored. The
professional development facilitator must take into account teachers’ backgrounds, comfort levels with these two considerably progressive areas (drama and critical literacy), and the desire of the teachers involved to implement their new learning into their practice. Coaching and individual support is not an element that can be planned ahead, as this is another responsive and needs-based professional development element that looks different based on each person’s individual needs and goals. As I personally continue to advocate for these two areas of meaningful instruction, I will continue to look for authentic opportunities to infuse our learning conversations and sessions through professional learning communities, coaching cycles, and standards-based teaching and reporting implementation.

There are several potential challenges that this project may face as it becomes implemented. One of the main challenges the facilitator may face is the issue of gaining buy-in from teachers. Currently, elementary teachers are faced with more on their to-do list than ever before, with the implementation of Common Core standards and developing lessons that align with the high demands of the several content areas each of them will teach. Critical literacy and drama-based instruction are intended to enhance the core content in order to deepen learning for students and empower their voices beyond the skills that standards require of them. However, the blending of these two areas can be a major challenge for teachers. The pressure to present results based on standards may limit teachers’ willingness to take risks with this approach. Those that are willing to engage in this type of instruction must be able to think innovatively, allow time and openness to collaboration, and commit to the time that it takes to be responsive to students’ needs and
build inquiry learning for their students that blends standards-based teaching and learning with highly engaging instructional strategies and critical literacy practice.

Overall, the development of this project has helped me as a teacher-researcher and instructional coach that supports elementary teachers in all content areas. Using drama-based instruction and integrating elements of critical literacy are things that all elementary teachers are capable of doing, given the right preparation and professional learning and support. By creating materials that teachers and school leadership can use to empower their staff to use these theories in their teaching, my hope is that more elementary students are given the chance to engage in questioning power, talking back to texts, and taking action about issues that matter to them. Young children are not only capable of these conversations and experiences, but they require support and structured guidance from us as their teachers in order to grow as individuals.
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Focus 5, Inc. (2012). *Arts integration workshop*. Findley Elementary School, Des Moines, IA.


Kelner, L.B. (March 27, 2013). *Character interviews: A dramatic approach to reading comprehension*. Des Moines Performing Arts, Des Moines, IA.


EMPOWERING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS TO EXPLORE CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH DRAMA-BASED INSTRUCTION

Courtney Jensen
UNI, 2016

By the end of these workshops, you will be able to...

- Describe the key theories behind critical literacy and how it impacts education
- Identify and implement drama-based instructional strategies through the use of children's literature
- Combine drama and critical literacy theories to develop ready-to-use lesson plans that encourage elementary students to engage in critical literacy through quality children's literature
- Reflect on your personal identity and how those qualities impact your practice and how you learn best
### Schedule of Workshops

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### The Basics: What is Critical Literacy? What Does Learning through Drama Look Like?

**Learning Targets:**

- Describe the meaning of Critical Literacy and its importance
- Understand characteristics of drama-based instruction
- Preview strategies for setting up a drama-based learning environment
Introductions!

**Arts-based skill and strategy:**

"Adverbs and Verbs"

**Directions:**

Take 2 notecards: 1 blue, 1 yellow

- Think of something you did over the weekend. Write that VERB on the blue notecards
- How did you do that action over the weekend? Write that ADVERB on the yellow notecard.

*Multiple ways of knowing*
Inquire

- **Critical Literacy Theory**
  - Democracy's Young Heroes: An Instructional Model of Critical Literacy Practices; Ciardiello (2005)
  - Multicultural Children's Literature as an Instrument of Power; Ching (2005)
  - Critical Literacy in Teaching and Research; Janks (2013)
  - Schools as Meeting Places: Critical and Inclusive Literacies in Changing Local Environments; Comber (2013)
  - YouTube: Critical Literacy:
    - Teaching Channel:
  - Teaching Channel:

- **Drama-Based Literacy Instruction**
  - Boosting Language Skills of English Learners through Dramatization and Movement; Greenfader & Brouillette (2013)
  - Imagery-Based Learning: Improving Elementary Students' Reading Comprehension with Drama Techniques; Rose, Parks, Androes, & McMahon (2001)
  - A Dramatic Approach to Reading Comprehension; Kelner (2006)
  - Performing Identities through Drama and Teatro Practices in Multilingual Classrooms; Medina & Campano (2006)
  - Teaching Channel:
  - Teaching Channel:
  - Teaching Channel:
The Basics: What is Critical Literacy? What Does Learning through Drama Look Like?

