Professional development is a critical necessity in today’s tempestuous educational environment; however, professional development programs often fail to support actual practices and connection with a network of like-minded professionals (Behbehanian & Burawoy, 2014; Ritchie, 2012). Further, current professional development (PD), often regulated by school districts, may not effectively support teachers’ knowledge that enables them to transform instruction (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Many institutions are struggling to provide appropriate and effective training and professional development opportunities for faculty and students (Vu, Cao, Vu, & Cepero, 2014). As a result, innovative digital technologies and increased use of the Internet for pedagogical and instructional ideas have prompted educators to look beyond schools for professional development (Kop & Fournier, 2010). In a climate of high-stakes testing and teacher accountability, scholars argue for increased PD that is holistic and critical (Albers, Harste, & Vasquez, 2011; Laughter, 2016; Larson & Shannon, 2016; Maniates, 2016). Educators, among others, are moving towards online resources to continue their learning (Andrade et al., 2011; Hylén, 2006).

In this article, we describe a critical literacy project called Global Conversations in Literacy Research (GCLR), an open-access online professional development space grounded in whole language and critical literacy that invites participants (e.g., teachers, scholars, researchers, students, interested others) to engage in live, issue-oriented discussions around literacy (https://globalconversationsinliteracy.wordpress.com). First, we present research and theory that ground this work. Second, we describe the project and discuss how teachers in this online professional development space had (and continue to have as this project is ongoing) opportunity to engage in meaningful, critical, and generative conversations around literacy issues. Next, we describe how teachers have learned from each other through the chat area about strategies they use in their classrooms, and how they have built a collective set of strategies in this online space. Finally, we demonstrate how participants draw upon diverse topics to encourage transformative practices that inform educational policy and advocacy. As part of a longitudinal research study now in its fifth year, the data was generated during the 2012–2014 Web seminars and analyzed through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); it includes chat transcripts, speaker and participant interviews, and website analytics. While we actively study this project, we present this work in terms of practice, and how participants in these seminars (teachers, students, speakers, etc.) understand and think about this project as significant to professional development and the aims of holistic and critical literacy.

GCLR

GCLR is a critical literacy project that hosts internationally recognized literacy scholars whose work is grounded in whole language and/or critical literacy pedagogy, research, and practice. Topics and GCLR speakers embody a critical perspective on literacy research, teaching, and practice with seminars on topics such as a critical untangling of adolescents’ literacy practices or the need for all teachers to address culture, race, and other differences. These presentations directly align with GCLR’s mission and vision to engage global audiences in discussions about literacy through
open-access to international scholarship. In practice, GCLR offers up to seven live one-hour open-access Web seminars yearly, delivered through Blackboard Collaborate. The GCLR team of ten members publicizes the seminars through social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, website) and electronic distribution lists. People from anywhere in the world who have Internet access can join one or all of the Web seminars by clicking on a link. To date, GCLR has offered live professional development to over 9,000 people across the globe, the YouTube channel has recorded nearly 23,000 views, and the website has recorded over 80,000 hits from 161 countries. We propose that these numbers suggest strong global interest in holistic and critical literacy research and pedagogy, and that educators actively seek out awareness of opportunities for professional development.

Theoretical Position and Related Literature

The World Internet Statistics (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2014) predict that by 2015, over 42 percent of the world will have access to the Internet. Technology is rapidly changing every aspect of classroom practice, and now it is transforming professional development. According to Leu, Kinzer, Ciero, and Cammack (2004), the Internet and other communication technologies are quickly becoming the central technologies of literacy for a global community in an information age. Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zyacek (2011) confirm that “interactive, real-time, on-demand, learner-centered, authentic, and learner-constructed events will characterize the educational environment of the future” (p. 127).

