

# **Mapping the Critical Ideology of Pre and Early Inservice Teachers: Teacher Education Experiences and the American Social Hierarchy**

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## ***Abstract***

*This research article examines how teachers' ideologies change as their teaching reproduces, shapes, and transforms the American social hierarchy. Educators go through observable stages of critical ideological becoming as they understand themselves and others as part of the structures that situate their teaching. The ideological transformation in this study primarily occurred through dialogical interactions, intercultural exchanges/experiences, developmentally appropriate frames, acting with others, personalizing experiences, connecting existing ideology and identity to just ideas, and developing intellectual solidarity with like-minded individuals. In this study, participants generally progressed through the developmental stages linearly, but ideological transformation was subjective and context dependent. Initial stages of critical ideological transformation commonly began with cognitive and identity shifts, and later stages included social analysis, community building, and transformative action. Findings demonstrate the impact of socialization, having diverse experiences, and existing ideologies on teacher praxis, revealing common ways in which ideological change occurs in a teacher's early career.*

**Keywords:** *Preservice Teachers, Inservice Teachers, Ideology, Critical Theory, Society*

## Introduction

Teacher ideologies, their evolution, and the role of critical ideology in pre-service and early in-service teaching experiences shape educational dispositions and determine how they will — and will not — counteract problematic realities within education and society. This research article examines how teachers' ideologies change as their teaching reproduces, shapes, and transforms the American social hierarchy. An empirical examination of these factors can reveal common points at which teachers experience critical ideological shifts and how these shifts impact cognitive, participatory, and more expansive approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers go through observable stages of “ideological becoming” as they come to understand themselves and others within the structures and society that situate their teaching. When teachers recognize the need for justice-focused teaching (e.g., Jaime-Diaz & Méndez-Negrete, 2020), their work leads to intellectual solidarity with students and communities (Magill & Rodriguez, 2021, 2022, 2024). In this study, teachers were observed and interviewed in pre- and in-service teaching experiences to observe critical ideological change and its impact on teaching over time. Educational artifacts were collected, and critical discourse analysis was employed to map the stages of ideological evolution experienced over six years. The goal of this work was to help teacher educators understand when, how, and why teachers adopt a more justice-focused, critical teaching praxis. Findings demonstrate the complexities of experiences that lead to teacher praxis and reveal common points of ideological change among teaching educators.

### 1. Literature Review

#### *Ideology*

Ideologies are the beliefs, values, and assumptions that shape our perspectives (Honnerich, 2009). For the purposes of this paper, ideology is discussed in two ways. First, as discussed in this section, ideology is a means of creating

uniformity of thought within a social apparatus that reproduces social hierarchy. Later, ideology is used to refer to the idea of critical consciousness, recognition, and humanization, which are foundational to critical praxis (cf. Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1998). Ideology, in this sense, can lead to shared analysis of social conditions and to solidarity, shaping emancipatory collective action.

These distinctions are important for teacher educators to understand because ideology can shape interpretations of social phenomena and human relationships, and how these affect individuals and groups.

Those with power use social ideology to cultivate the conditions for extending control (Lukes, 2005). These harmful ideologies shape social consciousness by perpetuating alienating social narratives that appear natural and teach individuals to ignore the complex socio-historical relationships that would help them understand society (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Trouillot, 2015). Ideology in this sense is used as a political tool to legitimize social thought, power, and educational practices that create antagonistic perceptions of human nature and identity, normalizing dehumanization to distract from economic exploitation. Ideological antagonisms have been used throughout history to justify inequitable cultural and social class conditions by reinforcing social hierarchies, normalizing assimilationist practices, and encouraging students to conform (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Healey et.al, 2018; Jaime-Diaz, 2019; Roediger, 1999; Federici, 2004). We can observe that identity politics promotes outrage and attacks against vulnerable populations as scapegoats, distracting citizens from examining the origins and locations of power (Magill, 2021). The subsequent creation of human hierarchy shapes social class, impacts access to resources, the possibility of humanization, and what students are allowed to know and experience. Observing these conditions is essential to fully see and address social injustice.

Ideology has also ensured that most understand human exchanges vis-à-vis capitalist relationships. Neoliberal ideology, for example, leaves individuals focused on abstract economic principles and the bottom line rather than on economic and material well-being (Fisher, 2022; Harvey, 2007; Hill, 2022; Rodriguez & Magill, 2017). Within the US ideological apparatus, humanity is similarly quantified through the situation of human labor, which is often based on cultural privilege and an individual's ability to accumulate capital (Leonardo & Manning, 2017; Hill, 2022b; Kozol, 2012; Marx & Engels, 1844/1988). Capitalist and neoliberal ideologies create forms of social hierarchy in the classroom that impact teachers' relationships with students, educational possibilities, and students' recognition as full participants in their own educational experiences. The implications of these ideologies are to reduce students to workers who are assessed on their ability to reproduce existing knowledge, ideology, and social conditions. Their transformation requires the abolition of the social hierarchy through conscious action to progress into conditions that would allow for democratic educational experiences (Hill & Maisuria, 2022).

Dehumanization that unfolds from oppressive ideologies occurs in many ways within education, which includes many intersectional realities, as students are socialized into class conditions based on school experiences (Willis, 2017). The intersection of class and race ideology in educational practices, for example, results in material conditions like over-standardization and over-policing of marginalized groups (Au, 2022; Love, 2016). Harmful social ideology reinforces how conditions are understood, shaping the thinking of leaders, teachers, and parents about inequalities and the impact of policy (Lukes, 2005; Therborn, 2008). Ideological attacks on constructs like critical race theory (CRT) or language learning are used to limit the observance of race and class together, democratic possibilities, and to legitimize attacks on vulnerable

populations (Lopez et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2023). The oppressive policies hinder justice-focused teachers' and stakeholders' ability to pursue more socially transformative work (Done & Murphy, 2018).