Learning Targets:
- Describe the meaning of Critical Literacy and its importance
- Understand characteristics of drama-based instruction
- Preview strategies for setting up a drama-based learning environment

Next Time...
- Explore our own identities in order to relate to critical literacy practice
- Learn strategies for developing a drama-based classroom
By the end of these workshops, you will be able to...

- Describe the key theories behind critical literacy and how it impacts education
- Identify and implement drama-based instructional strategies through the use of children’s literature
- Combine drama and critical literacy theories to develop ready-to-use lesson plans that encourage elementary students to engage in critical literacy through quality children’s literature
- Reflect on your personal identity and how those qualities impact your practice and how you learn best
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Examining Our Personal Identities & Positioning Ourselves as Actors

Learning Targets:
- Deepen our understanding of personal identities and how our identities shape our everyday lives
- Identify auto-ethnography and how it relates to critical literacy instruction
- Understand the characteristics of a drama-based learning environment
**AUTOETHNOGRAPHY** = taking on a critical stance toward personal memories related to social injustices; Goal is to **live** critical literacy

- **Is a process for consciousness raising:**

> "The purpose of autoethnography is to achieve critical agency in attempting to know oneself through critiquing and sharing one's own experience" (p. 11).

- **Is an ongoing process meant to have a larger impact**

> "Autoethnographies are not self-serving but have the goal of changing the world" (p. 11).

### SEE/HEAR/FEEL CHART

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NAMING
What is Privilege?

What are some of your initial reactions to this video?

Where might you land at the end of an exercise like this one?

In what ways does this exercise relate to the student population you serve?

Are there any changes you might make to your "Naming" document?

Acting Right: The Actors' Toolbox

- BODY
- VOICE
- IMAGINATION
- CONCENTRATION
- COOPERATION
Examining Our Personal Identities & Positioning Ourselves as Actors

Learning Targets:
- Deepen our understanding of personal identities and how our identities shape our everyday lives
- Identify auto-ethnography and how it relates to critical literacy instruction
- Understand the characteristics of a drama-based learning environment

Next Time...
- Review the Actors' Toolbox and see it in action!
- Experience a critical literacy lesson using children's literature with the drama-based strategy, tableau
EMPOWERING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS TO EXPLORE CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH DRAMA-BASED INSTRUCTION

Courtney Jensen
UNI, 2016

By the end of these workshops, you will be able to...

- Describe the key theories behind critical literacy and how it impacts education
- Identify and implement drama-based instructional strategies through the use of children's literature
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Workshop #6:
Reflecting on Our Learning: How Did it Go? What Needs to Happen Next?

Learning Targets:
- Know the characteristics of a tableau lesson
- Understand how critical literacy practices can be implemented with a children’s book
- Apply new learning to current practice
Acting Right: The Actors' Toolbox

- BODY
- VOICE
- IMAGINATION
- CONCENTRATION
- COOPERATION

think  plan

share  create
TABLEAU:
What do YOU think?

In what content areas could you see yourself and your team using this tableau strategy?

How might this strategy deepen student learning?

What questions do you have about tableau?

PATRICIA POLACCO

In Our Mothers' House
Our mothers loved to laugh. Meema's whole body shook when she laughed. Marmee laughed almost silently, but she'd laugh so hard that she'd practically fall down and go limp.

Our mothers' house was always alive with music. All kinds! Sometimes our mothers would put on old rock-and-roll or swing records and get all of us to dance with them.

"This is the Hully Gully," Meema would sing out. Once she flapped her arms and wings and clucked, "The Chicken Dance."

