



Striking out on their Own: Lessons Learned from Student Teaching during and after the Chicago Teachers Union Strike

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Abstract

This study looks at the experiences of pre-service teachers who began their student teaching assignments amidst the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike. Four yearlong student teachers reflected on their understandings of teaching, unionism, and activism before, during, and after the strike. Findings suggest pre-service teachers need greater opportunities to a) learn about the politics of school, b) work with families and community members outside of school, and c) develop as truth-telling political activists.

Keywords: *urban teacher education, urban student teaching, unionism, teacher activism*

On September 4, 2012, 19 Illinois State University (ISU) Chicago Professional Development School (PDS) yearlong intern teachers embarked on their very first, first day of school as teachers. They entered into buildings and classrooms ready to greet hundreds of students ranging in grades K-8. The ISU intern teachers had spent the three weeks prior to this first day of school working in their classrooms with their cooperating teachers, attending professional development sessions in their schools, attending ISU classes, and meeting with community leaders. Like many teachers on the first day of school, they were excited to meet their new students, nervous about how they would be received, and anxious to get the year started. Nevertheless, less than one week later, on September 10, 2012, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) declared a strike, and the start of the intern teachers' first year was seriously altered.

This study examines the experiences of four out of 19 ISU Chicago PDS intern teachers as they were ushered into the teaching profession amidst the CTU strike. This case asks four questions: 1) In what ways did the preservice teachers perceive teachers unions and the politics of school before the strike? 2) In what ways did the preservice teachers' experiences during the strike affect them professionally? 3) In what ways do the preservice teachers perceive teachers unions and the politics of school after the strike? 4) In what ways should teacher education programs prepare preservice teachers for the politics of school, political activism, and truth-telling for social justice? While recent research regarding teachers unions, labor relations, and strikes exist (i.e. Barnetson, 2010; Jacoby, 2010; Jacoby and Nitta, 2012; Robertson, 2008), critical research involving both teachers strikes and preservice teachers education is less prominent. It is the hope of this case study to begin to fill that void.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the concept of sociocultural theory (Bakhtin, 1986; Dewey, 1938/1997; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978; and Wenger, 1998) as a lens through which to make sense of the social and cultural nature of preservice teachers' experiences and descriptions of what they learned as a result of the CTU strike. I chose to focus on preservice teachers' personal narratives as a primary source of data, and because I viewed the narratives through a sociocultural lens, my findings describe and interpret preservice teachers' learning within varied social and cultural contexts. In short, I used a narrative approach to research (Moen, 2006) to identify preservice teacher experiences of learning in terms of power, which are understood as occurring within the social organization of schooling and the culture of the school.

Influenced by sociocultural theory, a narrative approach to research is defined simply as "the study of how human beings experience the world" (Gudmundsdottir, 2001, p. 16). Essentially, a narrative approach focuses on how individuals assign meanings to their experiences through the stories they tell (Moen, 2006). A narrative approach is not only subject-centered by drawing focus on the lives of subjects, it also uses the subjects' own stories and interpretations as data and begins and ends in the storied lives of the people involved (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). Subjects' stories cannot be understood without attention paid to the context of everyday life (Daniels, 2008). Further, the aim and purpose of a narrative approach is not to generalize and universalize truth (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007), but narratives are cultural scaffolds or thinking tools that can be used to develop the profession and the field of practice (Moen, 2006).

The personal voice and perspective that is captured by the narrative approach to research runs in concert with methodological truth-telling. Aaron Kuntz (2015), drawing from Foucault, defines methodological truth-telling, or parrhesia, as "the aim of intervening within normative practices of knowing and being" (p. 22). In the case of this study, the participants' perspectives regarding their positionality and learning during the CTU strike as they take action to initiate "progressive change in the name of social justice" (Kuntz, 2015, p. 22).

Methodology and Data Sources

Based on my pedagogical grounding in sociocultural theory, interpretive research, the interest in social construction of reality as individuals interact in social scenes (Geertz, 1973), was a comfortable research methodology. Elements of ethnography were also employed. "Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995, p. 1). The four participants in my study were the ones who made meaning of the particular experiences, and it was my objective to understand how they made meaning and what meaning they made regarding their learning in relation to the strike.