The impact of ideology on teaching practices is more subtle. Teaching is commonly understood through grand narratives that frame teachers as mere babysitters or purveyors of knowledge (Apple, 2004; Done & Murphy, 2018; Giroux, 1984). Teachers and parents rarely understand the complex relationship between culture and learning, even when they recognize it is needed (Ladson-Billings, 2009; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012). This lack of clarity about more complex forms of learning allows problematic assessments, practices, and teacher-focused approaches to govern classroom learning. Those enriched by capital (including social capital and cultural capital) see educational systems as working because they have benefited from their ability to navigate education effectively (Yosso, 2005). Those without capital are trained to feel uncomfortable in spaces where they might otherwise have the democratic power to improve social conditions. These ideologies have become fundamental parts of the structures and thinking that define and provide success within American education and society (Carpenter & Mojab, 2023; Rodriguez & Magill, 2016).

There is often a direct relationship between teachers' ideology and their pedagogy (Knowles, 2019). Teachers' ideologies shape their use of curriculum and pedagogical mediations, and these interactions have implications for how their students understand society (Magill & Salinas, 2019; Giroux, 1984). A teacher's or student's ideological unfolding can be seen in classroom interactions, discourse, behavior, and the symbolic mediation of social representations, as part of their teaching practice or praxis (e.g., Magill, 2023; Freire, 1970).

Ideology can also shape how parents, teachers, and students view others and themselves within the broader social discourse. It impacts the ability to engage in humanizing relations and conduct transformational activity, as well as how social antagonisms are discussed and contested. For these reasons, educators must consider and confront how ideology affects the teacher-student relationship and how teachers will support students' understanding of the world. Even teachers who can see the broader impacts of oppressive ideology on teaching and learning must still navigate these conditions. Even when teachers see, understand, and are sympathetic to these conditions, they may not feel they have the agency to transform them (Magill, 2023; Shanks, 2018). Therefore, close attention to ideology, ideological support, and examples of teacher agency in teacher education programs is essential to teacher education.

## **Challenges and Transformation: Transformational Ideology and Teacher Education**

### ***Challenges***

Teaching about ideology and socialization in teacher education is difficult because new teachers believe teaching is primarily about educational tools and disciplinary knowledge (Bartolomé, 2004). Preservice teachers (PSTs) often view teacher learning as methods, but may miss how human interactions and learning labor shape ideology and learning. The implication of new teachers' overfocus on learning tools is that ideology can appear neutral and that the educational process can appear universal and meritocratic (Mayo, 2022; Stetsenko, 2023). However, learning to use tools within ideologically infused structures such as schools or disciplines will not necessarily allow for understanding the realities of society, human exchanges (Engström, 2001; Stetsenko, 2017), or the complex social relationships that impact teaching and learning. Teacher learning (and learning generally) occurs in multi-voiced, socio-historically situated activity systems in which actors collectively use tools

to labor toward their learning goals (Smith & Magill, 2025; Sannino et al., 2009). Neglecting to teach about and honor human activity results in an abstracted, decontextualized learning experience (Pavlidis, 2023; Smith & Magill, 2025).

Teacher educators generally embrace culturally relevant and responsive approaches in the classroom, as scholarship has shown that these approaches have a positive impact on learning (Parkhouse et al., 2019). However, while these approaches promote multiculturalism and awareness of differences, they do not always show how social relations function or are transformed (Magill & Salinas, 2019). This makes transforming the ideologies that regulate preservice teachers' consciousness a complex problem, only partly addressed by teacher education programs (Sleeter, 2017). This is unsurprising, given that it is easier for new teachers to understand multiculturalism in the limited time they are afforded in the teacher education sequence. If only using a multicultural frame, a teacher may realize that racist discipline policies affect their students, but opt to use their power as a teacher to transform those conditions while also reinforcing other cultural or class ideologies (Licona, 2004). Teachers act on the basis of ideological and ontological stances toward social and educational factors (Magill & Rodriguez, 2022). Therefore, even when demonstrating an understanding of racism or classism, many teachers will not realize how their internalized ideologies and privilege shape their approach to students and society (Bondy, 2015; Milner, 2010; Rodriguez, 2008; Sleeter, 2017; Utt & Tochluk, 2016).

Further complicating ideological transformation, PSTs with narrow lived experiences, limited socio-historical knowledge, and expectations of privilege resist seeing structural inequalities in education as required for understanding transformational, humanizing, and democratic teaching (Gorski, 2016; Matias &

Zembylas, 2014). When teachers adopt these ideologies in teacher education programs, they sometimes dismiss the realities of structural inequalities in how organizations function and social interactions occur (Jones & Vagle, 2013; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Valenzuela, 2010; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012). Therefore, PSTs and teacher educators must deeply interrogate ideology to understand its impact on themselves, students, and classroom interactions and activities (Dover, 2022; Greene, 1999; Hagopian, 2025 & 2025b; Huddy et al., 2015; Mason, 2018).

### ***Transformational Experiences in Teacher Education***

Developing a critical ideology can help teachers grapple with social reality in ways that foster more transformational learning. Critical ideological development commonly begins with cognitive dissonance and introspection when teachers are introduced to the complexities of teaching, learning, and society, and engage in critical self-reflection (Harro, 2018; e.g., Jaime-Diaz et al., 2023). Schools and teacher education programs can help teachers navigate the complexities of ideology despite socialization, illogical and authoritarian attacks on human thought, and inequities that maintain structural power (Magill, 2021). Many teacher training programs include coursework that discusses or interrogates social issues in education or culture. These experiences can help teachers understand the impact of ideologies on personhood and transformative acting. Examples of course foci may include centering social issues in education, multicultural education, or even critical pedagogy. Programs may also have community-focused clinical placements or labs for preservice teachers to engage with the local community. Several programs have in-service mentor teachers who host preservice teachers, offering them opportunities to reflect on their engagement with human complexity and culture in these spaces. The experiences have significant impacts on preservice teachers' understanding of the curriculum, and the impact of pedagogical mediation on their praxis can

transform or reinforce limited ontological teaching postures that reinforce human hierarchy. Ideally, these courses and experiences allow teachers to consider themselves, ideology, schooling, and society to problematize and help them name the world (Aronowitz, 2012; Freire, 1970; Matias, 2016). As teachers recognize how ideology perpetuates oppression in schools, they can better transform unjust schooling experiences and systems. This recognition or ideological clarity allows teachers to better see the way oppressive structures limit their transformative possibilities and to address them as part of their educational activity (Hill, 2009 & 2022). Ideological clarity and recognition of injustice are crucial to transformative activity. However, they are not sufficient for material transformation. Teachers also require collective agency, solidarity, and a willingness to act (Magill, 2023).