We theoretically ground the work of GCLR in whole language and critical literacy principles as it relates to online spaces of learning. As a critical literacy project, GCLR acknowledges the multiple and varied ways in which knowledge may be distributed, especially using online technologies, to cut across geographic and discource boundaries. Critical literacy is both a theory and a practice that understands literacy as a social practice with an aim to uncover inequitable economic, cultural, political, and institutional structures (Comber & Nixon, 1999; Janks, 2000). In order for educators to engage in critical pedagogy, Freire (1970) argued, they must be able to reflect and act on the world “in order to transform it” (p. 36). Teaching within a critical literacy perspective, as Edelsky (2006) and Janks (2000) suggest, means that educators are open to transforming their teaching practices with an understanding that knowledge and language are situated within power structures. Other scholars (Albers, 2007; Janks, 2014; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008; Shannon, 2013; Vasquez, Egawa, Harste, & Thompson, 2004) suggest that multimodality and learning in online spaces must also be viewed through a critical literacy lens in order to prepare students to engage critically and globally in social action to promote social justice.

Janks and Vasquez (2011) argue that easy access to digital technologies across global landscapes changes the “conditions of possibility for literacy events resulting in the development of new practices” (p. 1). With this in mind, we articulate four tenets derived from holistic and critical perspectives that ground the work of GCLR. First, professional development in literacy must be relevant, have a purpose and meaning for learners, and empower learners (Goodman, 1986). That is, teachers must be able to share what they know, discuss what they want to learn, and connect new concepts and strategies to their own unique contexts. Second, teachers draw upon their personal and cultural resources to create critical and holistic spaces for the development of curriculum content (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). Said another way, teachers draw from these resources to make sense of new learning and to integrate this learning into their practice and curriculum. Third, interactive online PD engages educators in critical social practices in which teachers talk with others about social issues that shape how and what literacy is taught in schools, and how they take up what we have called “questions of matter” (Albers, Turnbull, et al., 2015, p. 171). Fourth, teaching of language is a global endeavor, and one that draws upon net localities (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011), a concept that describes how technology affords people an understanding of...
of how language, teaching, and learning are impacted by local, state, national, and international politics and policies.

**Online Professional Development**

A plethora of research has distilled five key features of effective professional development: alignment with previous pedagogical experiences, content area focus, engaged and hands-on learning, sustained time with others, and engagement with others from the same school, department, or district (Bolt, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Desimone, 2009; Zepeda, 2012). Harste (2003) writes that we “learn in the presence of others”; collaboration serves “not only to elevate ideas but also [to] clarify how your own personal thinking differs from someone else” (p. 24). We suggest that online spaces allow for this collaborative learning and can extend the learning to global audiences in ways that face-to-face PD may not.

Although face-to-face interactions and engagement are certainly important, professionals are increasingly moving toward more digital and online resources to stay abreast of their fields (Bolt, 2012; Laurillard & Masterman, 2010). In our search of the literature, we found an extensive amount of research related to online learning within the context of classroom teaching and learning (see Maeroff, 2003; McBrien, Cheng, & Jones, 2009; Morrison, 2011). However, learning in online spaces happens continuously, and educational institutions and professional organizations (e.g., NCTE, ILA) are no longer the sole owners of learning and knowledge, nor do they hold a monopoly on hosting internationally recognized speakers. A range of on-demand learning resources, including massive online open-access courses (MOOCs), online universities, online degrees, YouTube, and the Internet in general, continually feed people’s thirst for learning immediately when needed. The question is not, “Where can I find information?” but “What is the quality and theoretical grounding within these resources that holistic and critical educators’ desire?”

We suggest that online platforms of learning that are sustained spaces of critical engagement are essential in building—not just immediately satisfying—strong professional knowledge that informs one’s teaching practice. Thus, we position online and sustained spaces for professional development—grounded in theory and practice—as also effectively offering opportunities for teachers to collaborate on real-world issues, share their expertise and experiences, and learn from others (Albers, Pace, & Brown, 2013; Bolt, 2012; Laurillard & Masterman, 2010). While we have found little research in the area of sustained PD in online spaces, our research (Albers, Pace, & Brown, 2013; Albers, Cho, et al., 2015; Albers, Turnbull, et al., 2015), has begun to describe the possibilities of such spaces. In one study (Albers, Pace, & Brown, 2013), we found that participants engaged in “discursive asides,” in which a small group of participants engaged in short and intense conversations around a literacy topic. When questions arose in a presentation, GCLR allowed space for immediate conversations and exchanges of ideas to occur on the spot. In another study (Albers, Cho, et al., 2015), we found four key dimensions of GCLR that are necessary for effective professional development: the PD must (1) be grounded in theory which informs practice, (2) have willing participation, (3) have sustainability, and (4) include interactivity and interaction that allows for collaborative talk around topics that help educators listen to and share multiple perspectives on a topic. Gee (2001) argues that access to others who share affinity in topics of interest offers “immediate opportunities to extend, clarify, and present solutions” (p. 178). Through engagement with others, Triggs and John (2004) argue that teachers become “enabled professionals” who are reflective in their practice and discussion, both of which provide the conditions necessary to transform practice and become empowered in the classroom and beyond (Edelsky, 2006, p. 427). Such a turn brings with it a new dimension to the professional lives of those involved in literacy education, making collaboration and engagement with leaders in the field—figuratively and literally—virtually possible.

