Despite challenges and continuing inequalities surrounding urban education, there are instances which provide a counter narrative to the dominant discourses of failure. Urban educators who engage conscious caring and “armed love” in their practice are an example of this. This qualitative instrumental case study examines the practices of two transformative urban educators, around caring and armed love in their classroom praxis. This study examines their conceptions and practice of these approaches through interview, field-notes and video data. The findings involve manifestations of both caring and armed love, including connection, nurturance through food, community, directness, relationships, honesty, respect and demand, as well as high expectations. Despite the challenges that surrounded this school, the atmosphere of caring and armed love acted like a protective barrier or space of safety for the students. My conclusion points to the vital significance of re-humanizing our educational discourse in favor of the genuine care and connections that exist in urban settings, and the importance of re-centering our discussion to focus on the human aspects of education which lie at the core of our profession.

Firmly anchored in a critical educational tradition of struggle, Fighting, Loving, Teaching reawakens teachers to educational justice and the everyday possibilities of a pedagogy of the heart. With uncompromising passion and commitment, this timely book weaves a narrative of critical persistence and radical hope, in an effort to reinsert the revolutionary power of love into current discourses of democratic schooling and society.

―Antonia Darder
Leavey Endowed Chair of Ethics and Moral Leadership
Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles
Author of Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love
Fighting, Loving, Teaching
“Curriculum” is an expansive term; it encompasses vast aspects of teaching and learning. Curriculum can be defined as broadly as, “The content of schooling in all its forms” (English, p. 4), and as narrowly as a lesson plan.

Complicating matters is the fact that curricula are often organized to fit particular time frames. The incompatible and overlapping notions that curriculum involves everything that is taught and learned in a particular setting and that this learning occurs in a limited time frame reveal the nuanced complexities of curriculum studies.

“Constructing Knowledge” provides a forum for systematic reflection on the substance (subject matter, courses, programs of study), purposes, and practices used for bringing about learning in educational settings. Of concern are such fundamental issues as: What should be studied? Why? By whom? In what ways? And in what settings? Reflection upon such issues involves an inter-play among the major components of education: subject matter, learning, teaching, and the larger social, political, and economic contexts, as well as the immediate instructional situation. Historical and autobiographical analyses are central in understanding the contemporary realities of schooling and envisioning how to (re)shape schools to meet the intellectual and social needs of all societal members. Curriculum is a social construction that results from a set of decisions; it is written and enacted and both facets undergo constant change as contexts evolve.

This series aims to extent the professional conversation about curriculum in contemporary educational settings. Curriculum is a designed experience intended to promote learning. Because it is socially constructed, curriculum is subject to all the pressures and complications of the diverse communities that comprise schools and other social contexts in which citizens gain self-understanding.
Fighting, Loving, Teaching: An Exploration of Hope, Armed Love and Critical Urban Pedagogies

by

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Firmly anchored in a critical educational tradition of struggle, Fighting, Loving, Teaching reawakens teachers to educational justice and the everyday possibilities of a pedagogy of the heart. With uncompromising passion and commitment, this timely book weaves a narrative of critical persistence and radical hope, in an effort to reinsert the revolutionary power of love into current discourses of democratic schooling and society.

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Emily Daniels’ book contributes to the field’s awareness of transformative urban teachers’ practices through a rich theoretical framework and a rigorous phenomenological research methodology. In this way, her work expands our understanding of transformative teachers’ experiences and practices with youth in ways that can inform practitioners, researchers, and activists alike. She draws on the work of Paulo Freire and Antonia Darder to guide her research of armed love, hope and caring in these exemplary educators’ practices, providing important empirical data and analyses to a rich, largely conceptual literature with. This approach gives us a unique way to understand such educators’ commitments to their students and their profession.

Dr. Nancy Ares, University of Rochester.
DEDICATION

To my ever-patient Mother and son – Nana and Santiago-Arturo. Thank you.
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I. INTRODUCTION

I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative. (Freire, 1992, p. 2)

Just raise your head up, and stand up, no fear in your heart, tell me love and hope never die. So raise your head up and stand up, no reason to cry ’cause your heart and soul will survive. (Ozomatli, 2004)

Urban education is a highly contested terrain which resides in our imaginations, our prejudices, and our everyday experiences. It can be utopic or dystopic; what do we see when we consider the space of urban education and the students and teachers who reside there? What are the possibilities and the “untested feasibilities” (Freire, 2005)?

The purpose of this book is to explore urban teachers’ praxis with historically marginalized youth, in response to the multifaceted challenges facing urban youth, educators, and communities. As a scholar with a strong interest in Paulo Freire’s (1970, 1992, 2005, 2007) work and that of other critical pedagogical scholars, my research adds to the empirical literature on critical pedagogy, while bringing in the lens of caring and hope to deepen the discussion. Additionally, exploring and defining the concept of “armed love” was central to my work with these exemplary urban educators. Darder (2003) defines this as, “a love that could be lively, forceful, and inspiring, while at the same time, critical, challenging and insistent” (p. 497).