I also used a critical framework and paradigm for my research. By illuminating preservice teachers' voices and participant-assigned meaning, utilizing a narrative approach to research complimented a critical paradigm. Critical research is defined by the desire of the researcher to use research as a tool for social change (Morrell, 2004). Critical research is usually conducted with or on behalf of marginalized populations, the work itself is collaborative in nature, and the work is geared toward producing knowledge in the pursuit of action for change (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2008). My use of a narrative approach as a critical researcher illustrates my professional intention towards social change.

This study illustrates the methodological kinship between the narrative approach, critical research, and truth-telling. Whereas the narrative approach seeks to study how people experience the world, truth-telling pushes further to include how people act upon the world politically for social justice ends. The explicit goal in truth-telling of political action and social change overlaps seamlessly with that of critical research as both value the activism of the researcher and (researcher) participant. In this study, the preservice teachers must come to terms with the disruption they feel in their professional trajectory caused by the strike; listen and respond to the voices of parents, students, and teachers impacted by the strike; and confront their political identities as beginning teachers. As a researcher and as their course instructor, my students’ experiences relative to the strike pushed me to think of how our university-based urban teacher education program does and does not prepare preservice teachers to be political activists and truth-tellers.

The research for this study spanned the 2012-2013 school year. Four PDS intern teachers, Christina, Linda, Meredith, and Steven participated in the study.¹ The participants were in my university-based language arts methods class during the fall 2012 semester. All 19 of my students were invited to participate at the conclusion of the fall semester, and five consented, although one participant withdrew from the program in the spring semester. Participants were interviewed during the spring of 2013 and asked generative questions from three categories: before the strike, during the strike, and after the strike.

Table 1

Before the Strike	During the Strike	After the Strike
What were your experiences with and thoughts towards teachers unions prior to the strike?	What were your thoughts regarding your role during the strike?	What are your thoughts regarding the strike at the end of your student teaching year?
What were your thoughts towards the possibility of a CTU strike before the strike?	What did you do during the strike?	How did the strike shape your learning and professional development?
What were your thoughts towards CPS regarding their negotiation with the CTU?	What were the greatest challenges you faced during the strike?	What are your thoughts regarding how ISU handled your role during the strike?
	What were your greatest professional learnings during the strike?	What are your thoughts regarding unions, CPS, and the CTU after the strike?
	How did you see the strike impacting students, their families, and the community?	
	How did the strike impact teachers?	

Once collected, data was analyzed in steps through an open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Step one involved the practice of “narrative smoothing,” separating irrelevant and relevant data (Polkinghorne, 1995) to “see what is there” (Grant, 1999). Here, I isolated each sentence in the participants’ responses with the intention of listening to the data and following the stories the participants were telling through their experiences. This step allowed me to become familiar with the data as a whole, and discard data that was not fruitful while not imposing what I thought to be important before closely interacting with the data.

1. The names of people are pseudonyms.

Step two involved a functional approach to analysis (Bruner, 1991). Once I had a handle on the data from step one, I was able to see that there were recurring themes within and across participants' responses. I found that participants were explicitly making sense of their lived experiences regarding school, the strike, and their developing teacher identity. From here I reread the participants' responses more closely seeking to categorize data that illustrated their experiences regarding *school*, *the strike*, and their *teacher identity*. Overall, this step allowed me to continue to follow the lead of the participants and their voices within the data, rather than impose my own direction.

Step three of the analysis process involved participants "proofreading and editing" my analysis of their words and work. In one-on-one interviews, I shared with them what patterns, themes, and stories I saw emerging from the data. At this point participants were able to critique my analysis and provide critical feedback that informed the data analysis process. By engaging in "member checking" (Creswell and Miller, 2000), I was able to better gauge the validity of the data and analysis based on the participants' feedback. Also, the participants' perspectives on my analysis added credibility to the study by providing them the opportunity to react to the research. Finally, the act and purpose of "member checking" was philosophically consistent with the narrative approach, critical research, and truth-telling. All three, in part, work to center participant voices and build collaboration between researcher and participant. Member checking also values participant voice in that it can be used by researchers as a "way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants' experiences" (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). Member checking can be utilized as something more than a traditional, positivist approach of "checking the data." Through my member checking interviews, I wanted to "get it right" and establish transactional validity, but I also wanted to measure transformational validity and how participation in the study affected participants' thoughts and/or future behaviors (Koelsch, 2013).