"And this is bebop" Marmee said as she grabbed Will and spun him around, then dipped him backward. We laughed and laughed.

The most favored place to be for us kids was the sunroom above the carport. That's where all of our toys lived. It was where we played dress-up and where every Halloween costume we wore began. No store-bought costumes for us! Marmee and Millie designed them, and Meema would help us sew them.

One year we went as wild animals. Hardly any of our neighbors recognized us. That is, except for Mrs. Lockner. She knew us all right. She glared at us when she opened the door. She glared at our mothers, too. Her kids came running and were really excited to see us, but Mrs. Lockner turned her back and shut the door. "What's the matter with her?" Will blurted out. But our mothers said nothing and continued down the block.

Even so, it was one of the best Halloweens we ever had. We even won the Claremont Avenue costume contest that year!

CREATE A TABLEAU!
Show what a typical day in this family's household might look like.

CREATE A TABLEAU!
Become Mrs. Lockner's children after she shuts the door on Marmee and Meema.
One of the best things about our mothers' house was the tree house that we built in the backyard. Practically the entire neighborhood helped us. It all started with Will, who, like Marmee, was always building things. One Saturday he found some plans for a tree house in a magazine and went to her.

It took several weekends to finish, but the Saturday that we did finish it, everyone stood in a circle around the tree house. Marmee and Meema broke a bottle of soda over the doorjamb and named the tree house Thistle House!

At the end of the day, when everyone was cleaning up and getting ready to sit in our backyard and just talk, Meema looked up to see Mrs. Lockner coming down the street. The Lockners had been invited but hadn't come. She planted her feet squarely in front of our mothers.

"I don't appreciate what you two are," she snarled at Meema and Marmee.

Will and Millie came running up. I froze where I was. Mrs. Lockner wheeled and stalked off.

"What's the matter with her, Momma, what's the matter with her?" Millie kept saying.

All the neighbors closed in on us.

"She is full of fear, sweetie. She's afraid of what she cannot understand: she doesn't understand us," Meema quietly said.

"There seems to be no love in her heart either," whispered Marmee. The neighbors agreed— the Mardicians, the Polos, the Yamasakis, the Kiemans, the Goldshem, the Abdultas, everybody— and one by one they hugged our mothers. Then, they all stayed and talked and talked until late that night, thanking Meema more than once for thinking up the block party.
Will and his family live in our mothers' house now. We were so pleased that it didn't go to a stranger, and it is still a gathering place for all of us and our families. The walls still whisper our mothers' names. All of our hearts feel peace whenever we are there...not only remembering them, but being there, together, in our mothers' house.

CREATE A TABLEAU!
What scene from this story impacted you the most? Be prepared to share why in your narration.

Digging Into Instructional Strategies: Critical Literacy Through Tableau

Learning Targets:
- Know the characteristics of a tableau lesson
- Understand how critical literacy practices can be implemented with a children's book
- Apply new learning to current practice
Next time...

- Deepen thinking around "In Our Mothers' House," by Patricia Polacco through new drama strategies:
  - Character interviews
  - Writing-in-role
EMPOWERING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS TO EXPLORE CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH DRAMA-BASED INSTRUCTION

Courtney Jensen
UNI, 2016

By the end of these workshops, you will be able to...

- Describe the key theories behind critical literacy and how it impacts education
- Identify and implement drama-based instructional strategies through the use of children’s literature
- Combine drama and critical literacy theories to develop ready-to-use lesson plans that encourage elementary students to engage in critical literacy through quality children’s literature
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Call to Action: Developing Lessons You Can Use in YOUR Practice

Workshop #6:
Reflecting on Our Learning: How Did It Go? What Needs to Happen Next?

Digging Into Instructional Strategies: Writing-in-role & Character Interviews

Learning Targets:
- Know the characteristics of character interviews
- Know the characteristics of writing-in-role
- Understand how critical literacy practices can be implemented with a children's book
- Apply new learning to current practice
Acting Right: *The Actors' Toolbox*

- Body
- Voice
- Imagination
- Concentration
- Cooperation

Review & Reflect On Tableau Experience
Character Interviews

- The learner BECOMES a character and responses to prompt the character's point.
- Can be prompts or questions from teacher or other students.
- Use clues from the text to create a reasonable response from the individual.