We now turn to the four areas that we found provided space for participants to engage in critical and holistic professional development to support their teaching practices.

**Features of GCLR That Define Holistic and Critical Participation in Literacy**

In GCLR, we found unique features that define participation: (1) open dialogue; (2) shared perspectives on literacy practice and research; (3) socializing and being socialized into Web seminar practices, along with a desire to sustain a conversation with others; and (4) collaborative support in the generation of ideas.

**GCLR as an Open Space for Dialogue about Critical Literacy Research and Practice**

According to the scholarship in critical literacy, participants
who are actively involved in dialogue share information to extend their learning and transform their practices (Edelson, 1999). In our study of chat transcripts and participant interviews, we found that GCLR is a critical space where educators are involved in an open dialogic exchange across a range of contested topics (e.g., access to scholarship, interrogation of power, and how power controls decision making in schools). GCLR is a project that works towards transformation by providing space for allowing marginalized perspectives to be heard. For example, a participant in one of the GCLR Web seminars claimed that “too many of those working with our students want to be colorblind and think this is best, I do not agree. Thanks for sharing, Dr. [speaker].” Other participants responded to these comments, and created a space for collaborative and extended talk: “Yes, there is so much more that could be said but time is insufficient to address the profundness of the issue. There is racism in Asia, Africa, Australia, Canada, South America and so on. I would be happy to discuss the topic further with any of our [university] students and faculty.”

Learning occurs through opportunities to engage in longer dialogic exchanges. That is, GCLR provides a space where educators can take up ideas, share them, and offer examples. During a seminar on creativity, educators engaged in an online conversation around multimodal activities with the CCSS in mind. They discussed creative ways to work with literacy in their classrooms:

P1: I used digital storytelling for example, for encouraging creativity for myself and students.

P2: They love doing puppets and reader's theater.

P3: I love using comics and bringing newspapers into the classroom. We “read like adults” before writing like them.

While time did not always allow for expanded descriptions of how educators work with the CCSS in their class and still sustain a creative space, educators drew upon their personal and cultural resources—storytelling, puppets, comics, readers theater—to create holistic spaces in their literacy curriculum. Even though the CCSS can be restrictive, these participants found ways to work creatively in their classrooms. Each of these shared comments becomes an invitation for others to pursue similar ideas in their classrooms. When spaces are open for presentation and discussion of critical issues, collaborative talk happens, and ideas may be elevated and shifted from this talk (Harste, 2003). Although GCLR cannot claim that these exchanges shift practices, we do suggest that the ideas that participants present have the potential to shift future practice. When teachers have access to critical literacy, scholarship presented by internationally recognized speakers, and colleagues interested in learning with others, dominant ideologies around such topics as standards, creativity, and multimodality can be taken up and pedagogical ideas are shared.