Contextual Background

Chicago PDS

As previously noted, the participants were enrolled in my university-based language arts methods class and were a part of my university's Chicago PDS program. The Chicago PDS program involves a yearlong placement for elementary and bilingual elementary majors in one of three partner communities in Chicago (Albany Park, Little Village, and Auburn Gresham). Christina, a white woman, lived and taught in Auburn Gresham, a predominately African American community on Chicago's south side. Linda, a Latina; Meredith, a biracial Mexican American; and Michael, a white male, were all bilingual majors who lived and taught in Little Village, a predominately Mexican American community on Chicago's west side.

During their PDS year, participants taught in their classrooms and took university classes in Chicago during the fall semester, and taught exclusively in their classrooms during the spring semester. The Chicago PDS program has strong relationships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in each partner neighborhood, and the participants worked with the CBOs so that their teaching could be more culturally and community responsive. One of the unique hallmarks of the Chicago PDS program is that preservice teachers don't come to the program to teach in a generic way with no attention to context. The content of the methods courses taught in Chicago along with the partnerships with the CBOs aim to push our preservice teachers to teach in ways

that build on the cultural and community strengths of their students and families. Preservice teachers learn about the communities in which they teach from CBOs and are taught by university faculty how to incorporate the community in the curriculum. Additionally, The Chicago PDS program also made housing available in each partner community. This allowed each participant to live within the community in which they taught.

CTU Strike

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is home to more than 600 schools, over 400,000 students, and approximately 23,000 certified teachers. While tension between labor and management is an important piece of Chicago's history, especially in city schools, the origins of the 2012 strike can be traced to the summer of 2011. In June of 2011, then Illinois governor, Pat Quinn signed into law legislation making it harder for teachers across the state to strike. The key provision of the law stated that teachers unions couldn't strike over salary disputes. Quickly parlaying the new law into political leverage, the CPS board of education rescinded the 4% annual pay raise it had pledged to the CTU membership. Because the CPS board of education members are appointed by the sitting mayor (at the time and currently Rahm Emmanuel), and not up for general election, the CTU was left with few political options in terms of lobbying individual board members to persuade their vote.

The inability to utilize the political tool of a strike in order to recoup the previously promised pay increase dealt a significant blow to the CTU. However, during the summer and into the fall of 2011 CTU leadership was able to organize a much more dynamic platform heading into the November negotiations with CPS. The CTU still advocated for greater financial benefits for teachers in the form of a protected pay scale relative to a teacher's experience and education, as well as a protection of health care benefits with no increase of out-of-pocket contributions. But the CTU also wanted teachers' evaluations to be minimally based on student standardized test scores. In another recent act of legislation, the state of Illinois passed a law mandated that school districts would use student test scores on standardized tests to make up at least 30% of teachers' evaluations. It was the contention of CPS to have 45% of teachers' evaluations to be based on students' standardized tests scores. Additionally, the CTU called for greater training built into contract days regarding new curricula, technology, testing, and standards, which CPS had cut in recent years.

Finally, the CTU advocated for greater investment in infrastructure and school support personnel. In recent years, CPS had tested the waters of quasi year-round schooling. Numerous elementary and high schools clustered in the same neighborhoods had been encouraged to implement a schedule, dubbed Track E, that would start school in early August and finish the school year in late June/early July. One of the key issues this move had exposed was the real lack of air conditioning, technological capacity, and other modern amenities in many CPS buildings. The CTU wanted the district to create and adhere to a workable timetable in modernizing CPS buildings. Also, the CTU wanted CPS to agree to hire more school nurses, counselors, school psychologists, and certified music, P.E., art, and technology teachers. By broadening the demands of the CTU to include increased support professionals for students, less emphasis on student testing, and "quality of life" infrastructure improvements, the CTU was attempting to move beyond salary talk and broaden their public appeal while maintaining their support of rank-and-file teachers.

