School of Leadership and Education Sciences: Faculty Scholarship

School of Leadership and Education Sciences

2019

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Abstract

As more teacher education programs commit to developing critically conscious educators, it has become increasingly important to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to engage in critical actions within authentic contexts. To this end, the TESOL program in partnership with community stakeholders instituted a language program, where candidates were provided opportunities to explore the role of advocacy in their work through engaging in iterative dialogic reflections with their students. This chapter illustrates how the candidates came to embrace their role as agentive forces that strived to contribute to the empowerment of their learners to advocate for themselves within their own communities.

Keywords: Teacher advocacy, teacher agency, community-based English language program, critical consciousness, critical language pedagogy, change-making

Introduction

Advocacy in teacher education is indeed, a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. In the K-12 literature, the need for teachers to serve as advocates on behalf of their English learners has long been emphasized (Athanases & de Oliveria, 2008; Athanases & Martin, 2006; Dubetz and de Jong, 2011; Linville, 2016; Molina, 2013; Valenzuela, 2016). Similarly, in the community college and university sectors, the advocacy role for teachers of underserved students has also been considered vital particularly in terms of supporting their students to navigate available resources and programs pertinent to their academic success (Roberge, 2009; Rose, 2005). In a community-based English language program for adults however, the teacher's role shifts from being the advocate for their students to empowering their students to advocate for themselves within their local communities to meet a broad range of goals that might include communicating more effectively with teachers, health care practitioners or employers.

As a designated change-making institution, the mission of social justice has been embedded into the fabric of our university ecosystem. As a teacher educator, I hoped to develop a language program that contributed to this shared vision of serving members of the surrounding Linda Vista community, which houses our university. Linda Vista is a vibrant community with over 25 languages spoken, but also one of the few most distressed neighborhoods in San Diego. The ecology in which our community-based language program was situated evoked the importance of a critical stance as we were serving what economists, social analysts, or politicians would consider, a vulnerable population.

In the Fall of 2015, I spent four months with a group of TESOL teacher candidates at a community center in Linda Vista to understand the needs of its members. In the Spring of 2016,

I met with community stakeholders to determine resources required for the program. Funding for food, materials and childcare was procured through the support from the Mulvaney Center for Community Awareness and Social Action, the Impact Linda Vista Grant Initiative and the Linda Vista Kindergarten Readiness Network, our community partners in this initiative. In the Fall of 2016, with the endorsement of the principal, this program was offered at Montgomery Middle School located centrally within the community so as to provide ease of access for the participants.

The teacher candidates met on Tuesday evenings to deliver 1.5 hour lessons. The childcare worker organized meaningful, literacy-based activities for the children, while their parents attended classes. These lessons were followed by a debriefing session and discussions around theory, practices, and advocacy within this particular context.

Drawing on critical consciousness theory undergirding the framework of teacher advocacy, this chapter illustrates how our TESOL teacher candidates made sense of their work as teachers of adult learners within this community-based English language program as it pertained to empowering their students to enact change in their own lives.

Theoretical Orientation

In our teacher preparation program, our mission is to develop educators who will advocate for equity in the professional settings in which they serve by becoming agents of change. This entails evoking a sense of critical consciousness, whereby teacher candidates can engage in dialogical learning with their students so as to transform their lives.

Freire's liberatory pedagogy revolves around the central idea of "praxis," and seeks to be a pedagogy that enables students and teachers to be Subjects who can look at reality, critically reflect upon that reality, and take transformative action to change that reality based upon the original critical reflection, thereby deepening their consciousness and changing the world for the better. Pedagogically, Freire thus advocates a process of problem posing, coding/decoding, and dialogue as a means of developing critical consciousness for social transformation both in the classroom and in the world (Au, 2007, p. 182)

As a teacher educator, it was important to have our teacher candidates begin to make sense of and experience this theoretical orientation undergirding our program in practice.

Situating Teacher Advocacy within Critical Consciousness Theory

Critical consciousness requires that teachers engage in dialogical reflections on the multiple factors (political, social, environmental, relational) impacting their work with their learners in their particular setting.   It also involves awareness of the self (eg. one's beliefs, positionality, assumptions) that can be nurtured through honest reflexive practice with the aim of self-transformation (Dewey, 1997). Richards & Lockhart (2012) define reflexive practice as "one in which teachers and student teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use information obtained for critical reflection about teaching" (p.1). Advocacy from the perspective of critical consciousness for the purposes of this chapter is what Freire identifies as engagement including both understanding through dialogue and critical action (Freire, 1993).