My work also examined what is “going right” with teachers and marginalized youth rather than what is “going wrong”. Ginwright (2006) points to the pathological focus of social science research done on Black youth in particular as being problematic. He argues that by virtue of its sole concentration on the problems within poor Black communities, the research itself reiterates negativity and is limited by being overly deterministic in its focus, and disallowing for the positive and transformative aspects of Black youth culture.

Another example of this discourse of deficiency at a larger level, would be the “achievement gap” discussions which assign an inherent level of superiority to white students and a subordinate position to students of color in test-taking (and by inference intelligence) measurements. When African American, Latino and Native American students don’t “measure up”, Eurocentric measuring tools and assumptions have not generally been questioned, but rather Black and Brown youth become the focus of deficit discourses. There are many scholars who challenge these notions (see Ladson-Billings, 2006 and Cross, 2007 for provocative and insightful discussions of the “achievement gap”) and their work is a powerful reminder of the insidious damage possible through descriptions that privilege whiteness while denying Black and Brown youth the opportunities to be viewed and treated as successful, intelligent and gifted. Though these discussions can seem shocking, from a Critical Race Theoretical (CRT) standpoint, racism is portrayed as endemic to American society, and is seen as closely intertwined with all aspects of American-ness, in our cultural beliefs, practices, and within our
introduction (Ladson-Billings, 2003, Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). The statistics for youth of color continue to be disturbing; when we “lose” our precious children to the streets, the prisons, and the military complex, we can see waves of complex, multilayered injustices that seem overwhelming.

Setting

Rosa Parks (Parks) high school is located in a North-eastern post-industrial city that hosts numerous coffee shops, an incredible art gallery, restaurants, and a plethora of summer festivals. Our city has a variety of challenges as well as incredible opportunities within it. These opportunities are not equally available to everyone, and there are remarkably sharp divisions based on race, class and zip code. For instance, the city school district (CSD) has high numbers of students receiving of free and reduced lunch. According to their website, 84% of students are eligible to take part in the free and reduced lunch program. The rate of high school graduation is also distressing, ranging between 37% and 55% for 2009, which is described as “increasing, but still too low.” These challenges are also augmented by the deindustrialization of the city, with its major economic corporations having downsized and/or relocated.

Within this setting, schools operate and attempt to negotiate the multiple difficulties that can arise. Rosa Parks high-school is located downtown, near a section of the city with a bar, a food cooperative, a donut shop or two, and a complicated highway intersection that cuts through and around what I assume used to be neighborhoods. There are approximately 180 students who attend this school, which serves grades 9 -12. The students are predominantly African American, and there are Latino and White students represented as well. It is a special school, in its approach to learning as being “more than just a test score”, and it is also a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES). This entails a distinctive approach to education focusing on individual students, the development and nurturance of learners, and a democratic approach to education.

The Problem

Education, and schools in particular, are sites of struggle (Nieto, 2005; Nieto, 2003; Apple, 1990; Kohn, 1999; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Freire, 1970/1993; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2007). These struggles and battles are multifaceted: loaded with politics, ideologies and warring factions. Opposing arguments are presented and debated, such as: schools need improvement, education is hopeless, education is for freedom, education is for oppression, more government involvement, less government involvement, smaller schools, better methods, more testing, less testing. The list of demands and solutions is strongly contested and deeply polarizing, but within our society many believe that something is wrong with schools, teachers, and/or students. When the government becomes involved through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and other “well-intended” legislated attempts to “fix” schools, these instances have often had undesired and even disastrous effects that have
increased inequities instead of counteracting them (Kohn, 1999; Hursh, 2007; Harris, 2007). Despite fervent critiques and questionable “reforms” and “solutions,” problems persist and inequities continue. This is notable in our “standards” driven era of simplified conceptualizations of learning as easily measurable and connected to corporate-created tests.

This is especially true in urban schools for youth of color; schooling is not only contested, but inherently unequal (Kozol, 2005; Ginwright, Cammarota & Noguera, 2005; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Schools are often sites of domination, control and oppression for youth of color, not spaces of learning or equity (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Cammarota, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2002). Within the last 25 years these circumstances have been exacerbated: the emphasis on standardized testing and scores, inequitable district funding formulas, and classed and racialized re-segregation within districts have contributed to a despairing and demoralizing perspective on schooling as well as a host of negative implications for teachers and students (Kozol, 1991; Janesick, 2006; Darder, 2002; Lipman, 2002; Nieto, 2003).

In addition to these complexities, the problems of representation and power have plagued debates about justice and equity within schools. Frequently these discussions have been rooted in deficit models that not only deny white privilege and structural racism, but lay the blame for injustice and inequities on the hearts, minds, and souls of those who have been victimized and demonized by it (Akom, 2008; Lipsitz, 2005; Weiner, 2007). As stated by Lorde (2007), “The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions” (p. 53). These discourses arose partly from historical factors that laid the foundation of racism in the construction of our Constitution and the blood of the oppressed that has gone into the creation of our country. Much more recently, we find the “culture of poverty” model developed and perpetuated by scholars anxious to problematize and blame Brown and Black folk in an unjust and pathologizing manner (Akom, 2008). This has a long and tragic interconnection to our shared history in the United States. For centuries, we have suffered the consequences of the creation of a country so clearly based in racialized discourses that denied the humanity of the Indigenous, Latino/a and African American people, we have suffered the ramifications of this for centuries (Ladson-Billings, 2003). The genocidal treatment of the Native Americans, the dispossession and assault against Latino/as, and the residue of slavery have all left their marks on our society, effects which endure into the present.