Teachers tend to transform their ideologies in several ways, enabling them to understand how educational contexts function to maintain status quo power relations. They commonly develop a more transformative and complex consciousness of ideology when exposed to the hypocrisy of subtextual control in practical US schooling experiences (Bartolomé, 2004; Therborn, 2008; Weiner, 2023). Pedagogically, this often occurs through critical dialogical encounters, which have been shown to help PSTs “transform beliefs and practices” to “engender equity to enhance learning for all students” (Mansfield & Jean-Marie, 2013, p. 1). A dialogical approach can be quite impactful when an instructor and other students in the class have deep knowledge and experience of the ideological blind spots of people in society. Dialogical education can include social inquiry to help students reveal the interconnections between current and historical social movements, theories, and lived experiences from their cultural standpoint (McLaren, 2003; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Shannon-Baker, 2018).

Such experiences provide scaffolded opportunities for cultural immersion, diverse social interaction, peer observation, the identification and discussion of ideological oppression, and the building of positive community-school relationships. These experiences have been shown to help teachers develop more justice-focused identities and ideologies within teacher learning (Accurso & Gebhard, 2021; Pham, 2021; Picower, 2012). When teachers have experiences that reshape their ideology, they are commonly accompanied by shifts in their identity (Magill et al., 2020; Messiou & Ainscow, 2015; Said, 2014). For example, a preservice teacher may initially see their pedagogical identity as a knowledge facilitator, which is then transformed through education into a co-creator of knowledge as they learn about students' cultural realities and the structural realities of schooling. Similar shifts toward a more critical educator identity and ideology are commonplace in teacher education programs focused on justice or critical education when PSTs experience situations that create cognitive dissonance.

### ***Teacher Identity and Justice***

Teacher educators must consider the close relationship between ideology and identity in their programs. Identity is a hybrid, flexible, complex, and intersectional concept often developed through the intersubjective naming of personhood as individuals understand themselves and others as part of, and apart from, social groups (Cooley, 1902; Goffman, 1963; Hegel, 1977). As with ideology, an individual's identity shapes their social behavior and group affiliations within the structural design of one's living ecology (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Long-held and intersectional identity positions are central to teachers' understanding of their privilege, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, and often shape their political motivation to teach or act critically (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Woodward, 1997).

Research on teacher identity demonstrates that in teacher education, it is shaped in various ways. Some examples of how identity has been observed in teacher education experiences include a teacher considering their relationship to educational models and approaches, personal narrativizations of teaching, reflections on contexts, communities, conflicts, and content or subject-area specializations (Rushton et al., 2023). The critical educational literature suggests that a justice-focused educator identity shapes pedagogy (Parkhouse et al., 2019) and that critical identity is more likely to develop when a teacher more deeply connects with students' social concerns and with the community in which they work. These deeper connections to social conditions allow them to observe the need for liberation as an individual and collective part of their teaching practice. Critical identity commonly compels them to demonstrate a pedagogical commitment to discourse and reflection, support student agency, increase students' awareness of the structural realities across cultural backgrounds, and act to improve communities (Bartolomé, 2004; Patterson et al., 2022).

Educational research suggests that co-participation deepens the connection between ideology and identity. Changes in a teacher's identity often occur as they experience cognitive dissonance, become ideologically aligned with others in a critical community, act together, and regularly engage in group-identified liberation activities (Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018). Developing a critical or justice-focused identity is more likely when a teacher education program helps students find clarity and gain agency by countering inconsistencies within the neoliberal status quo (Malott & Ford, 2015; Souto-Manning, 2019). The depth of a teacher's critical identity significantly affects their willingness to engage in praxis beyond the structures and ideologies that contextualize their work (Rodriguez & Magill, 2017).

## **Living Praxis: Observing Critical Ideological and Identity Transformation**

Critical scholars often argue that justice and democracy are inseparable values from teaching and learning and, therefore, involve understanding the ideologies that maintain power relations. Observing ideology more closely enables teachers to leverage social critiques to take political action for self-actualization with students in society (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2002). When teachers understand the need for a justice-focused educator identity and ideology, they attend to the ever-changing nature of the world and teach to transform with and for their students. This is a teacher's living praxis, perpetually defined and redefined as individuals' understanding of themselves within society transforms it. Embodying critical praxis requires understanding oneself and one's students within the educational and American social hierarchy.

Critical ideology, identity, and living praxis can be observed in how preservice teachers speak, interact, and act. Critical teachers apply the knowledge they gain through critical reflection to engage in reflexivity and praxis, improving teaching practices, humanizing interactions, and fighting for more humane conditions. Ideological transformation may begin as teacher educators, students, teachers, community members, and others engage in dialogical efforts to transform education (Freire, 1970). Teachers may create more equitable and just learning environments, adopt culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies, integrate social justice themes into the curriculum, and work to create more inclusive classroom communities (Ladson-Billings, 2009; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012). Next—living and perpetual praxis (Freire, 1970), or the continuously unfolding of this ideologically infused theory into practice—enables teachers to address problematic ideologies and material social conditions.

A living praxis is contextual and perpetual because ideology and material realities are fluid and complex. Therefore, suggesting that a teacher will live transformational praxis in all ways is unrealistic. Instead, critical ideology and teaching involve adopting transformational engagement, whether through classroom or community-based initiatives and advocacy, or through the development of abolitionist and educational revolutionary identities and ontological postures (Love, 2019; Magill & Salinas, 2019; McLaren, 1998; Rodriguez, 2008). Teachers model the values and practices of justice, democracy, and student agency when living a transformation praxis with and for students.