The negotiations between the CTU and CPS that started on November 1, 2011 proved unfruitful, and mediations between the two parties began the following winter on February 1, 2012. Mediations throughout the winter and spring of 2012 brought the two sides no closer together, as

both sides seemed content to let the impasse play out over the summer. In a huge show of strength right before the end of the school year on June 11, the CTU put the notion of a fall strike to a member vote. After the ballots were tallied, a strike earned support from 90% of voting members. The overwhelming support for a strike in this vote showed the general public and the CPS leadership the CTU had the internal solidarity required to strike if need be. By the end of the month the current labor agreement expired, and for the next few weeks both sides made plays for the support of the public.

On July 24, 2012 after intense and ongoing negotiations, the CTU and CPS came to a partial agreement. Under the terms of the settlement, the CTU would agree to a lengthening of the school day, while CPS would agree to hire almost 500 teachers, many of whom had been laid off in recent years and rated as satisfactory or better. Of the teachers to be hired by the district, a significant amount would be music, P.E., and art teachers. Both sides claimed victory, but the larger areas of disagreement between the sides had been left unresolved.

Over 100,000 CPS students attending “year round” Track E schools returned to school on August 13, as did their teachers, this time teaching without a contract. Three weeks later on September 4, the remaining nearly 300,000 CPS students and their teachers returned to school as well. By now, the CTU had put in place the needed legal maneuvers to call for a September 10 strike. The stated strike date coupled with the start of the school year forced CPS to make a contract offer on September 5. The district’s offer centered on a modest pay increase, well short of the previously withdrawn 4% increase from over a year ago. The CTU rejected CPS’s offer, and the union began their strike on September 10, their first in 25 years.

While CTU members hit the picket lines, CPS enacted a strike contingency plan that would open 144 of the district’s 675 schools as “Children First” sites serving CPS students, and run by non-union CPS employees. The sites offered free breakfast and lunch to all students, “engagement activities”, and were open from 8:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. Additionally, 59 faith-based organizations, 78 Chicago Public Libraries, 78 Chicago Park District sites, and over 90 community-based organizations offered programming during much of the regular school day hours. Both sides were well-prepared for the beginning of the strike. The district mounted an aggressive public relations campaign running radio, print, and TV ads in English and in Spanish. The ads were geared towards CPS parents to apply pressure on their local schools and teachers. However, the CTU enjoyed a We Ask America public opinion poll that indicated 55.5% of voting Chicagoans polled supported the strike with 40% opposing. And of those polled who were CPS parents, 66% supported the CTU strike.

Sensing the momentum of the CTU and public opinion, CPS reached a tentative agreement with the CTU on September 14. Under the terms of the agreement, teachers who were laid off due to school closing would receive preferential treatment in being rehired by CPS and student test scores would play a less significant role in annual teacher evaluations. However, the agreement was not fully reached, and the strike continued. Chicago Mayor, Rahm Emanuel thus sought a legal injunction to force the CTU membership back to work. This effort stalled and the strike went into a second week.

Finally, after renewed negotiations, the CPS and CTU came to an agreement to end the strike on September 18, which allowed teachers and students to return school on September 19. By many accounts, the CTU had won a major victory. Under the conditions of the new contract over 600 additional music, P.E., art and other certified teachers were to be hired. Limits on class sizes in general education classrooms would be maintained. Textbooks would be made available to students and teachers on or before the first day of school. There would be room for greater

parent voice regarding class size on Local School Councils. Protocols were added to increase racial diversity in hiring of new teachers. Student tests scores of standardized tests for annual teacher evaluations would be reduced from the 45% proposed by the district to the state minimum of 30%. Funding would be increased in order to hire more special education teachers, school psychologists, social workers, school nurses, classroom aides, and school counselors. The longer school day that CPS wanted was agreed upon. And the CTU agreed on a 17.6% increase in salary over the next four years after initially seeking a 30% increase over the same time period.

Findings

The participants all taught in Track R schools. The university school year had started August 20, 2012 so they had been in their schools with their cooperating teachers (CTs) when CPS teachers reported later in August, and had been meeting with CBO leaders and Chicago PDS faculty and staff prior to the first day of the CPS school year. Essentially, three weeks into their official start as a preservice teacher in CPS, and perhaps their symbolic start as a teacher, the CTU voted to go on strike, and nine days later, classes resumed.