**GCLR as a Space for Shared Perspectives on Literacy Practice and Research**

Critical to the professional development process is the opportunity for teachers to share ideas and reflect on how they might be implemented in their classroom practice. Prestrike’s (2010) study found that enabling teachers to talk critically to one another is an important component of the professional development process, while Darling-Hammond and Sykes (1999) found that open dialogue, sustained collaboration, and curricular innovation were critical. In its chat feature, GCLR provides a space where participants and speakers can engage in dialogic exchange—presenter to participants, participants to presenter, and participants with each other (Albers, Pace, & Odo, 2016). In a study of the GCLR chat, Albers, Pace, and Brown (2013) found that open dialogue occurred as discursive asides, moments across a live seminar in which participants stepped away from the larger talk to engage more deeply about an issue raised by a presenter with a smaller group of participants. Further, at the end of each seminar, participants were invited to share their thoughts on their learning. For example, one participant wrote, “Nice to be a part of the conversation and to be able to get some insight into research story . . . an ongoing area of interest and challenge.” Another stated, “The webinar was very thought provoking . . . I liked the graphic about culturally responsive family engagement.” Yet another participant wrote, “This was fabulous! I’m thinking of how to use this information to connect home and school as part of our [State] Literacy Network work. Thank you!” We suggest that words/phrases such as “nicely to be a part of,” “get some insight,” “thought provoking,” and “thinking of how to use this information,” among others, indicate the value that such seminars have on participants’ PD.

In a Web seminar presented by Brian Street, a renowned critical literacy scholar, he described a training program that brought together ethnographic approaches to researching local literacies and educational approaches.
to learning and curriculum development in international spaces. The focus of the seminar was to explain the importance of learning about each community’s literacy and numeracy activities in order to help the learners become more aware of what they do and feel about literacy and numeracy. A participant in this seminar raised the issue of hidden literacies: “I think that is what is challenging with literacy—the invisible/hidden literacies. Educators tend to view it from the dominant definition—what is visible—letters, words, text, numbers. How do we expand this definition of literacy and how do we get society to value it?”

By seeing such comments, participants realize that critical questions can be raised through this online seminar space, and they can discuss how language, teaching, and learning are impacted by local, state, national, and international politics and policies. Based upon Street’s talk, participants from different countries and geographic spaces engaged in open and collaborative talk, raised questions, and shared curricular ideas in the chat:

P1: And, educational mandates utilize the autonomous model that looks at literacy in a very narrow, skill based view.

P2: Dr. Street, any suggestions for identifying, describing, and critiquing hidden/invisible literacies?

P3: I wonder how the teachers responded to the attempt to get them to move beyond autonomous approaches to literacy? Were there tensions? How were those tensions addressed?

P4: It makes me think perhaps the first thing is that the ones who feel that they are not literate see themselves as such. That would be our work as educators.

Chat participants drew upon net localities (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011); that is, participants examined how educational institutions limit what counts as literacy. They were interested in how the educators in Street’s project worked within hidden/invisible literacies, as well as how they navigated the politics and policies that mandated autonomous and skills-based models of instruction. Their dialogue and questions revealed that they agree ideas of literacy should be expanded to include every student’s literacy learning, and that they also were soliciting information to help them understand more critically how to work with curricula that have “hidden literacies.”

GCLR as a Space for Socializing and Being Socialized into Online Professional Development

Socializing and being socialized into online PD are critical to those who attend GCLR for the first time, as well as those who return. We define socializing as social engagement with other participants through social talk. Examples of this kind of talk include, “Hi . . . great to see you,” “How’s your classroom this year?,” or “What are you teaching this year?” Being socialized into a community, for us, means that participants learn to interact and respond according to the social rules of the Web seminar. For example, questions like “How long is this seminar?,” “Should we type our questions in the chat area?,” and “Why doesn’t my microphone work?,” help participants navigate the technology tools associated with the delivery platform (e.g., Blackboard Collaborate or Go to Meeting).

In a traditional teacher development context, teachers often find themselves outside of professional development in that it is often shaped for them by the districts, who determine who is going to present and what and how the participants are going to learn (Curwood, 2011). What we have found across the years is that participants return to GCLR as it provides a space where teachers can come and go as they find the topic relevant and interesting, but in doing so, they socialize with others. For example, one participant wrote: “Can anyone chat here? I am just so excited and looking forward to the session. I want to learn as much as I can about Critical Literacy.” Others who are more familiar with this project responded, “Welcome [Shad]! Yes, anyone can chat.” Others follow with comments like, “Nice to see you here!”