## **2. Methodology**

### *Underpinning work*

To study the critical ideological evolution of teachers and its unfolding into praxis, the researcher began by examining the ideologies of preservice teachers enrolled in a Social Issues in Education course at one public and one religiously affiliated Southwestern research university. Several of the teachers continued to work with the researcher in their in-service teaching experiences. The original study of preservice teaching took place between 2016 and 2021. These cohorts included a majority group of white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual, and Christian preservice teachers. Naturally, participants had distinct intersectional identities. A purposive subset of participants was selected upon entering their in-service teaching roles because they represented themes observed in the broader data or were unique in their political and ideological clarity (Bartolomé, 2004). Working with teachers, both pre-service and in-service, enabled a longitudinal analysis of teacher experience across teacher education programs and in-service teaching. These data were collected from 2021 through 2023.

Given this background, the following questions were posed to investigate teachers' critical ideological becoming:

RQ1: What experiences or factors in teacher education and early in-service teaching cause critical ideology and identity shifts, and how do they impact their living praxis?

RQ2: How, when, and why do teachers adopt approaches that transgress the educational and social status quo in teacher education and early in-service teaching?

RQ3: What are the common stages that preservice and early in-service teachers go through when they make critical ideological and identity transformations?

To examine these questions, the researcher collected data on teachers' ideological transformation in DEI-focused Social Issues in Education classes each semester for six years (Magill, 2019; 2021; 2023; Magill & Blevins, 2020; Magill & Rodriguez, 2021). Observations and personal participation enabled me to holistically assess participants' progress across and through ideological development at various stages, and to examine how these influences shaped their examination of consciousness, social structures, and human exchange.

### ***Data Collection***

Semi-structured interviews, field notes, artifacts, written reflections, and surveys were collected to examine how ideologies exist as an aspect of critical becoming (Creswell, 2002). Each teacher participated in semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 1 hour at the beginning, middle, and end of each participating semester. These interviews allowed for confirmation, categorization, and examination of the teachers' ideologies and thinking about classroom experiences. Observation and interviews were the primary data

sources. However, other artifacts were collected—such as participant journals, lesson plans, handouts, journals, classroom art, and posters—to confirm findings and establish meaningful conclusions regarding the relational factors affecting teacher ideology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Field notes were collected through direct observation and compared with the teachers' reflective journals. As these teachers became in-service teachers, each data type was collected again to gain insight into the day-to-day experiences of PSTs and newly in-service teachers and how they situated the dialectics of ideological stasis. Data collection continued with these purposefully chosen participants, who remained with the researcher through in-service teaching. Data were continually compared to the conceptual frameworks across time, focusing on observable instances of transformation and in-service teaching from 2016 to 2023. Data were coded based on the previous studies on ideology and the types of ideological transformations that demonstrated observable relationships across data sources (Creswell, 2002).

### ***Data: Macro-textual and Critical Discourse Analysis***

Data were organized based on observations from previous studies on ideological transformation and on theorizations of ideological transformation.

Macro-textual categorization with critical discourse analysis allowed the researcher to identify patterns across classroom interactions and interviews, and to examine how these patterns demonstrated stages of ideological becoming over time. The approach included observations of individual ideological transformation (or lack thereof), how they related to group interactions, and the dataset's recurring and unique longitudinal dynamics. Previous findings (Magill, 2019, 2021, 2023; Magill & Blevins, 2020) provided *a priori* categorizations that allowed for the identification of commonalities. After organizing these categorizations, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to reveal how ideology, discourse, and social relationships occurred within patterns across

data within and across cultural and social structures. CDA allowed the researcher to reveal power relationships across communication, the moment-to-moment structures of language, and their connections to the ideologies that shape sociological sign systems (Gee, 2014 & 2015; Vetter et al., 2021).

Multimodal signs, such as spoken utterances and interactional social linguistics, allowed for observable relationships among signs, ideological and political clarity, and action (Bartolomé, 2004; Jones, 2019). Examining these signs helped the researcher observe how individuals build, challenge, or transform ideologies and practices and develop the possibilities for agency (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013).

Patterns and themes crystallized as macro-level representations of stages of ideological transformation (Blommaert, 2005; Ellingson, 2014; Fairclough, 2013; Stake, 2005). The researcher organized these themed patterns into macro-textual findings, which became the final categories representing ideological becoming. Macro-textual categorization allowed for broad observations of how "social power... is enacted, reproduced, and resisted...[in the classroom's] social and political context" (VanDijk, 2015, p. 352). Findings are presented this way to communicate a broad representation of ideological transformation and to make broad relational claims (Schneider, 2019). The descriptions presented in the findings are organized to illustrate how transformation and ideological consciousness within the American social hierarchy and educational climate occurred and did not (Stake, 2005). The analytical approach aimed to present the individual factors—ideology, identity, consciousness, and praxis—related to pre-service and in-service teaching experiences and social experiences, allowing for analysis of their impact on stasis, transformation, and action.

### **3. Findings: Stages of Ideological Becoming and Identity Transformation**

Findings from this study suggest that several factors in teacher education and early in-service teaching experiences impact critical ideology and identity shifts toward living praxis. Generally, they included dialogical interactions, intercultural exchanges/experiences, acting with others, and working to develop intellectual solidarity across like-minded individuals. Classroom interactions focused on dialogical education allowed participants to share their previous and developing ideologies and identities, and to understand how their discourse was received and how it impacted the classroom and community social hierarchy. Intercultural exchanges—particularly across class, race, gender, sexuality, and lived experience—created a hermeneutical circle that allowed participants to consider the parts or factors that impacted the holistic experiences of others and the historical significance of social factors affecting the experiences of individuals with differing ideologies and identities (e.g., Gadamer, 2013).

Acting cemented participant commitments to actualizing ideology as a material act, leading to teacher commitments to justice-forward approaches. The synthesis of these ideological transformations developed intellectual solidarity—the shared commitment to understanding others and transforming problematic conditions despite structural conditions.

The following macro-textual thematic areas represented common ways in which ideology and identity shifted. *Familiarity and exposure* occurred as participants came to understand topics such as race, class, or sexuality. *Acknowledgment* happened when teachers articulated the impact of social relations on students, teaching, or learning. *Conflict, analysis, and engagement* occur when teachers (productively) take more active steps to address social issues as part of their instruction. *Experience and recognition* happened when teachers embodied their ideology by living with others and experiencing the impact of problematic ideology. *Solidarity and perpetual praxis* arose when teachers understood the

interconnectedness of social, economic, and identity issues and took collective action to challenge systemic injustices. These stages are generally linear, but ideological development was subjective and contextual.