Character Interviews

- USE YOUR IMAGINATION!
- Create an alter-ego: use props, a costume, fake-microphone, different voice, sound device.
One of the niftiest things that happened in our neighborhood was the Woolsey Street block party. Marmee organized it. It became a tradition.

For that first one, Millie and I made all of the invitations by hand, and Meema took us around to deliver them from door to door. Everyone was invited. When we stopped at the Lockners’ house, their mother glared at us, the way she always did.

"Why doesn’t that lady like us, Meema?" I asked my mother.
She just smiled at me and hugged me up. "I like you, baby," she said, and we went on our way.

At the end of the day, when everyone was cleaning up and getting ready to sit in our backyard and just talk, Meema looked up to see Mrs. Lockner coming down the street. The Lockners had been invited but hadn’t come. She planted her feet squarely in front of our mothers.

"I don’t appreciate what you two are!" she snarled at Meema and Marmee.

Will and Millie came running up. I froze where I was. Mrs. Lockner wheeled and stalked off.

"What’s the matter with her?" Millie kept saying.

All the neighbors closed in on us.
"She is full of fear, sweetie. She’s afraid of what she cannot understand: she doesn’t understand us," Meema quietly said.

"There seems to be no love in her heart either," whispered Marmee.

The neighbors agreed—the Mardicians, the Polos, the Yamagakis, the Kiernans, the Goldsteins, the Abdullas, everybody—and one by one they hugged our mothers. Then, they all stayed and talked and talked until late that night, thanking Meema more than once for thinking up the block party.

BECOME MEEMA:
"Meema, tell us how you were feeling when your daughter asked you why your neighbor didn’t like your family?"

BECOME A NEARBY NEIGHBOR:
"Tell us, what were your reactions when Mrs. Lockner began shouting at the block party? What did you want to do in that situation?"
There wasn’t a day in my life that I didn’t feel deeply loved and wanted by Meema and Marmee. Our mothers were willing to do anything for us. We knew that.

Here’s what I mean. One day Millie and I ran all the way home from school and came tumbling into the kitchen with news.

"Meema, Marmee, we’ve been picked to host the mother-daughter tea this year," we squealed, jumping up and down.

"Well, what an honor!" Meema said, looking at Marmee.

That means we are going to have the tea here!" I trumpeted.

"And," I looked at Meema and Marmee, "you both will have to wear long dresses with big picture hats!"

"All of the mothers will be dressed like that!" Millie added quickly.

Meema and Marmee looked at each other and shrugged. We had never seen either of them in a dress... ever!

"Okay," they finally said. "Well, okay."

This was going to be a first!

Meema sewed three whole nights to finish not only their dresses but Millie’s and mine as well. The garden was decorated, tables rented and set. A string quartet was hired, and our mothers had the affair catered by our nonno.

After Millie and I got dressed, we waited at the bottom of the stairs for our mothers. We could hardly wait to see them.

"Why did you feel your mothers must dress like ‘all of the other mothers’ at the tea party? As an adult, how would you respond to that situation today?"

A way to expand experience of taking on a character’s perspective

Can be open-ended or scaffolded with prompts, depending on learning goal or age of students

Encourage learners to take action and speak on behalf of the character, not only infusing their own opinions. Give the character a voice and balance of power through your writing.
CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Take the perspective of a main character, and write a letter to Mrs. Lockner. Imagine this is right after the outburst at the block party. Think back to the feelings you experienced during character interviews.

- Become one of the neighbors that witnessed Marmee and Meema and their children being verbally attacked at the block party. Reflect on your experience through writing.

- Take the perspective of Marmee and Meema. Write a letter to either Mrs. Lockner, the neighbors on your block, or other families at your children’s school. What do you wish you could tell them?

How have these experiences made you reflect on your students and their families?

How do you welcome them into your classroom discourse and community?