Before the Strike...Fighting for Education

Findings suggest that the preservice teachers were deeply affected by their experiences with the CTU strike. Before the strike, participants generally noted that the primary function of a teachers union was to negotiate teachers' salaries. However, during the time prior to the strike, participants learned that the CTU also advocated for textbook availability for students, as well as a lowering of the cap on class size. Linda mentioned that she had never learned about unions and "this side of school" in any of her university classes, and wondered why.

Because of their outside position as non-members of the CTU who eventually wanted to work in CPS, the participants found safety in being able to stay "neutral." They appreciated their ability to ask questions and listen to the veteran teachers in their building, but they were keenly aware of the ways in which their building principals talked about the impending strike. Steven mentioned, with surprise, that his principal showed constrained support for her teachers and the CTU. Nevertheless, they all spoke about not wanting to "ruffle any feathers" or get on the principal's bad side if they outwardly supported the CTU.

Meredith stated, "Prior to the strike, I did not know that the union fought for education and learning environments for students. Later, I realized that the union is a lot more focused on the students' wellbeing than what I thought." Regardless of whether or not the participants came in to the school year as being knowledgeable and/or sympathetic to teachers unions, the four participants expressed surprise in knowing all that the CTU had been advocating for. Having open conversations with their CTs and other teachers in their school prior to the beginning of school helped to broaden the participants' knowledge and understanding of the CTU's position, specifically, as well as the function of teachers unions, generally.

During the Strike...Sinking or Swimming

Normally, I taught my literacy methods class at one of our partner schools on the south side of Chicago in Auburn Gresham. However, during the strike, we were not going to cross the picket lines so we had to hold our class in the university office located in Little Village. Our one

class during the strike opened with us talking about everyone's experiences that week. Many of the participants found the media coverage to be very one-sided in favor of CPS. Steven made note that over the summer he wasn't really paying attention to the possible strike. But once the school year started, he paid close attention to what he was hearing from media outlets, statements from Mayor Emmanuel's office, and from Chicagoans. While all participants recognized the bias in the media coverage, Steven was the most appalled by it. He said, pointedly,

Uh, what I've heard on the news and read online has been ridiculous! They're making it sound like the teachers are greedy, don't care about teaching, and are only out for money. How can they not report what the actual demands of the union are? It's crazy!

The participants also noted that the media coverage and public relations blitz from the CPS and CTU confused many of their students' parents. This was particularly true in Little Village, where many of the residents do not speak English as their primary language. Linda, Meredith, and Steven discussed with other peers teaching in Little Village that the ads being broadcast on Spanish-language television and radio stations were aggressive, contradictory, and confusing to many residents. Linda noted,

I heard from my CT that parents are getting calls in Spanish from CPS and the union, and both sound a lot alike. The parents are scared and confused. The district calls say something about teachers breaking the law with the strike, and the union calls say something about the district not supporting students and teachers. I guess a lot of our parents just can't tell the difference and don't know how to get involved. When they hear 'break the law' they get scared.

As previously stated, while the strike was happening, most CPS schools were unavailable for students to access. The CPS utilized some buildings and offered parents the opportunity to drop off their children for most of the day. Many student teachers from other university programs in Chicago were sent to those sites while their home school site was shuttered. However, due to the ISU Chicago PDS program's relationships with CBOs in the partner communities, the participants spent the week of the strike in "safe" locations (e.g. churches, CBO buildings) working with a wide variety of students doing a wide variety of activities. This was described as the most difficult and educative experience relative to the strike for the participants.

On Monday of the strike week the participants were directed to a "safe" location by the Chicago PDS staff. CBOs had set up these sites for parents to utilize while school was not in session. Church kitchens, CBO gyms, and other spaces were used to house the youth of the community. The participants, and the CBOs, had no idea what to expect the first day of the strike, and student teachers were simply directed to be ready to work with the kids who came. When the participants arrived at their sites on that Monday, they found them to be lacking any instructional materials for kids. But shortly after their arrival came the kids.