**Table 1**

<b>Stage of Critical Transformation</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Familiarity and Exposure to New Perspectives of Ideology and Identity (Cognitive)</b>	Participants come to understand a topic like race, class, or sexuality.
<b>Acknowledgment of the Impact of Ideology and Identity (Cognitive)</b>	Teachers begin to articulate the impact of ideological and identity relationships on students, teaching, or learning.
<b>Conflict, Analysis, and Engagement for Considering and Addressing Ideology (Cognitive toward Participation)</b>	Teachers struggle to take more active steps to address social issues as part of their instruction.
<b>Experience and Recognition Toward Transforming and Addressing Ideology (Experience)</b>	Teachers embody a justice-forward identity by living with others, experiencing the impact of problematic ideology, and beginning to act to change conditions.
<b>Solidarity and Perpetual Praxis: Ideological and Material Transformation (Participation for Transformation)</b>	Teachers understand the interconnectedness of social, economic, and identity issues and take collective action to challenge systemic injustices.

Table 1 represents a typical ideological progression of participants. PSTs and others may begin at different stages depending on the relationship between their ideology, identity, and the topic. For instance, an individual may be at the *Acknowledgment* stage of ideological consciousness, considering race, but in the *Familiarity and Exposure* stage regarding gender identity. Therefore, an individual's progress may be unique to a topic. When someone approaches the final two stages, they begin to see the impact of ideology and how it exists

across social constructions. An individual at the *Solidarity and Perpetual Praxis* stage will generally understand how ideology impacts relationships across social identities, how it functions to maintain social conditions, and how they seek ways to transform structures, ideologies, or material conditions. The findings also suggest that ideological development progresses as participants understand aspects of society. As participants progress through the stages, they begin to see the impact of a concept's relationship to the social whole, or dialectical totality, broadly enabling a more developed understanding of social oppression.

### ***Familiarity and Exposure to New Perspectives of Ideology and Identity***

Rachelle, a white teacher, commented to her peers, “I get racism, but I’m not sure why elementary teachers need to learn to teach about race. Students don’t see race at that age.” Tosha, a Black teacher and Rachelle’s classmate, responded, “Of course they do. Students learn about differences very early. Sometimes, they can be cruel. Being cruel comes...with practice.” A teacher’s existing identity and ideology cause them to maintain their investment in whiteness and other forms of privilege (e.g., Crowley & Smith, 2015). Certain participants learned about racism and microaggressions but required more knowledge, experience, or empirical examples of their impact on social relationships. In this case, familiarity involves learning more racial expertise and is less about acting beyond one’s cognitive shifts to address racism. The stage demonstrates a teacher beginning to critically examine their understanding of issues affecting students, biases, and future teaching practices.

Exposure is characterized by a teacher’s deepening understanding and observations of a dialectical phenomenon (e.g., heterosexism, racism, or microaggression). Teachers actively apply their newer understandings to social conditions but often need the differing interpretations of colleagues or

classmates to struggle to make sense of the phenomenon. Frequently, exposure beyond familiarity deepens intellectual curiosity about a subject. For example, Heather discussed how exposure to the concept of stereotype threat deepened her understanding of socio-educational phenomena:

I think about stereotype threat, gender, race, and social class together (presented class frames). When I walk alone in a dark parking lot, I am generally scared when I see someone, but I feel it more when the person looks poor or even more when they look poor and Black. Like in *Whistling Vivaldi*, the fear goes away if a Black person looks nerdy or rich, like in a suit... I have been affected by [stereotype threat] too in science class.

Heather's exposure allowed her to recognize how she had perpetuated and been subjected to oppressive behaviors, and to develop a more critical and self-reflective approach to teaching. Applying the analytical frame to herself allowed her to name the “social gaze,” see how it affected her perceptions, and how she and others experienced it.

Similarly, Katherine's exposure to a women's march fighting gender-based violence in Mexico provided her with an experience that began to change her ideology, though not necessarily her practice. She shared, “I hadn't realized how common femicide was and how often it was ignored by authorities.” Before the experience, she argued, “I don't understand why the Woman's March and Feminism is needed... women have all the rights men do legally.” Later, she mentioned, “I didn't feel oppressed, so I didn't understand.” Heather and Katherine's experiences reveal that exposure helped them observe social phenomena and realize similarities and differences across space or context. Familiarity with and exposure to concepts help teachers rethink unquestioned ideas on which social ideology often rests.

### ***Acknowledgment of the Impact of Ideology and Identity***

When teachers are exposed to new frames, social phenomena, and ideas, they experience cognitive shifts that cause them to acknowledge and articulate the impact of ideology on social-material relations. These cognitive shifts allow them to see the social implications of ideology, often leading to collaboratively examining power dynamics and the systemic issues that perpetuate them.

Gabriel, who self-identified as an Evangelical Christian, exemplified this stage when his classmates' identity impacted how he understood sexuality and social pressure. He stated, "When Laura shared her experience of coming out, I had not realized how many obstacles she faced with the university and her parents." He examined the heteronormativity he had experienced and how it was produced within society, which allowed him to understand the alienation it causes. To his credit, he worked with Laura to analyze how individuals who identified as sexual minorities experienced social hierarchy at a local school. Gabriel then began to acknowledge the complexity of heteronormativity in school: "Teachers... have a double standard for picking on LGBTQ+ students. They turn a blind eye if not outwardly supportive and are overly protective if they know what is happening." Citing his Evangelical Christian upbringing, Gabriel acknowledged his previously unconscious bias against the LGBTQ+ community and became more critical and aware of the implications of heteronormativity.

John had a similar transformative experience with race. Initially, he held color-blind and deficit views of students, citing the lack of racism in his almost exclusively white and wealthy school. After engaging in discussions with his classmates and conducting further research in class, he stated:

Seeing how many more Black students are suspended and that school is set up for white students, I realize what an important issue this is for students...If someone like me, who wants to help students, can have a racial bias, it needs to be addressed in schools and police forces.