Are you willing to give your students this much voice in your classroom, regardless of your personal beliefs?

https://www.brainchildmag.com/2013/11/in-our-mothers-house/
Your Practice...

- We have explored three major strategies that involve the imagination and use of drama as we just scratch the surface on critical literacy:
  - Tableau
  - Character Interviews
  - Writing-in-role

In what ways might you use each of these strategies with the content you currently teach?

In what ways might you use these strategies to raise questions about issues of power and social justice in your classrooms?

Learning Targets:

- Know the characteristics of character interviews
- Know the characteristics of writing-in-role
- Understand how critical literacy practices can be implemented with a children’s book
- Apply new learning to current practice
Next Time

- Create lessons that YOU will be ready to teach!
- Bring any materials relevant to current content
  - We may be able to expand upon these to include components of critical literacy
EMPOWERING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS TO EXPLORE CRITICAL LITERACY THROUGH DRAMA-BASED INSTRUCTION

Courtney Jensen
UNI, 2016

By the end of these workshops, you will be able to...

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Call to Action: Developing Lessons You Can Use in YOUR Practice

Learning Targets:

- Understand drama-based instructional strategies as they apply to critical literacy
- Be prepared to implement lessons with opportunities for critical literacy using drama-based strategies
Acting Right: *The Actors’ Toolbox*

- BODY
- VOICE
- IMAGINATION
- CONCENTRATION
- COOPERATION

Are you a LEADER or a SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADER?
**TAKING ACTION:**

*How will your new learning become part of YOUR practice?*

- Design your lessons during this time
- Use each other!
- Leave today ready to implement this lesson in your setting
- Bring your reflection thoughts to our final workshop (Workshop #6)

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**TAKING ACTION:**

*How will your new learning become part of YOUR practice?*

- Drama-based Strategies:
  - Tableau
  - Character Interviews
  - Writing in-role
- Elements of Critical Literacy:
  - Question issues of power
  - Social justice
  - Taking action
  - Multiple perspectives
Call to Action: Developing Lessons You Can Use in YOUR Practice

Learning Targets:
- Understand drama-based instructional strategies as they apply to critical literacy
- Be prepared to implement lessons with opportunities for critical literacy using drama-based strategies

Next time...
- Reflect on implementation of lessons created today
- Give and receive feedback on implementation notes
- Plan action steps for instruction after this program ends
By the end of these workshops, you will be able to...

- Describe the key theories behind critical literacy and how it impacts education
- Identify and implement drama-based instructional strategies through the use of children's literature
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**Reflecting On Our Learning**

**Learning Goals:**
- Reflect on implementation of new learning
- Summarize major learning points from this professional learning experience
- Prepare action steps for enhancing current practice
Share & Reflect on Implementation

We want to know:

- An overview of your lesson(s)
- What parts went well
- What things are still challenging
- How students responded to the work
- Your hopes & goals moving forward

Critical Literacy for Novices and Newcomers

Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys (2002)
By the end of these workshops, you will be able to...

- Describe the key theories behind critical literacy and how it impacts education
- Identify and implement drama-based instructional strategies through the use of children's literature
- Combine drama and critical literacy theories to develop ready-to-use lesson plans that encourage elementary students to engage in critical literacy through quality children's literature
- Reflect on your personal identity and how those qualities impact your practice and how you learn best

"Ticket Out the Door"

List 3 things you learned or are taking with you from these 6 workshops.

List 2 questions you still have about critical literacy and drama-based learning.