These historical effects linger in the continued practices of institutional, societal and individual racism that are ingrained within our culture, and are normalized in their continued persistence. The discourses that arose during the 1950s and 1960s within the U.S. were an extension of this, with the deficit model applied to all who were not middle class and white. Many scholars argue that these racist undercurrents still exist, but, like a virus, have mutated into different forms of display and enactment in the post 1960’s United States (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006). These discourses are much more difficult to trace in contrast to the older paradigms that previously defined what racism entails. One of the main points is that racism is still normalized and experienced by people of color within our society, but is much more masked in
its display by terms and concepts such as “color-blindness” and “reverse racism” (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000).

I argue in the Freirean tradition that we as teachers need to be both critically engaged and (radically) loving simultaneously; that these are linked to transformative education, and that hope is closely connected to creating different possibilities for education in an inequitable world. In a piece that was published posthumously by Freire’s wife (2007), there is a beautiful point that Freire makes about the importance of dreaming: “My discourse in favor of dreaming, of utopia, of freedom, of democracy is the discourse of those who refuse to settle and do not allow the taste for being human, which fatalism deteriorates, to die within themselves” (p. 26). In order to avoid the destructive and oppressive tendencies of education, we desperately need spaces for liberatory praxis. Education is inherently political (Apple, 1990; Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994) and the choices we make as educators to move toward socially aware and activist stances have an important place in our classrooms and curricula, and for the children with whom we work.

Research Exploration

I believe that teachers and their classrooms can conceive and demonstrate pedagogical praxis that involves both reflection and transformative action that is based on and intertwined with a deep political love for children, and this love is connected to the hope necessary to persevere despite barriers. Freire (2004) and Darder (2002) define hope as central to the transformative experience of education. Freire takes this even further to argue that, “hope is an ontological need” (p. 2). I argue that, especially in a field such as education, with the daily interactions and challenges of balancing public opinion, institutional racism, and shortages of funding and respect, hope is a necessity for both teachers and the youth with whom they work. I also believe that, in part, the militant/radical love of teachers intertwined with hope, offers a spiritual and practical antidote to these challenges, and that classrooms can be both protective and nurturing spaces for youth. The problems are many: perceptions and realities of schools in a racist and divided society, high push/drop-out rates, unfair tracking practices, and unsafe schools. Amid these issues lie the precarious positions of our children, especially those in low income areas (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

In response to these complexities, my goal within this work was to explore the role of hope, armed love and “praxis” in the work of transformative teachers of marginalized children and youth. More specifically, I examined the conception and implementation of caring, armed love, hope, and critical pedagogy.

Significance of Research

Critical social theories are excellent at providing critiques; however they must not simply stop at the theoretical and philosophical presentation of the
negativity that abounds in education and in the daily lives of urban youth. This can lead to despair, and it is a delicate and tenuous balance between admitting the challenges and at the same time presenting alternatives that are empowering, without surrendering or sounding unrealistically idealistic. In fact, many academics that I have encountered perceive hope or optimism as symptoms of a misplaced naïveté, instead of powerful sources of change-agency. Urban education is a complicated space, and has many different facets within it that are connected to historical inequalities and current social injustices. In terms of the challenges faced by young people of color, Ginwright, Cammarota and Noguera (2005) state:

Global capitalism has contributed to the exodus of jobs, higher levels of inequality, and the marginalization of the urban poor. Urban youth have been particularly affected by this transformation and the concomitant social and economic conditions. (p. 24)

The speeches of politicians are a superficial start, especially in the face of many complexities. We must bring this rhetoric into concrete practice for children of all colors and classes, youth are our future. Ngũgĩ (1993) eloquently and chillingly states:

Children are the future of any society. If you want to know the future of a society look at the eyes of the children. If you want to maim the future of any society, you simply maim the children. Thus the struggle for the survival of our children is the struggle for the survival of our future. (p. 76)

Although we must face the demons of inequity that continue to torment our children, we can choose our response to them. As educators we have the responsibility to be aware of the politics we are choosing, and to what end they are directed. Are our positions coming from the politics of despair and nihilism, or are they the politics of movement and hope? Where does change originate and what sustains it? Do we believe that education and educators can make a difference in the lives of children and youth, or not? Even amid postmodern debates that de-center the individual as connected only to larger systems, we need to consider the everyday realities of youth and children we work with.

Explorations of caring, armed love, and critical pedagogies.

I hope to present the many ways in which the difficulties and challenges reside alongside the promising possibilities for resistance. In the midst of chaos and inequity, there must be room for growth and movement, for a re-visioning of what could be possible.