Inspired by this realization, he worked with a classmate to investigate racial bias among teachers. His acknowledgment began to impact his ideology.

Acknowledgement is a *cognitive* step toward ideological and identity change. Teachers at this stage may acknowledge the need to become ideological allies, realizing a dialectical tension between social issues and other relational factors. Katherine and Heather's exposure in the previous stage allowed them to more clearly see the reality and implications of a social phenomenon and hierarchy. Next, they might acknowledge how patriarchy and neoliberalism consciously and unconsciously narrativize power, reinforcing social ideology *vis-à-vis* media presentations.

### ***Conflict, Analysis, and Engagement for Considering and Addressing Ideology***

Conflict, analysis, and engagement impact ideological shifts, leading to a more justice-focused identity that unfolds as active praxis. Teachers at this stage begin to take active steps to address issues in their teaching. In this stage, ideological clarity about justice, as described in previous stages, the analysis of associated dialectical tensions, and active engagement in critical, reflexive action occur. Jenna, for example, initially asserted that education funding was equitable as written in the law, since local schools received funding from property taxes and, therefore, the money should stay in these communities. However, she began to realize the impact of inequitable financing. She went through stages of becoming, starting with exposure and acknowledgment and then proceeding through conflict, analysis, and engagement:

I saw major differences in buildings, technology, and money. [School 1] had a pool, a new gym, new buildings, and a nice performing arts center, and [School 2] didn't...[School 1] had 1-to-1 technology, iPads, and smartboards. [School 2] had old technology...The houses reflected the schools...the tax collected for [School 1] was much higher.

Jenna first articulated that the complex concept of equality under the law often fails to translate into equity in practice. Then, she attended school board meetings to advocate for more funding practices, raising her ideological transformation to the conflict, analysis, and engagement stage. Conflict led to this action, which helped Jenna analyze society and engage in conversations about funding equity differently. Through her engagement, she tried to transform dialectical tensions in tangible ways following the ideological clarity she had gained from attempting to resolve the observable dialectical tensions formally and informally.

In another example, Raul, an in-service teacher who worked with special education students, led a discussion in his teacher education class:

I thought about social constructions and what a body can do [referencing a course-assigned video]. People that were disabled are treated like they can't do anything but can. We can make spaces and experiences where students can access school and be included... like when the activists fought for curb cuts [referencing a course-assigned podcast].

Later, as an in-service teacher, he shared that asbestos was “getting into a breathing apparatus several students used, and it was making the students sick,” noting that “one student showed symptoms of pneumonia.” He brought this injustice to the attention of another teacher, who said, “That is terrible... I'm sure they know about it. Right?” When realizing nothing had been done, he

petitioned the district to make classroom changes and to connect with others in the community. Raul's experiences illustrate how conflict, analysis, and engagement can impact ideological shifts, leading to a more justice-focused identity as active praxis.

As teachers engage with concepts, they can take meaningful actions to address real-world problems as “just teachers.” The result of conflict, analysis, and engagement is that teachers interact in more tangible ways with others across diverse backgrounds, realizing the importance of dialogical exchange and addressing social issues in ways that help them scrutinize how power operates and clarify the struggle against alienation (Marx & Engels, 1867/1988; Rodriguez, 2008).

### ***Experience and Recognition in Transforming and Addressing Ideology***

Experience and recognition are a stage of ideological transformation in which teachers live or experience the impacts of ideology with others, allowing them to counteract dominant ideologies critically. For those in historically marginalized groups, the experience stage may include living with students or others with a shared cultural identity. For individuals who cannot experience the impact of a social ideology, it may involve living as allies and negating privilege as much as possible. Like Raul, teachers transform their beliefs and perspectives through experience, becoming more aware of systemic injustices and working to dismantle them.

Miriam, for example, demonstrated the previous stages of critical becoming by noticing that identity threats and racism were significant concerns for Latina students like her. Miriam said, “The more I learn about myself and about my history... the more I understand my identity and the more I want to know about my place in the world. I want my students to have that experience, too.” Having

experienced curricular alienation, Miriam became involved in developing the cultural studies curriculum in her local community and discussed its implementation with state officials (e.g., Magill & Smith, 2024). She saw using a culturally focused curriculum to provide “civic role models” and “help to develop a sense of agency.” Her students became “muckrakers who documented and communicated the issues they experienced.” Later, they discussed these things with the school board and principal. Miriam’s consciousness helped navigate, together with the community, the issues experienced to deepen a shared understanding of students and how to act in their support. Miriam shared that her thinking and actions were shaped by her observations of the hypocrisy of her childhood priest. She observed that he “gave a sermon” but then demonstrated “bad behavior behind closed doors,” declining to discuss details. Miriam articulated that her lessons became about activism to address similar “hypocrisies of power” she now sees “everywhere.”

Recognition is the stage of ideological becoming that involves understanding oneself within these power structures and seeing students as authentically human. It is not merely an acknowledgment of dialectical tensions experienced by an individual or group but the mutual recognition of humanity. Recognition implies that when one oppresses another, they oppress themself and limit the possibility of human solidarity (Buber, 1996 & 1970; Hegel, 1977). Such analysis would further suggest that identity is distinct, shared, and, to a degree, continuously changing. Said another way, it is hybrid and intersectional. Mutual recognition across identity develops when humanity is ensured and the need for shared struggle is recognized among persons (Buber, 1949). Then, shared acting toward transformation can occur.

During this stage, teachers actively question how and why dominant ideologies and discourses exist, and how they shape beliefs, and recognize how ideologies

are used to perpetuate systemic injustices. Recognition allows them to live and experience the world with others, developing a more nuanced understanding of the identity, cultural, and societal factors that shape their own, their students', and their colleagues' lives. Teachers may apply experience to social analysis without critical recognition but they do not understand how ontological perceptions and dispositions impact human hierarchy.

Recognition involves seeing how problematic ideologies limit human possibility, compelling teachers to become more culturally responsive and transformative actors. It leads to increased confidence in neutralizing human hierarchy in the face of power. For example, Caesar, a white teacher, shared how dialectical tensions impacted a pedagogical interaction between his cooperating teacher and their students. His cooperating teacher, also white, responded to a student's comment about political corruption and public safety:

Student: The [United States] government is kind of like Mexico, but the US has differences?