Situating Language Teaching within Critical Consciousness Theory

Phillipson (1992) recognizes the social and political weight of the English language and encourages teachers to be cognizant of their role as language teachers and what this could mean

(Matsuda, 2012) as well as raise their students' awareness of their status in society and how they can be empowered to create change (Freire, 1970).

Ricento & Hornberger (1996) further affirm that "because human society is constituted of, by and through, language, all acts and actions mediated by language are opportunities for the implicit (and explicit) expression of language policies (i.e. opportunities for language planning, macro and micro, overt and covert, intended and unintended)" (p. 420). As a result, it is important for teacher candidates to recognize that their work as language teachers is, in a sense, a political act.

Crookes (2013) defines critical language pedagogy in the following way:

> In a general sense, a pedagogy which can use the term "critical" is a perspective on teaching, learning, and curriculum that doesn't take for granted the status quo, but subjects it to critique, creates alternative forms of practice, and does so on the basis of radical theories of language, the individual and society that take seriously our hopes for improvement in the direction of goals such as liberty, equality, and justice for all (p. 1)

As a teacher educator, it became important to align the work within our TESOL program with the mission of our department through provision of opportunities for our teacher candidates to think about and develop this sense of critical consciousness through their work as language teachers.

Methodology

Research on second language teacher education (SLTE) recognizes teachers, not as *conduits* of knowledge, but as "reflective practitioners who think deeply about the principles, practices, and process of classroom instruction with a considerable degree of creativity, artistry, and context sensitivity" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 9). Most SLTE programs believe that this opportunity to engage in critical reflections as they make sense of theory in practice is best attained through

fieldwork experiences. In our TESOL program, teacher candidates are placed in community college and language academy settings under the supervision and guidance of a mentor teacher. Though this is appropriate scaffolding for pre-service teachers as they begin to learn to teach, they often report feeling constricted in their ability to play an active role in the instructional decision-making process. As such, this community-based English language program was instituted to provide the teacher candidates with opportunities to engage in dialogue and critical action within their own classrooms. Because this was a pilot program, I was most interested in how the teacher candidates engaged in advocacy actions, if at all, within this setting, and whether this sense of critical consciousness carried through in their final capstone projects completed a semester after this program.

Research Questions

1. *In what ways do teacher candidates demonstrate a sense of critical consciousness in their work with adult learners within this community-based English language program?*

2. *In what ways, if at all, did teacher candidates approach their final capstone projects completed a semester after this program with a sense of critical consciousness?*

Research Design

Qualitative case study methodology (See Yin, 2003 and Creswell, 2008) was employed for this exploratory study to gain insight into how the teacher candidates made sense of their role as language teachers within this context.

Teacher Candidates

This study focused on 11 teacher candidates who served as teachers in this community-based English language program. The teacher candidates worked in teams of 3-4 to teach three groups of learners differentiated by proficiency levels. There were two males and nine females. The

teacher candidates were between 24 and 28 years of age. Five of the teacher candidates were international students from China, one of the teacher candidates recently received her citizenship and is of Korean descent who was raised in Costa Rica and the United States. Two of the teacher-candidates identified as second-generation Americans with one student of Cambodian and Thai descent and one of Vietnamese descent. One teacher-candidate identified as Puerto Rican and Dominican, one teacher-candidates identified as Caucasian, and one teacher-candidate identified as African American. All candidates completed one year of the program including courses in foundational TESOL theory and methods of language teaching. Previous teaching experiences included tutoring, some classroom teaching, and teaching abroad for several months.

Adult Learners

The students that attended this community-based program were between their early 20s and late 60s. Because this was an open-enrollment program and attendance fluctuated, where we had between 6 and 17 students on any given day. In terms of the students who attended regularly, one was from Argentina, three were from Iran, one was from Bangladesh, and the rest were from different regions of Mexico.

Data Collection Tools

In order to understand how teachers enacted critical consciousness within this context, six sets of data were collected. These included teacher candidate analysis of their students' needs assessment data, syllabi, lesson plans, reflexive journals, debriefing sessions and their capstone inquiry projects.