Chapter 2 goes into depth regarding the extensive literature on caring, armed love and critical pedagogies. Through the second chapter, I aim to present the many different instances and representations of caring and armed love, as well as problematize them, and the implementation of these standpoints. Caring and love seem like “simple” concepts, but the literature reveals a wide range of understandings and perspectives on these concepts. Hope and critical pedagogies are also examined.
Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework (a combination of caring, armed love, and critical pedagogy) and the methodology used to implement the research. (Armed love is based in the tradition of Paulo Freire (2005) and Antonia Darder (2002, 2003). Through defining and examining armed love, I argue that it includes a strongly critical and activist stance that is intertwined with the core commitment to changing the lives of students through transformative education. The methodology I chose involved a qualitative case study with interview and video components, based in the work of Stake (1995) and Seidman (2006).

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the multitude of findings including the importance of understanding, relationship, community and caring, the salience of race, hope and despair, as well as armed love. The findings present some fascinating and powerful contrasts from these educators’ experiences which help us to understand the complexities of urban education and critical pedagogies, as well as armed love and caring.

Chapter 6 concludes the work by drawing parallels to larger social forces of oppression and the ways that individuals must continue to struggle despite the need for larger and deeper changes to occur. There is resistance, criticality, hope, despair, opportunity and stories of struggle to be common unifying themes within the practices of these exemplary educators.

First, I will begin with questions, background, and problems to proceed into the realm of urban education more deeply. Education is immersed in ideologies, politics, racism, power, privilege and dominance. In the midst of these social forces, children and teachers struggle to survive and to thrive. They negotiate and create caring spaces in the face of tremendous difficulties.
CHAPTER II

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH CARING, HOPE AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGIES?

It is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up. In short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented and well-thought-out capacity to love. (Freire, 2005, p. 5)

“Love” is a common word, but its definitions, experiences and representations differ greatly. This terminology and its classroom application vary greatly depending on the researcher, teacher and students- as well as culturally specific connotations. Definitions of terms such as love, hope, caring and critical pedagogy are potentially sites of contestation. These terms and their demonstration can be sites of growth or of conflict, and exploring them brings greater understanding of the complexities involved.

Forms of Love

According to hooks (2003), “at its best teaching is a caring profession” (p. 86). If caring is so intimately interwoven into teaching, it is necessary to discover what is meant by caring, and this proves to be a challenging task. Caring has different aspects, and the definition is a challenge because of the orientation, experiences and many perspectives on caring.

Noddings' (1984, 2002) work on caring is seminal. She wrote from a white second-wave Feminist standpoint on the importance of caring as intertwined with morality and ethics. Her work examined and expanded on different aspects of caring, bringing a much needed discussion of caring into the field. Noddings connects caring to fundamental needs and human connections, and makes a strong argument that both defines what genuine caring looks like and points to its necessity in our interactions. Her conception of caring also noted the importance of the care-giver and the cared for as equally crucial elements of caring relationships.

Noddings’ work presents a nuanced perspective of caring, but subscribes to a common mistake associated with the time period; it universalized women’s experience as white and middle class, and ‘naturally’ connected to caring. This assumption that caring is based in biology or gender is limited in its notion of what caring is, and polarizes the sexes based on this perceived strength (or weakness) in demonstrating caring. Her work is still quite useful when considered with an understanding of its limitations. It contributes a particular foundation to the discussion of caring which is elaborated by many other scholars in a wide range of fields, including education.

Other scholars have expanded on Noddings’ work (see Goldstein & Lake, 2000, 2003; Haskell McBee, 2007; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Thompson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999; Lysaker, McCormick & Brunette, 2004; Beauboeuf-
CHAPTER II

Lafontant, 2002, 2005; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rolón Dow, 2005). Haskell McBee (2007) found seven themes in particular surfaced through her research that can assist with a definition of what caring means to teachers specifically: offering help, showing compassion, showing interest, caring about the individual, giving time, listening and getting to know students (p. 36). Other work, such as that by Shel (2006) equates caring learning environments with nurturing students’ growth and ties it to both cognitive and emotional development. Cassidy and Bates (2005) described caring as both a “perspective and practice” (p. 68). Citing Noddings’ (1984) work extensively, they see caring as having holistic effects on youth and children when it is implemented with a focus on containing different components. According to these authors, the special challenges of the school (which worked with youth who had been identified as having difficult life situations) are contradicted by the, “ambience of the school, which exuded peacefulness and warmth. Students who had been labelled unmanageable, even violent, by former schools and by the justice system appeared happy and relaxed and were doing schoolwork” (p. 72). As demonstrated by these works, caring can manifest and impact classrooms very differently. Caring relationships can be critical to the learner in their growth, as well as their success in school, it can even possibly negate challenging environments and situations for youth.

Caring concepts which build deeply on the work of Noddings (such as those above) can be problematic, however. Though these pieces offer a direction to begin to investigate the definitions of caring, they are notably quiet on the ethnic/racial/class implications or assumptions behind the conceptions of caring. There is a need to examine other studies that challenge the concepts and assumptions of caring that are grounded in experiences of white privilege. In fact, Thompson’s (1998) work explicitly challenges the ethic of caring (and Noddings’ previous work) as Eurocentric and subscribing to an ideology of color-blindness. This is important to understand because caring can vary so greatly, and so much of the caring literature is based on Noddings’ work.