Cooperating teacher [CT]: Well, Mexico is okay with the corruption, and the people don't care in the same way we do.

The comment by the cooperating teacher was somewhat polarizing and challenging for the students, predominantly Latina/o, to hear (e.g., Galindo, 2011; Jiménez-Castellanos et. al, 2013). The students looked doubtful of the comment but did not respond. Caesar addressed the class:

Caesar: What about the Lieutenant Governor of this state and other US politicians? Plenty of examples of the corruption of US officials exist. What about the political fundraising system itself? Lobbyists in Washington make sure systems maintain their power. So, how do we make sure we have our rights?

Student: We need to be more powerful.  
Caesar: Right, and that starts by being involved.

Given what the cooperating teacher mentioned, I asked Caesar why the conversation with the students occurred. He explained, “When information is hidden, misinformation guides decision-making. Students rely on what they have been told, even if the information is inaccurate and racist.” Caesar’s justice-forward ideology and identity enabled him to recognize his students’ humanity and to disregard the possibility that addressing power might affect his credentialing.

Other participants transformed conditions differently through human recognition. For example, one teacher-student opened their “home as a space for undocumented students and their families,” where “civil rights lawyers” provided information about civil rights. The teacher shared that “government officials...came to her door.” This stage includes recognizing dehumanization and prioritizing perpetual humanization, even at the risk of material well-being. It is characterized by adopting a justice-focused identity, ideological clarity of power, and a willingness to engage in transformational praxis. By understanding that transformation is individual and communal, we might recognize our essential nature and humanity in others. The result is that teachers see themselves as transformational actors working to transform themselves with and through others as part of the greater community and world.

### ***Solidarity and Perpetual Praxis: Ideological and Material Transformation***

To achieve solidarity and perpetual praxis, teachers require a justice-focused identity and ideology, and continual self-assessment of oneself, one’s society, and oneself in society. Teachers who work in solidarity understand the interconnectedness of social, economic, and identity issues. Further, they

recognize the need to take collective action to disrupt how they are used as antagonisms to challenge systemic injustices. Perpetual praxis is the continual process of developing solidarity and living one's commitment to transformational change across all human struggles and existence.

First-year teacher Jesse's students returned from Juvenal Hall and complained that they were "being harassed by police on their way to the park where they played handball because drugs were sold there and who they were." Jesse's sense of justice and ideological clarity compelled him to walk with his students to the park. When the police searched his students for drugs, Jesse spoke with the officers about the situation and discussed ways to create a better community. Jesse's future lessons included curriculum inviting community members, the principal, and community members to the class to situate these issues as part of instructional sessions, saying, "The police are oppressing my students, but they are people. If they see students as valuable community members, it could improve community-student interactions...this change is sometimes needed with teachers, too." Consequently, Jesse's students were harassed less frequently and took an interest in working with others to cultivate community agency and learn the tools needed to overcome alienation. His instruction continued to reflect the ever-changing dynamics of the students and the community.

Similarly, Gray, a Latino and Indigenous teacher who primarily worked with a similar population of students, observed that the government and corporations take things from their community unless held accountable. After hearing those students wanted to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline/Standing Rock, I observed the following classroom interaction:

Student 3: What do they need?

Gray: Well, they are probably cold and hungry .... If you set up collection boxes, I put an announcement out and get a box on [college campus] and take it box to Standing Rock.

Hearing his students, Gray brought boxes to different places around the department and committed to taking the materials to protesters during his Thanksgiving break with another student teacher. When they returned, he shared the solidarity and struggle:

Everyone had access to... the things people would drop off... we shared as a community of love and respect... the propaganda was saying we were the violent ones... police and the company hired people to surround the camp... we tried to peacefully get them to go away... we were shot with rubber bullets and water cannons and maced.

When asked why, he suggested, “In teaching, I think about how we can imagine a future together in which we will take action to address economic and social inequality.”

Jesse, Gray, and the other teachers recognized the importance of community and participation in formal and informal class struggles related to culture and identity (Magill, 2019). Solidarity and action occur when teachers embody a living praxis that challenges dominant ideologies and material injustice to transform human relations with and for others. Teachers expand their understandings to center the importance of community engagement as formal and informal class struggles within and across hybrid identity positions for transforming conditions toward humanizing ends. They recognize the interconnectedness of social and economic issues, how they impact individuals within education, and what must be done to secure human freedom.

These identity and ideological foundations enable teachers to work with students, families, and community members to challenge systemic injustices and create more equitable communities and learning environments. Teachers engage with these conditions in various ways, including, but not limited to, fighting for better policy, working with community leaders, and participating in other forms of political activism. There are many other examples in the data analyzed for this study that were not presented here. Solidarity involves acknowledging that struggle, critical reflection, and praxis are perpetual, shared, and necessary for challenging and transforming dominant ideologies and promoting justice.

#### **4. Discussion**

Ideology broadly impacts the conscious ordering of teachers' lives, impacting how they think and act in their profession. Philosophically, the epistemological and ontological stances a teacher takes, their interactions with micro-level dialectics, and their understanding of intersectional identity are impacted by their living ideology. An embodied ideological consciousness shapes their decision to negotiate, further, or reject oppressive power in human relations and within social structures. Therefore, critical metaphysical grounding is part of a transformational teacher's ideology, identity, and essential nature. Ideological transformation takes different forms based on context and the cultural realities of an individual or community. Fundamentally, critical ideological transformation involves developing a disposition that allows for better connection across cultural differences or mutual recognition of the humanity of the oppressed, the oppressor, and of acting.

In practice, ideological transformation requires developmentally appropriate frames, dialogical exchanges, and personalized experiences that connect with teachers' existing ideology and identity before they engage in criticality.

Engaging in dialogical education, intercultural exchanges/experiences, acting with others, and developing intellectual solidarity were fundamental experiences for those participants who progressed through the ideological stages identified in this research paper. Teacher educators' recognition of how identity, consciousness, and ideology impacted their ability to engage in reasoned social analysis for ethical action was vital to supporting their engagement in perpetual living praxis.

