ABSTRACT

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white patron on a Montgomery bus. Her act of resistance sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott and ushered in the mid-20th century Civil Rights Movement. Although Parks occupies a prominent place in United States history, she was not the first to challenge racial segregation. Elizabeth Jennings was an African American schoolteacher who was ejected from a streetcar in New York City in 1854. Her lawyer, future President Chester A. Arthur, sued the streetcar company and won. Jennings’ and Parks’ stories serve as examples of counterstories that can raise critical race consciousness to matters of racial inequity in historical narratives and school curricula. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to examine whether students in an undergraduate teacher preparation course at a major university in a metropolitan region of the Southeast demonstrated critical race consciousness with reflective writing assignments by analyzing the counterstories of Elizabeth Jennings and Rosa Parks.
INTRODUCTION

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white patron on a Montgomery city bus. Her act of resistance against segregation ordinances sparked the year-long Montgomery Bus Boycott and ushered in the mid-20th century Civil Rights Movement in United States history. Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) indicate that Parks is often regarded as a “famous” American hero among elementary and secondary children. These findings are not surprising, as Parks’ arrest and resulting Boycott is emphasized in many civil rights narratives found in school curricula. However, there were other “black women in America [who] repeatedly stood their ground against conductors, ticket-takers, and cabdrivers who tried to turn them into second-class citizens” years before Parks’ arrest (Collins, 2003, p. 180). For example, Elizabeth Jennings was an African American schoolteacher who was ejected from a streetcar in New York City in 1854 due to her race. Her lawyer, future President Chester A. Arthur, sued the streetcar company and won. Although she is often compared to Rosa Parks, Jennings remains a relatively obscure historical figure (Howell, 2001; Singer, 2005; Greider, 2005; Perrotta & Bohan, 2013). Consequently, inaccuracies and omissions of Parks and Jennings that often appear in historical narratives and curricular materials can contribute to the development of “a ubiquitous lack of awareness of how ordinary citizens and minority groups fought for and achieved civil rights throughout United States history” (Perrotta & Bohan, 2013, p. 14).

Pedagogies that promote critical race consciousness (CRC), or awareness to race and inequality, can prepare pre-service teachers for the challenges of the 21st-century American classrooms. Among these challenges include racial, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic gaps between Caucasian students and students of color (Gay & Howard, 2000). An example of such a pedagogy is the implementation of reflective writing assignments that are based upon counterstory analysis of historical figures such as Parks and Jennings. According to Tyson (2006), counterstories are the histories of racial, class, and gender minorities that function “as a means of analysis to examine the epistemologies of racially oppressed peoples” (p. 47). Traditionally, many United States historical narratives that are used in K-12 classrooms have focused on the experiences of white males, which can diminish the experiences of minorities as “add-ons” to the curriculum (Bickford & Rich, 2014; Loewen, 1995; Kincheloe, 2001). Reflective writing assignments that are designed to examine the portrayals of race in counterstories of historical figures, such as Parks and Jennings, can be effective instructional techniques that raise pre-service teachers’ CRC by combatting “the stereotypical images that certain elements of society have constructed,” particularly with regard to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, 2006; p. 57).

With these premises in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to examine whether students in an undergraduate teacher preparation course at a major university in a metropolitan region of the Southeast can demonstrate CRC with reflective writing assignments based upon analysis of the counterstories of Elizabeth Jennings and Rosa Parks. The following questions formed the foundation of this qualitative case study:

1. Can pre-service teachers’ analyses of historical similarities and differences between Rosa Parks and Elizabeth Jennings as counterstories in reflective writing assignments contribute to the development of CRC in an undergraduate teacher preparation course?