Armed with very little, prepared for even less, the participants had to figure out how to engage youth, mostly Kindergarten-5th graders, for the duration of the typical school day. Christina mentioned all she had access to on Monday was a box of markers and a tablet of paper. The CBO was able to provide lunch for the youths, and Christina was able to locate a TV by the end of the day. Nevertheless, Christina noted that she went home crying that evening and didn't want to come back the next day. Despite her challenging day, Christina and the other participants stated how

they scrambled that evening for things to bring and activities to do with the youth in their charge. Christina brought in yoga DVDs to do with the children, Linda took the kids outside on a prolonged “nature walk”, even hearing from a child, “we never get to do stuff like this in school,” and Steven talked about playing all kinds of relay games in the gym.

The participants found this “sink or swim” experience so early in their careers to be both extremely stressful while also extremely rewarding. They felt overwhelmed and underprepared as they were left completely in charge of a group of children before they had even taught their first lesson as an intern teacher. Still, they conveyed a similar and more nuanced sense of understanding relative to being a teacher. They drew a connection between being under-resourced to work with their youth and lack of instructional resources they saw in many CPS schools. Also, they viewed a connection between their implementation of movement, music, and outdoors learning that engaged their youth with the limited opportunities their youth receive to do such things in a school setting. Finally, while they acknowledged they were certain they hadn’t taught their youth much that week, they did see and experience teaching as an organic dynamic between students and teachers. They didn’t necessarily need traditional school structures (e.g. desks, textbooks, tests) to engage youth in educative activities.

As the week winded down, and the buzz of the end of strike growing, participants noted that the support for the striking teachers from parents and community members was very high. Parents and community leaders brought coffee and breakfast to picketing teachers. Parents, for the most part, offered encouraging statements like, “I hope you win!” to the participants as they picked up their children. The participants missed their students and worried about parents who were inconvenienced, but for the most part finished the week emboldened. Christina reflected on her learning during the strike stating, “As a teacher, I have learned it is my professional responsibility to be there for my students and school community in any way possible.”

After the Strike...So much More

After the strike and upon returning to their school, participants reflected on how the nature of their school community changed due to the strike. Participants noted that teachers felt an elevated sense of pride and collegiality along with a deeper respect for the parents that were generally strongly supportive. Teachers and parents appeared to see each other in a new, more positive light. Also, participants saw that while administrators remained neutral, they interpreted some of their actions as being supportive of the CTU, and were very supportive and happy to get back to work.

In addition, participants stated that they saw the strike as necessary, while also being just a start. Linda noted, “There is still so much more that needs to be changed to favor students.” Looking at the strike in retrospect, Linda ultimately saw the strike as something to be done for students, not for teachers. Finally, participants felt like they saw teaching through a different lens now, one that was more realistic towards the politics at play within a large, urban school district. As Steven stated, “I feel disheartened that CPS continues to struggle in that way, when its neighboring districts in the suburbs commonly contrast CPS with its abundance of resources.”

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the data, the following assertions can be made regarding preservice clinical placements and teacher education: First, preservice teachers need opportunities to have educative experiences regarding the politics of schools, particularly those being prepared to teach

in urban communities. The participants spoke consistently about knowing very little regarding the politics of schooling prior to the strike. Within teacher education courses and experiences, opportunities for preservice teachers to more closely and deeply examine the political functions of school districts and teachers unions need to exist. These experiences will more fully prepare them for the profession they are about to join.

After the 2012 strike, our program began a partnership with the Chicago Grassroots Curriculum Taskforce (CGCT) in an effort to better infuse critical truth-telling in our PDS curricula. The CGCT has helped us move our students to not only see the presence of politics within their classroom (e.g. school policy, provided curricular resources, assessment) but also within the broader society (e.g. federal and state policy, school funding, community policing). Once our students see where and how politics emerge in the classroom, they are then taught as teachers the professional imperative to intervene as critical truth-tellers within their classroom as instructional leaders, within their school communities as community members, and beyond as engaged citizens.

Second, preservice teachers need to have opportunities working with youth, families, and community members outside of the schoolhouse. The participants found it extremely educative to engage with stakeholders. While being given full responsibility of such a fluid group of children during the weeklong strike was initially discomfoting, the intern teachers found that they were able to more closely engage with the resources and expertise of CBOs and parents during that week. Additionally, they were able to, at times, be more responsive to their youths because they were free from the trappings of “doing school.” Where there lacked logistical support and materials, there was autonomy to explore new avenues for learning. The participants spoke to this point and wanted to do their best to maintain the “authentic learning” they experienced that week as they reentered their classrooms.