Utilizing the typology presented in this article can support teachers and teacher educators at different stages of ideological becoming. Most of the teachers' studies progressed linearly through the macro-textual categories and commonalities in their ideological development. However, ideological transformation is inevitably shaped by factors as numerous as teachers' experiences, so no one-size-fits-all experience or intervention can ensure it. Culture, behavior, experience, and factors such as privilege, training, and socialization shape when and how critical ideological development unfolds. Individuals often struggle with their relationships with dominant societies, so teacher educators play a significant role in demonstrating the complexities of these factors in the learning experience. They can model attention to ideology and culture in their practices with pre-and in-service teachers.

The initial stages of critical ideological transformation commonly began with cognitive and identity shifts because identities frequently included socialized and privileged ideological perceptions. When individuals recognized how power relations shaped their ideology and identity, they experienced cognitive dissonance and disorientation that either compelled them toward ideological transformation or made them less receptive to justice. Less receptive teachers were commonly disengaged from critical ideas and tried not to offend those who were. I interpreted these actions as teachers trying to be (in their view)

“neutral,” secure a grade, and learn about teaching tools without considering challenging and complex ideas related to ideology or social justice. Teachers who demonstrated critical ideological dispositions and willingness to act and understand justice through their teaching identity were likelier to work past limit-situations that caused them to fear transformation (Monchinski, 2008; Freire, 1970). Here, working in intellectual solidarity across teacher educators, teachers, students, and communities supported individuals in developing ideological clarity, political will, and a shared sense of agency to transgress the educational and social status quo when conditions or ideologies were not serving students (Bartolomé, 2004). Ideological clarity, growing awareness of, and acting upon society commonly unfolded from dialogical engagements, intercultural exchanges/experiences, and acting with others. There are many ways this can happen through experience. Recently, for example, attitudes changed on campuses and worldwide as open and visible genocide was clearly observed. The university community resoundingly condemned the actions of Hamas and Israel, where thousands of innocent Israeli and Palestinian civilians were impacted by the devastating humanitarian crisis in 2023–24 (Crow, 2024; Livingstone, 2023). This is despite social rhetoric framing this solidarity and humanization as anti-Israeli by right-wing sycophants. Although not reflected in the justice-focused commitments for this group of teachers (because they occurred after the study), participation in justice-focused campus events can create shared possibilities for dialogical education, centering human recognition and leading to ideological shifts within a community (e.g., Magill et al., 2024).

Teachers may initially realize that ideologically infused concepts like racism exist in the abstract. Still, because of their ideology, they may not recognize how it limits possibilities or secures a social class relation. As teachers understand others, work with them, and clarify what needs to be done for a better society, they become more willing to challenge the status quo. PSTs

require support in recognizing the need to be critical of mainstream social ideologies that limit social possibility, and that school can be a space to counteract them.

Teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and community members hoping to support critical ideological becoming can work in perpetual solidarity.

Supporting critical ideological transformation should include gaining knowledge of the teacher and using individualized approaches to curate artifacts that reveal personal and social ideologies and conditions. The nature of social and ideological power is constantly changing, much like society itself. So, too, must be responses to it. Teacher educators can ensure that they promote student agency and participation. Programs can emphasize the importance of experiencing the world and of opening themselves to ontological and epistemological diversity, as well as to the dialectical realities of their students and communities. Depending on where a teacher begins their ideological journey, their experience might start by developing a critical understanding of power relations, including participation in formal and informal interactions and struggles. From a systemic perspective, participation requires shifts in thinking about what education is for—for example, moving from focusing on teaching as a technical exercise to a pedagogical disposition that emphasizes observing human exchange and transformational praxis. Teacher educators can prioritize the ideological impact of material realities across identity and include opportunities to experiment with, understand, and engage in transformational thinking and acting. Such guides can offer additional clarity for those making ideological shifts by jointly understanding and living shared struggles.

Supportive mentors can include conversations and educational experiences that cultivate the conditions for participants to expand their sociological imagination, ideological clarity, democratic engagement, and the ability to

recognize and critique power. Supporting teachers through the stages of critical becoming requires understanding the history of social ideology, their and others' ideologies, cross-cultural connections, social and educational structures, and their relationship to perpetual social struggle. These aspects of critical consciousness, as knowledge, must be articulated through ideological, pedagogical, and analytical engagements. Perhaps most salient, teacher candidates can be encouraged to engage in dialogic exchanges with their teaching peers and develop a critical understanding of justice, requiring teacher educators to create classroom environments conducive to these exchanges as philosophers and people of introspection, thought, and action.

## 5. Conclusion

Critical ideological becoming helps teachers cultivate a humanizing educational ecology where they and their students can authentically reveal and participate in social transformation. Ideological transformation is complex and multifaceted and requires understanding how social, economic, and hierarchical positions are maintained. This study demonstrates that teachers develop critical ideologies through dialogical education, intercultural exchanges/experiences, collaborative action, and intellectual solidarity. Teacher educators can use these practices to help preservice and early-career teachers develop more nuanced ideologies that better support their students. They can foreground experiences that help their teachers reveal human essence, embody a pedagogical disposition fostering exchange, and engage in efforts to transform social issues.

Critical ideological development is crucial for teachers because they play an integral role in shaping how citizens understand and interact with the world. Personal and social transformation is necessary for educators to clarify agency, roles, values, and commitments. Teachers, students, and communities have the agency to work past the ways they have been taught to understand human

experience. Our ability to know and participate freely and openly diminishes when we accept society or education's mainstream ideological framings. Securing the conditions and ideologies to participate as a transformational and free actor requires the teacher have the freedom to know, name, and rename the world with their students through subjectively informed democratic exchanges. Here, there is a distinction between schooling and Education or learning, the latter of which involves naming, renaming, and experiencing the self in society as a transformational action. Otherwise, education becomes a performative endeavor of memorization or workforce development that reproduces existing social conditions. The exchange of subjectivities, the mediation between teachers and students, and the coming to know the world through the conscious exchange of experience are essentially the reciprocal process of ideological humanization.

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