We see socialization as the building of communities and gaining of a sense of connectedness that are facilitated through the chat tool in Web seminars, which provide a space whereby new participants feel invited to exchange ideas with others who are familiar with the context. GCLR is a social space, but it is also a socializing space. That is, participants are socialized not only into the learning group at the Web seminar but also into an online practice. That is, in an online
forum, there are ways of working with the tools that afford communication and visibility. In the example above, Shad is both welcomed through social conversation and also socialized into how he should act in this space. The responses to Shad’s question help him know that this is an open dialogic space for expression and he is valued as a participant. Not everyone is as eager as Shad to participate. In fact, a number of our participants revealed in post-presentation interviews that they did not participate: “I have to admit I was too shy and intimidated. . . . I felt that I would learn more by just listening in this particular situation,” said one person. Another remarked, “It is great to meet in a place where so many people from all over can get together to discuss various aspects of literacy. It’s a definite opportunity for us to gather information and learn something new.” Socializing appeared to be much easier for some participants; they greeted each other as soon as they entered the seminar room, talked about their everyday academic and social activities, asked questions, exchanged ideas and educational resources (e.g., hyperlinks, theories, teaching methods); challenged, negotiated, and/or maintained discourses. However, those who were new to GCLR needed more time to understand the practices that defined participation in these seminars; they did not readily interact with other participants and/or speakers, and did not make use of the tools of the delivery platform Blackboard Collaborate (e.g., emoticons, symbols, etc.) to interact with others.

In post-seminar interviews, GCLR scholars also mentioned the significance of the social nature of Web seminars. One participant, for example, said, “It’s a great way of reaching people, and more engaging than just asking them to read an article on the same topic, which they could easily do. But people like to see them, sometimes the face behind the name they’ve read or so on—so it’s a bit more of a personal connection, isn’t it?” Scholars also socialized by sharing tips about the very nature of their presentations and by what they included or didn’t include, receiving comments such as, “One could have better visuals . . . umm video clips embedded in the slides would be great if one had time to put all that sort of thing together.”

Many participants acknowledged people they knew in these seminars, with comments like, “Great to see you here!,” “How did the defense go?,” or “Congratulations on the new publication!” These seminars were personally relevant to them, and having this space, especially for those who return multiple times, offers a sense of solidarity with like-minded others. One person commented, “Thank you, very interesting and insightful. Look forward to attending more seminars!”

GCLR as a Space for Collaborative Support in Curricular Innovation and Ideas

During GCLR Web seminars, teachers exchange strategy ideas around context-based literacy issues. Learners tend to report materials and experiences from their classrooms, and they make efforts to link ideas during the online discussion. GCLR allows teachers to apply what they are learning to their everyday teaching practice and to discuss their experience with peers. Research shows that an online learning community like GCLR can support the development of teachers’ competence by providing opportunities for continuous professional development that favors critical inquiry with peers in the context of everyday teaching practice (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). Organizational capacity increases when motivated learners have control over their learning (Ferriter & Provenzano, 2013). As one teacher shared, “I just used a collaborative collage in my Writing across the Curriculum class, and the students learned so much from each other.”

One participant new to GCLR said that even though she found it intimidating to share ideas in the chat, she “like[d] how [the speakers] had a practical [example]. There was a little girl in the video there, showing her reading, and it just makes me think of the learning process and the teaching process, and just I relate that to what I’ll be doing as practical in the classroom.”

Teachers take control of their own learning by asking such questions as, “Should we develop and assess teacher creativity in teacher education? If so in what ways?” They also seek out innovative ideas presented by the speaker for implementation in their classroom by asking if anyone has lesson plans they can share. In addition, participants can exchange information and create threaded discussions about data-driven instructional strategies. They can connect to others’ questions, for example: “[Victor] raises a really nice question . . . how does creativity theory operate in teachers’ working creatively with language learning?” Frequently, others join in and share ideas:

**P1:** My favorite time in the classroom . . . [is] when students are using their oral language through their conversations during self-discovery and science experiments, etc. An integrated approach
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The socialization into how chat works provides space for collaborative thinking and affirmation of others’ ideas.