Recognizing the trappings of “doing school” based on the narrowed, district provided or mandated curricula and resources is in itself beginning evidence of truth-telling in our preservice teachers. Often, university-based teacher preparation programs, like ours, urge their teacher candidates to reject canned curricula and teach in ways that are more centered on their own students. However, this cannot be fully realized without community collaboration and an eye for truth-telling. Two years after Linda’s experiences as a preservice teacher during the CTU strike, she spoke to me about how, as a second-year teacher in CPS, she reached out to community members to guide her teaching. Linda was teaching 2nd grade and wanted to read *And Tango Makes Three*, a picture book that depicts the true story of two male penguins who adopt and co-parent a baby penguin. She wanted to read the book to her students knowing that some parents and co-workers might find it too controversial or age inappropriate. By reaching out to the community organization, Linda was able to build her confidence in reading the text to her students, and develop a strategy specific to her community for interacting with students and adults who may challenge her and the text. When teacher educators help preservice teachers engage with youth, families, and community members outside the schoolhouse they can become stronger critical truth-tellers.

Finally, preservice teachers need to have opportunities to develop a disposition towards political activism. Steven captured the participants’ general view towards action when he spoke about “sneaking into a CTU rally.” He wore a red CTU shirt, boarded an “L” train after work, and went downtown to meet up with other intern teachers to march in a CTU rally. He felt he needed to be there, to be active, to be energized. With policies in numerous states challenging teachers unions, teacher tenure and due process, redefining teacher evaluation systems, along with many other powerful issues, preservice teachers need to study current teacher activism and be explicitly prepared to be active in the civic political process (Horn, 2014).

The CTU strike helped our program think more deeply about how we are preparing our students to be teachers who are truth-telling activists. Since 2012 we have made improvements to our courses to meet this end, as well as more actively involved our students in the political climate of Chicago. During September of 2015, our PDS program canceled classes and took our students to a sit-in rally at City Hall to protest to proposed closing of a Dyett High School. Also last fall, one of our recent graduates spoke at a public hearing in opposition of her school co-locating with two other schools in the same building. And this spring, current students and recent graduates alike participated in rallies downtown and across Chicago to support the CTU's strike on April 1. Our program's increased effort to be more public truth-tellers with our students have developed our graduates and students to be truth-tellers themselves.

This study is situated in a time and place of great struggle for teachers unions. The CTU strike came after collective bargaining by teachers unions was weakened in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio and before 50 Chicago schools were to be closed, and over 2,000 Chicago teachers were to be laid off. With teachers unions and unionism in flux, it is important for teacher educators and institutions of teacher preparation to prepare preservice teachers for the political landscape they are about to enter. Exploring the lived experiences of these four preservice teachers can potentially inform teacher education innovation, practice, and policy. Our program was strengthened when we listened to our students' experiences during the 2012 strike. The inquiry involved in this study related to "how human beings experience the world" (Gudmundsdottir, 2001, p. 16) and assign meanings to their experiences through the stories they tell (Moen, 2006) has become a more central component of our program design. While the narrative approach to research has contributed to the writing of this research, it has more importantly contributed a more active lens through which our program improves as it is committed to critical truth-telling and social justice.

On November 23, 2015 thousands of teachers, students, parents, and community activists held a rally in Chicago's Grant Park in support of CTU in their latest stalled contract negotiations with CPS (Waldroup, 2015). At stake, potentially hundreds of CTU members' jobs threatened by layoffs due to a city and state-wide budget crisis. Among the many teachers whose jobs are in jeopardy, Christina, and five of her 19 former ISU classmates who have just entered their third year teaching in CPS having endured the last CTU strike as preservice teachers. Since 2012, dozens of teachers unions have gone on strike, most notably in urban districts like Seattle, Scranton, PA, and East St. Louis, IL, but also in smaller districts like Kelso, WA and Prospect Heights, IL (Brenneman, 2015). For critical teacher educators across the country, active teacher solidarity is not isolated, and not in the past. The time is now for us to engage our preservice teachers in critical conversations about the politics of school, labor, and collective teacher action so that they are fully prepared to participate in the struggles that lie ahead.

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