Thompson traces the origins of the theories of caring to Carol Gilligan’s (1977) work In a Different Voice. Thompson’s critique begins by pointing to the fact that, “Black feminist theorists and other scholars have long argued that the values that appear natural and universal to Whites are values that work for Whites, including White feminists” (p. 526). Thompson posits that by virtue of the lack of questioning of the concepts of care, approaching this as a universal is dangerous. Through doing so, difference becomes minimized and absorbed into the (white) discourse. Caring becomes essentially “whitewashed”, disregarding the nuances and differences in communities of color.

The whiteness of the caring literature is challenged by other scholars as well. Valenzuela (1999) realized the interconnection between youth’s perceptions of teachers as caring or uncaring and their connections to school and desire to achieve. She was careful to present the conflicting definitions of caring as understood by students and teachers, mentioning specifically that educación is a foundational concept connected to caring for Mexican and Mexican-American youth, and that the definition of educación is important to them. She states:
Educación is a conceptually broader term than its English language cognate. It refers to the family’s role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning. Though inclusive of formal academic training, educación additionally refers to competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others. (p. 23)

Caring is interconnected to culture, to morality and to genuine relationships and understanding of students. Valenzuela (1999) argues that authentic relationships of caring with students are central to success. By not establishing these genuine connections, the mostly Anglo teachers were denying the importance of students’ cultural backgrounds and also created a “subtractive” schooling environment for the youth in her work. The schooling environment acted as a destructive force for the youth enmeshed within it, due to the lack of caring and culturally-based relationships.

Visions and praxis of caring and armed love.

The works below move towards armed love in their approaches to student-teacher relationships. It is sometimes difficult to separate the differences between what caring and armed love manifest as, especially since the literature has very few studies that touch on armed love explicitly. However, the research mentioned in this section uses other terms that coincide with the goals of armed love. The political elements in the search for equity and the highly-demanding nature of armed love are shown here.

Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) present their research and description of caring with a focus on socioculturally situated caring in two Latino community schools. In this case caring was contextually situated within the respective Latino communities, and connected with social activism and empowerment as well as struggles for equity. The authors based their work substantially on both Thompson (1998) and Valenzuela (1999). Their conceptions of caring are connected to justice. Their discussion included powerful examples of personally and politically relevant curricula for Latino youth who attend the schools. In particular, one concept based in Latino culture, personalismo, was connected to the schools’ institutional practice. The authors cite Santiago-Rivera et al. (as cited in Antrop-González and De Jesús, 2006) and describe this as an emphasis on personal connections, warmth, and close relationships.

Brown (2009) examined African American men’s teaching styles as performance, and found some powerful themes. Brown approaches pedagogy as “performative”, and looks at the nuanced versions of interaction that African American teachers in his study demonstrate. In his findings, he points to three distinct patterns of performance; “Enforcement”, “Playfulness” and “Negotiation” as key elements. Each of these styles was flexible and changed depending on situations. This connects to armed love, in the interactional basis
of connections between teachers and students, as well as a form of directness in communication. Ware (2006) defines advocacy, political awareness and caring as *Warm Demander Pedagogy* (p. 427). Care-giving is one of the notable roles that African American teachers take on. Within her framework of *Warm Demanders* as defined by Vasquez (as cited in Ware, 2006) teachers who work well with students of color are seen as simultaneously having affection and high expectations and demands for the youth they work with. Ware categorized her participants within three different contexts: authority figures, care givers and pedagogues (p. 436), and provided examples from her research to support these observations. Caring and strong discipline were intertwined here with high expectations for youth, similar to the ways in which I have envisioned and examined armed love.

Roberts (2010) develops her theory of *culturally relevant critical teacher care*, which she connects with the teaching practices of African American teachers. She looks at the perceptions as well as the embodiment of caring in relation to African American students. Her predominant themes spoke of “political clarity/colour[sic] talk and concern for students’ futures” (p. 455). These themes engaged open, honest discussion and guidance in dealing with racism, as well as encouraging students to consider possible careers, and to navigate away from the dangers which they may face in their lives. Race, advocacy and caring are intertwined here.

Foster (1992) discussed the pedagogical and professional experiences of African American teachers, and states, “despite the difficult circumstances in which teachers often find themselves, it is possible to consciously embrace an educational philosophy and fashion a pedagogy designed to counteract oppression and foster empowerment” (p. 179).

The analysis and presentation of caring and armed love here are based in non-Eurocentrically based frameworks, and emphasize the strengths of seeing the ethic of caring as highly flexible and powerful. Caring is contested and contextual. In this case, the form of nurturing and care are connected to both the individual students and the larger historical and social meanings to which students of color are connected. Caring and armed love involve vastly different perceptions and enactment depending on the sociocultural location of the teacher, researcher and students.