Online Web seminars like GCLR can support teachers as they move toward transformation of perspectives and, perhaps, even practice. As teachers take a self-paced, self-directed learning approach in conjunction with the features of traditional learning like reflection activities and peer collaboration, they may be more willing to transform classroom practices. Teacher-participants in GCLR report increased insights into their practice, and many describe intended changes in practice. Others engage in discussions about the complexities of language learning, based on a speaker’s presentation. In a seminar with Ken and Yetta Goodman, for example, two participants engaged in a discussion about how meaning is marginalized when a skills-based reading approach is emphasized:

P1: I just love the idea: Meaning is in the writer and reader . . . it seems sadly, that we squash this when children go to school because there is so much focus on the visual information

P2: Yes, too much focus on letter of the week and decodable text in some places.

P1: Children become decoders and forget to listen to the message . . . And then we wonder why the comprehension falls off the radar.

P2: We need a “new” book – Kidwatching in New Times – for our preservice and newest teachers who are not as familiar and are no longer seeing anecdotal observation embedded into the classrooms where they are teaching . . . we need to support teachers in these times . . . different from the 80’s and 90’s . . . they are not seeing whole language practices in action.

In GCLR, teachers look for opportunities to create new and different learning environments for their students.

One teacher education participant wrote to her students during the chat: “Looking forward to your thoughts on family and literacy learning this week in class . . . lots to think about!” One student replied, “Thank you! Looking forward to discussing this presentation in class this week!” Another teacher commented on a literacy model that was presented, “[@ Name] we’ll have to share these ideas with our class!” Comments such as these suggest to us that teacher educators and their students find online spaces to be a way to integrate their learning within their classes and extend their learning from the seminars. Teacher educators who participate in these seminars are willing to balance the individual needs of diverse students with the demands of curriculum to become an agent of change, transforming the existing social order of the classroom and empowering all students through online participation in scholarship. Thus GCLR serves an educational requirement that teachers enable their students to interact effectively with people of different social and cultural backgrounds in this more globally intertwined age (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Ravitch, 2010).

Discussion

Miller (2013) proposed that online learning promotes more reflection, intimacy, and community than traditional face-to-face interactions in class. Within the GCLR activities, we found out that online discussions serve not only as a learning tool, but also an avenue for teachers to engage in relevant, purposeful, critical, and connected discussions to support their teaching practices. Once the participants become comfortable in the environment, GCLR is a good learning experience in a virtual face-to-face space. We suggest that online participation in relevant, holistic, and critical spaces like GCLR supports teachers in four ways.

First, participating in seminars on multiple occasions may build confidence in how teachers interact and engage with ideas presented by scholars. They understand that they can or do not have to write in the chat, but may do so after one or two experiences. As an ongoing project with defined times and dates of presentations, GCLR allows educators to build their networked relationships with global others. When participants enter the space and are greeted by others, they feel socially present, which Tu and McIsaac (2002) suggest prompts more online participation from those present.
Second, online professional development spaces are vital to teachers who work in locations where talking about critical issues is not valued. As a networked locality in which the local informs national and international policies, Web seminars like GCLR can offer educators a like-minded community that supports and extends their own learning about critical pedagogy and practice. For example, when educators brought up issues of standardized testing, which occurred across all the seminars, participants raised questions and sought solutions as they related to classroom practices—anything from using storytelling to sustain creativity in curricula informed by the CCSS to the importance of reading comprehension rather than just decoding. These discussions suggest that participants desire not only a space for talking about holistic and critical practices, but actively seek out ideas to transform their practice. Windschitl (2002) suggests that good professional development happens when participants make explicit arguments and reflect on their own practice by critiquing what goes on in the classroom. GCLR provides teachers choice in terms of defining conceptions of education, and it enables them to revisit key concepts and ideas in their own time.

Third, online Web seminars can open up dialogic spaces for a range of perspectives. Not only do participants share ideas, but these spaces also open up questions for conversations, which can lead to transformation, pedagogical support, and strategy sharing. For example, in James Gee’s Web seminar a participant asked, “Wouldn’t experiences reading the world vary for individuals? How can teachers with goals of language literacy for students create experiences reading the world?” There were several other questions asked about how to implement “reading the world” in classrooms. In other words, these participants were interested in how to ensure there was not just a focus on reading skills, but critical thinking about social issues. After this question, several participants chimed in and described the importance of reading the world in the classroom. In reference to using video games, one participant said, “The yugioh seems to help students understand the language by providing that ‘reading the world’ with interactions and videos giving them the background knowledge.” This comment allowed participants to deeply analyze what they consider important in reading instruction and texts. There was a transformation in thinking around literacy and a desire to learn more. One participant said, “Dr. Gee, I loved your explanation that situated meaning = reading the world. Thanks!”