List 1 goal you have for your instruction, based on your learning in these workshops.
APPENDIX G: Verbs and Adverbs: Arts-Based Skills and Strategies

This hand-out described an instructional strategy presented by Artful Learning, Inc. (2002) as an interactive process where learners write verbs and adverbs on notecards. After writing verbs and adverbs, the participants mix up the cards and receive a new pair of cards with one verb and one adverb. The participant then dramatizes the scene that the verb and adverb describe (Artful Learning, Inc., 2002).
APPENDIX H: Leland and Harste, 1999

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APPENDIX I: Ciardiello, 2005

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APPENDIX J: Ching, 2005

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APPENDIX K: Janks, 2013

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APPENDIX L: Comber, 2013

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APPENDIX M: Diekman and Murnen, 2004

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APPENDIX N: Greenfader and Brouillette, 2013

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APPENDIX O: Rose, Parks, Androes, and McMahon, 2001

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APPENDIX P: Medina and Campano, 2006

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s194c+4b179be6d6-496ea9e338&rev=1
APPENDIX Q: See/Hear/Feel Chart: Arts-Based Skill and Strategies

This hand-out is created by Artful Learning, Inc. (2002) as a resource for implementing the instructional strategy that utilizes a graphic organizer with three columns. Participants using the graphic organizer describe a particular object or topic by filling out what that object looks like, sounds like, and feels like (Artful Learning, Inc., 2002).
APPENDIX R: See/Hear/Feel Chart Graphic Organizer

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APPENDIX S: Actors’ Toolbox Overview

This resource provides an overview and scripted explanation for introducing the concept of the Actors’ Toolbox (Focus 5 Inc., 2012) that will be the basis for drama-based learning and provide a common language for the classroom environment during this professional development program. The Actors’ Toolbox describes five tools that learners use as they become actors, including their voice, body, imagination, concentration, and cooperation (Focus 5 Inc., 2012). These five tools are described and in this overview, authors describe ways to help students practice using the five tools before truly engaging in drama-based learning (Focus 5 Inc., 2012).
APPENDIX T: Actor's Toolbox: Cooperation Challenge

Cooperation is one of the five tools in the Actors' Toolbox (Focus 5, Inc. 2002) that actors and learners need to use to be proficient drama-based students. The cooperation challenge is a game-style learning experience that helps students practice and strengthen the skill of cooperation (Focus 5, Inc. 2002). Students form groups based on challenges given by the teacher or facilitator, and students are encouraged to work as a whole group to form groups and not leave anyone out (Focus 5, Inc. 2002). This handout describes steps and phrasing that can be used when using this strategy with students in the beginning of implementation.
APPENDIX U: Actor's Toolbox: Concentration Circle

Another tool in the Focus 5 Inc. Actors' Toolbox (2002) is concentration, which is a skill that again needs to be practiced and reinforced through instruction by the teacher. This Cooperation Circle is another game that requires students to practice staying focused on a particular focal point through different amounts of time and with different distractions added (Focus 5 Inc., 2002).
APPENDIX V: Tableau: Arts-Based Skills and Strategies

An Artful Learning, Inc. (2012) resource, this handout provides easy-to-follow steps that can guide a teacher through the facilitation of tableau as an instructional strategy. Tableau, an art form in which individuals form a frozen picture using their bodies, is taught through this resource that includes phrasing and common language in conjunction with the Actors' Toolbox (Focus 5 Inc. 2002).
APPENDIX W: Character Interviews

This handout includes steps for implementing a lesson using character interviews with the use of children’s literature (Kelner, 2012). Ways to set up the lesson, choose an appropriate text, and prepare students for the lesson are introduced (Kelner, 2012). Tips for how to prompt students and use dramatic instruction are provided (Kelner, 2012).
APPENDIX X: Character Interview Question Stems

Kelner (2012) provides sentence starters that can be used as teachers or facilitators are implementing the use of character interviews with children's literature. These prompts can be used as a guide for teachers beginning to use this strategy in their classrooms, and includes a variety of question types that can be modified or adapted based on the topic of study or text that is used.
APPENDIX Y: Scanlan and Theoharis, 2015

This one-page handout features a chart created by Scanlan and Theoharis (2015). The chart illustrates descriptors of two types of leaders in schools—a regular leader, and a leader for social justice (Scanlan & Theoharis, 2015). These descriptors provide educators a chance to reflect on how to enhance their leadership role in their focus on social justice.
APPENDIX Z: Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys, 2002

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my.sharepoint.com/personal/courtney_jensen_dmsschools_org/_layouts/15_guestaccess.as
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