As mentioned previously, caring is complicated. Based on the works that I have encountered, as well as my own experience with transformative teachers, I have crafted the definition of armed love to build on the previous literature and to include a strong and deep commitment to protecting, caring for, and empowering students in the face of social barriers and oppressions that surface in their everyday lives, as well as a political passion to inspire and support marginalized youth. By this definition, armed love includes a strongly critical, political and activist stance that involves a deep social awareness of injustice, and the core commitment to changing the lives of historically marginalized students through transformative education. This love “looks larger” and “sees deeper” into the bigger implications beyond the classroom as well as within it. As stated by Freire: “It is indeed necessary, however, that this love be an ‘armed love’ the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to
fight, to denounce, and to announce” (p. 74). Radical, transformative approaches to education are inherently connected to the struggle for social justice, and love is a key element within this. Freire’s work stressed the importance of love to teaching (2005). In fact, Freire (2005) saw love as a crucial ingredient for teachers, associating love with courage and considering it an absolute necessity.

Hope

On the other hand- while I certainly cannot ignore hopelessness as a concrete entity, nor turn a blind eye to the historical, economic and social reasons that explain hopelessness- I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream… Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings… (Freire, 1992, p. 2)

Freire (2004) and Darder (2002) define hope as central to the transformative experience of education. Freire takes this even further to argue that “hope is an ontological need” (p. 2) because without it, our activism dies, as we can imagine nothing better than what we see before us. Nieto (2003) posits that hope comes from a variety of sources for teachers, including from their students, colleagues, their own beliefs and refinement of their work and also from the deep belief in the optimistic possibilities of public education (with a healthy cynicism and awareness of inequities). She states that this is a difficult balance to achieve- holding onto hope despite the crushing disappointments that plague public education.

Hope and teaching are addressed in various ways in educational research including “audacious hope in action” (Givens Generett & Hicks, 2004; Givens-Generett, 2005), hope and organizational connections connected to teachers’ loyalty and commitment (Hodge & Ozag, 2007), hopeful curriculum as a framework for social change and educational interventions (Renner & Brown, 2006; Renner, 2009), as well as an examination of the concept of “robust hope” in theory and practice (McInerney, 2007), and a discussion of different forms of hope in connection to urban education (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). However, despite this variety of discussions of hope, none of these works examined hope in combination with armed love and praxis. Neither have there been many empirical studies, so hope tends to be discussed much more conceptually and philosophically, and examined much less empirically.

Some authors address hope auto-ethnographically. hooks (1994) speaks of her own experience in Black schools as a child in the segregated South, with education being a hopeful endeavor in a lengthy struggle. The Black women teachers provided the challenge and support for children that they connected with in their classrooms. hooks states that:

For Black folks teaching-education- was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle… we learned early on that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racial colonization. (p. 2)

Vitally important for this type of revolutionary educational activism is the combination of social awareness of racism and other inequities with
willingness to take action for change. This is similar to Freire’s concept of “praxis” (Freire, 1970/1993) which brings together critical consciousness and self-reflection with active practice. To enact transformation I argue that hope is a necessary ingredient and that its opposite, despair, leaves no room for activism or movement because of the sense of the overwhelming power of the obstacles in our way as educators. Hope creates room for movement, for possibilities to create different outcomes, whereas despair simply shuts them down. I strongly agree that hope in fact creates spaces of possibility that can open teachers and their students to new ways of being educators and educated. This hopeful vision of the present and future is vital.

Hope offers us possibilities, as mentioned by Coté, Day and de Peuter (2007), “the crucial task of our times is not only to analyze and oppose existing forms of oppression and inequality, but to discover within our various communities the powers that will allow us to create viable alternatives to them.” (p. 332). To struggle, we need to be able to envision something better and more promising in our future. Hope is one element, while critical pedagogy is another potentially rich method of doing so. In the following section I will investigate the possibilities of this perspective and its valuable classroom implications.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is a complex approach that involves liberation through education. It has been seen as an outgrowth of Freire’s (1970, 1992, 2005) work (with many other influential thinkers throughout the 20th Century) and seeks to implement particular democratic and critical educational approaches and perspectives within classroom settings (McLaren, 1999; Bartlett, 2005). McLaren (2009) states that “Critical pedagogy is fundamentally concerned with understanding the relationship between power and knowledge” (p. 72).

Historically, Freire is strongly connected with critical pedagogical approaches, however critical pedagogy also owes a debt to the larger field of critical educational thought with the Frankfurt School, which developed in Germany in the early 1920s (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003). The Frankfurt School’s basis in Marxism was originally focused on critiques of the historical and political environment at the beginning of the twentieth century with advanced Capitalism, domestic and international wars, and intense political struggles forming the backdrop for their philosophical and theoretical standpoints (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003). The implementation of education as social critique, as well as the potential for political and social activism are the underlying currents within critical pedagogy. It is also inherently contextually based. Kincheloe (2007) argues that critical pedagogical approaches must be cognizant of the complexities of context, that “no simple, universally applicable answers can be provided to the questions of justice, power and praxis that haunt us” (p. 16).

Within our current society, where standardization and capital take precedence, critical pedagogy offers a site of potential hope and change. Critical pedagogical approaches value education as a site of social change.
while incorporating the criticisms of gross inequalities that continue to plague our society, its institutions, and the people attempting to survive within it.