The range of perspectives not only engaged participants in interesting and generative conversations, but directed many toward critical and holistic practices.

Fourth, learning continues after the live presentation is over. We noted earlier that participants indicated that these post-seminar conversations happened, and both teachers and students were “looking forward” to engaging in discussions about a seminar topic. Pace (2015) studied GCLR to understand why and how teacher educators implemented this seminar series in their teacher education undergraduate and graduate literacy classes. Pace’s participants suggested that GCLR offered their students multiple perspectives on critical literacy, an opportunity to see social justice in action through interaction in the seminar, a “rich learning experience outside the classroom” (p. 170), and a space to “think more deeply and critically about literacy” (p. 107), among other reasons. Many of these teacher educators noted that GCLR embodies social action and provides their students access to cutting-edge scholarship and scholars. One participant noted, “For me, it’s about social justice. It’s about providing an opportunity for my students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who are nontraditional students” (p. 110). Further, Pace’s participants saw GCLR as a space for “one more opportunity for the students to engage with a scholar who may or may not share my personal perspectives” (p. 111). One participant wrote that seminars “really facilitated our in-class discussion. . . [W]e spent like about an hour of our in-class time and did think-pair-share and talked about the resources that he presented at the web seminar and how in current public school it was our current practice, and what the classroom teachers are doing in the classroom where my students are observing, and in the future, how they can utilize those digital tools in the classroom” (p. 146). Statements such as these suggest to us that seminars have made their way into the literacy classroom, where they open up space for teacher educators and their students to discuss contemporary literacy issues in their local setting.

Conclusion

We agree with Goodfellow and Lamy (2009) that the lines between traditional and online language learning contexts have become increasingly blurred. Connectedness, critical ability, and creativity are emerging as social roles played by institutions. Online learning should enrich face-to-face
communication and support collaboration, which are among the important goals of education, especially if the institution aims to serve democratic society and social change. Educational institutions should provide more critical literacy content and more venues to take advantage of this content (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012).

Critical projects like GCLR that are committed to whole language provide a vehicle for communicating research, theory and practice across nations and among scholars who have strong allegiance to holistic critical practices. As a project, GCLR has offered live professional development to over 9,000 people from across the world. Their YouTube channel has recorded nearly 23,000 views. We suggest that projects that maintain and sustain scholarship—both live and archived—in whole language and critical literacy have the potential to shift practices and beliefs.

Scholars who present their work grounded in a holistic and critical perspective enable learners to interact and engage ideas with others across the globe. Such access ensures that educators “will become more the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it” (Freire, 1970, p. 90). This voluntary learning has important implications for the nature of the community and teachers’ cognitive development. Teachers can engage in online communities for multiple purposes (e.g., learning and building relationships with like-minded professionals; sharing resources with others). Thus critical literacy practices accessed through new technologies should be encouraged for a change in learning and teaching practices. Institutions should motivate interactivity and critical literacy through social media so that they can activate movement towards global justice.

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Peggy Albers is a professor in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be reached at malbers2@gsu.edu.

Tuba Angay-Crowder is a doctoral candidate in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be reached at tangay1@student.gsu.edu.

Sarah Turnbull is a doctoral student in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be reached at swilliams99@student.gsu.edu.

Aram Cho is a doctoral student in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be contacted at acho5@student.gsu.edu.

Ji Hye Shin is a doctoral student in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be contacted at jshin17@student.gsu.edu.

Myoung Eun Pang is a doctoral student in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be reached at mpang2@student.gsu.edu.

Christi Pace is a part-time instructor in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be reached at cpace6@gsu.edu.

Mandi Sena is a doctoral student in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be reached at msena1@student.gsu.edu.

Huan Wang is a doctoral student in language and literacy education in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education at Georgia State University. She can be reached at hwang45@student.gsu.edu.

Jin-Kyeong Jung is a PhD student in reading/writing/literacy with a concentration in international educational development at the University of Pennsylvania. She can be reached at jinkjing@gse.upenn.edu.