The literature for critical pedagogical approaches varies widely with a range of practitioners and theoretical standpoints. Transformation and critique are underlying threads within this standpoint. While the critiques are crucial, I argue that hope and armed love and commitment are also necessary components. These components push the critiques further into action when practitioners run into despairing social and educational realities. All the same, critical pedagogy is powerful and interconnected to classroom practice. As argued by Lynn and Jennings (2009), critical pedagogical work is based on several important tenets, and those educators engaged in it:

1. Question the links between knowledge and power.
2. Recognize the dialectical nature of oppression as a dehumanizing force that requires some level of ‘participation’ from their students.
3. Believe that dialogue and reflection are key ways to empower students in the classroom.
4. View their students as ‘producers’ of knowledge with the ability to transform oppressive social and cultural structures.

When educators are aware of the political nature of education, and practice with the knowledge and skills to use critical pedagogical approaches, they are using the classroom as a site of struggle and resistance. The classroom can become an “enclave” in otherwise uncomfortable, boring and oppressive schooling situations, especially for youth of color.

Pedagogical approaches and the choices that teachers make about them can make a difference in the lives of their/our students. Educators have power within their classrooms and institutions to make choices about what and how they teach, despite demoralizing and punitive curricular pressures. These choices that teachers make can move students toward acceptance of the status quo or toward awareness, resistance and activism in fighting against it through critique and transformation.

Classroom-based critical pedagogical interventions.

Within the past few years there has been a tremendous amount of research on practices involving critical pedagogy in the classroom (see Cammarota & Romero, 2011; Low, 2011; Lopez, 2011; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Chapman & Hobbel, 2010; McGee, 2011; Sensoy, 2011; Choudhury & Share, 2012). Authors have worked within classrooms and other spaces to engage the tenets of critical pedagogy actively with youth and adults. Though critical pedagogy has seen criticism regarding it being “overly theoretical”, it is now moving firmly into the discussion and practice. The studies below examine many possibilities within the classroom for critical pedagogy and its concrete implementation.

McGee (2011) examines and reflects on the incorporation of critical pedagogy as a student teacher, addressing concepts and issues of immigration in her sixth grade classroom. She facilitates a student-generated topic, and helps her students discuss, reflect on, and learn more about issues of immigration in their school and larger society. She reflects on the ways critical
pedagogy needs to be fostered in our practices, and the potential power it can bring to the classroom and students’ understandings. Critical approaches can open up the minds and worlds of our youth.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) argue that through combining criticality and practice, we find more empowering ways to bring critical pedagogy into education. The main focus of their book, The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools is to examine and discuss the practical aspects of utilizing critical pedagogy. One example given in the incorporation of critical pedagogy is the way the teacher/researchers engage canonical literature, in combination with critical approaches. They utilized works such as Beowulf and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as pathways into the dominant cultural representations, while also giving the youth involved the tools to empower themselves as critical readers and be able to challenge the silent authority of these texts.

Low (2011) focuses on hip-hop and the intricacies which arise when centering hip-hop as a pedagogical approach. She examines three urban classrooms, where hip-hop was utilized as a means of examining the many layers and meanings of a critical hip-hop pedagogy. Her reflection and analysis center the ways in which race, identity, youth culture, power and expression can offer sites of conflict as well as growth for youth and those who work with them. She courageously engages with the controversies and multiple meanings of language and power through hip hop as a site of resistance and learning. As she begins her work, the core of hip-hop authenticity is explored, and then she proceeds to examine a talent night rap, where the many complex themes and interpretations of language, poetry and youth perspectives collided. This study also examines the problematic issues with language and representation within hip-hop and points to the ways in which critical hip-hop pedagogies are embraced and challenged within the curriculum. She argues that incorporating critical hip-hop pedagogies involves struggle and serious commitment by educators, parents and administrators.

The collected essays in Chapman and Hobbel (2010) examine social justice educational approaches across various disciplines, theoretically and historically. In this case, the terminology is not identical, but the practices are embodiments of critical pedagogical approaches, referring to “social justice education”. The book speaks to the historical moments which have led to social justice pedagogies, including the aftermath of WWII and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Civil Rights movements, Multicultural Education, the work of Freire, laboratory schools, and other social movements. They incorporate theoretical bases for critical education, and then focus on possibilities for classrooms across multiple disciplines. The final section of the book genuinely integrates social justice pedagogy through discussions and examples of instances where it has been used within classrooms from art, to ESL, to math, to science. The conclusion argues for the desperate importance of critical social education, as the need for this in a fragmented and inequitable society is pressing.

Hill (2009) also utilized youth culture and literacy practices through hip hop. The specific course he examined and also co-taught was entitled Hip-Hop Lit, and was an English elective. The space that he created in his classroom
made a place for students to not only connect their lived experiences with the lyrics and meaning of hip-hop, but to share their own personal (and sometimes very painful) narratives as well as build a community. The lessons from this piece involved the importance of critical pedagogy with an awareness of the difficulties that we may be presenting to our students when we work with justice-centered issues, as they can bring both transformative influences as well as suffering. This is a delicate and necessary balance.

Kumashiro (2000) addresses this specifically when discussing his own teaching against oppression, when students began to struggle with and confront the power of oppression less on an intellectual level, and more on an emotional one. As he describes his students’ engagement with the emotional and psychological aspects of oppression, he could see that students were put into crisis. Through this crisis, Kumashiro argues, students and teacher are in a process of “unlearning”. Only by engaging with our emotions and whole selves can we expect to be fully present to help learners move through the difficult waters of oppression and critical pedagogy, of which suffering is inherently an aspect.

Sensoy (2011) speaks of an exploration of representations by seventh-graders of racism, classism and sexism. In this instance, the students were given a disposable camera and several days with explicit instructions to document instances of these particular oppressions. The student responses ranged in complexity reflecting troubling notions of the persistent divide between “school knowledge” and “life knowledge”.

Darder (2002) and Nieto (2003) specifically explore the voices of teachers in their own praxis as critical educators, with excerpts from their own lives and experiences as the basis for discussion within their respective works. The voices of the teachers give a picture of their own realities, beliefs and motivations in enacting critical pedagogy, bringing critical pedagogy concretely into practice. For many of them, their lived experiences have informed their teaching and internal drive for social justice for the children (or adults) they work with, and their own praxis is the mirror of this.

Schultz (2007) worked with urban 5th graders to brainstorm, identify, and then tackle serious deficiencies in their school atmosphere and facilities. Though the author does not concretely identify his pedagogy as critical, the elements of critical pedagogy are certainly evident: relevance to the lives of the (historically marginalized) students, a critique of systemic and everyday inequities, and an activist approach to empower youth to challenge these problems. The youth developed skills in campaigning, publicity, advocacy and research as well as academic skills that are intertwined with this. Through their dedicated and thorough labor, the young participants also secure some definitive changes such as badly needed repairs for their school building.

Cammarota (2007) offers another perspective on approaches to critical pedagogy and teaching through socially relevant curriculum. His focus is specifically on Latina/o students and he argues for critical consciousness to be developed through “active participation of Latina/o students in their lives, communities and futures” (p. 87). Cammarota argues that the findings of this study showed that students who were involved felt that they were thinking
differently about their own education and potential, as well as being helped to graduate from high school and consider the possibility of attending college.

External to classroom based critical pedagogical interventions.

Classrooms are only one possible venue for this kind of critical exploration. Outside of the classroom many youth-based community groups also organize, educate and unite around the themes prevalent in critical pedagogy. Some examples of these include Kwon (2008), Blackburn (2005), Chávez and Soep (2005), Ginwright (2006), Kirshner (2008), and Akom, Cammarota and Ginwright (2008), Fox, (2011/2012) and Ginwright, (2009). These works look at community groups, or critical media projects that are often youth-led as well as youth-focused, and practice critical pedagogical approaches to sharing knowledge and skills with youth to encourage local change.

One interesting example by Guajardo, Guajardo and Casaperalta (2008) focused on a hybrid site, an educational non-profit center based in a Texas high school. This organization began with an explicit focus on college preparation of Mexican American youth, and blossomed into a more holistic educational approach. The authors describe their work through focusing on the lived experiences of a young girl-participant and chronicle the development of the center through her journey through the program. Here we can see the centrality of caring and connection with critical pedagogical approaches. For example, Carmen, the focus of this work, mentioned a memory of ninth grade where students were debating a piece published in a journal that they created with their teachers. This journal work was focused on their own stories and histories, an excellent example of drawing on students’ experiences to support them and to create new knowledge.

Marri and Walker (2007) examined a program that took place in a series of workshops to discuss the continuing legacy of the Brown versus Board decision on its 50th anniversary. In this case, New York City high-school students were the participants in an educational endeavor designed with the critical pedagogical goals of examining social movements in the past and the present.

Another aspect of critical approaches is critical literacy. This perspective views the world through a lens which includes awareness of power imbalances and the complexities and situated nature of texts, as well as the reading and writing of them. Mulcahy (2008) eloquently argues:

Critical literacy is a mindset; it is a way of viewing and interacting with the world, not a set of teaching skills and strategies. From a pedagogical perspective, critical literacy is a philosophy that recognizes the connections between power, knowledge, language and ideology, and recognizes the inequalities and injustices surrounding us in order to move toward transformative action and social justice.

(p. 16)

Moving toward creating possibilities takes courage, persistence and the realization that this struggle goes beyond us, both stretching into the past and into the future. Greene (2003) poses some eloquent and crucial questions, “How can we awaken others to possibility and the need for action in the name
of possibility? How can we communicate the importance of opening spaces in the imagination where persons can reach beyond where they are?” (p. 100). In our work and our lives as educators and advocates we can take hold of these questions and use them to guide our reflection and our interactions in our everyday lives with our students, colleagues and others. Love, caring, criticality, hope and fighting are at the core of this work – these perspectives serve as the point for engaging the literature as well as praxis. Hope is a complementary color in this quilt; it blends the others together and gives the strength to continue. Critical pedagogy is more like the force, the needle that connects and moves the entire endeavor into action and bridges the gaps between theory and practice. Acting as the “bricoleur” (Kincheloe, 2007) I begin to piece these elements together into a cohesive whole, which presents a nuanced and multicolored picture of the ways in which criticality, advocacy, caring and armed love and hopeful practices in urban classrooms.