Needs assessment. Candidates were encouraged to conduct ongoing formative assessments with their students throughout the semester and provided an analysis of their understanding of this data in their reflexive journals and capstone inquiry projects.

Collaborative syllabi. Each teaching team submitted a collaborative syllabus, that was also framed as a living syllabus, whereby, the respective teams could make adjustments to meet the emerging and changing needs of their students throughout the semester.

Collaborative lessons. Collaborative lessons were submitted weekly and provided detailed insight into the decisions the groups made on the content and delivery of their lessons.

Candidate reflexive journals. The reflexive journals were submitted weekly and provided the teacher candidates with the space to articulate and document their thinking process and lessons learned in addition to their analysis of the emerging and changing needs of their students.

Debriefing sessions. Debriefing sessions followed the instructional period each week. These included dialogues between members of the teaching teams, across teaching teams, and the teacher educator.

Capstone inquiry projects. Final capstone projects conducted a semester after completion of this community-based program were collected to understand how candidates approached advocacy as a role in their work in subsequent settings in which they were placed.

Data Analysis Procedures

Document analysis was used to analyze the six data sets collected for this study. Document analysis is a procedure for evaluating documents in order to deepen the understanding of a

phenomenon under investigation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Chunks of data were then

extrapolated from the data sets that illuminated teacher candidate understanding of and action

related to advocacy within this setting. The data sets were triangulated (Duff, 2008) and

reviewed through an iterative process where codes were generated and collapsed into categories

through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Findings

For the first question, the data analysis process revealed two broad areas where elements of

advocacy surfaced. These included their approach to program policies and their approach to

curriculum planning and design.

Elements of Teacher Candidate Advocacy in Program Policies

Attendance policy. Based on the critical theoretical orientation undergirding this

program, the candidates felt that it was important to allow students to continue to enroll in the

program throughout the semester which resulted in our Open Enrollment Policy. Absenteeism,

tardiness, and the continual enrollment of new students resulting from this policy exacerbated the

candidates' frustration because of their inability to provide continuity in their lessons.

> The nature of this program made it difficult for me to collect data due to the sporadic
> attendance. It also made lesson planning difficult when I was trying to introduce
> materials from the previous classes. One week, we had all of our students show up. Then
> there would be a week where one student was absent. The week after that, another
> student was absent. Sometimes, we only had one student show up. –Teacher Candidate,
> Final Reflections

Though they may not have been able to apply the changes they hoped to employ in their

subsequent lessons, they engaged in moment-to-moment interactions with their students, learned

to be flexible and make instructional decisions based on the students that were there and ready to

learn. For example, they adjusted their lessons and enacted different strategies to accommodate

the late comers while moving forward with the new lesson with those students present by dividing the teachers between the two groups, where one group reviewed missed portions of the lesson while the other group moved forward with the new lesson. Teacher candidates also began to respond to the attendance issue with some coaching from a critical understanding of the context in which they worked. They began to enact policies around this that were not punitive, but instead, grounded in a critical and contextual understanding of their students' circumstances.

> Tardiness was also an issue affecting our class, but I still encouraged students to attend even if they knew they were going to be late, because I understood the challenges they face outside of the classroom, such as taking care of family members or working. So, it did not bother me at all when they arrived late to class, even if it meant not finishing a lesson. Students would continue to attend as long as they know they are supported. – Teacher Candidate, Final Reflections

Through the relationships the candidates developed with their students over the course of the semester, they softened their original frustrations with attendance and began to develop deeper levels of understanding and compassion to serve this group of students by creating a comfortable, supportive and welcoming environment for their students.

> the first few times we were really upset and didn't know what to do…we didn't know what to do, but now we are prepared…we are going to have a positive mindset, attitude, and be more active. – Teacher Candidate Comment, Debriefing Session

Over the course of the semester, the teacher candidates learned of the many circumstances that contributed to absenteeism and tardiness which included factors such as the impact of weather (eg. rain, cold), day-lights savings (eg. fear of walking in the dark), lack of transportation, loss of job, changes in work schedules, or lack of childcare. Two students had severe health problems that also contributed to their absence. One student did bring food for our teacher candidates one day as an expression of her gratitude, but was embarrassed to stay because she had just lost a tooth and needed immediate dental care, but had to wait for an appointment. Another important

consideration was the political climate of the elections in the Fall of 2016, where our teacher-candidates designed lessons around the elections. However, after the elections, there were several absences. When our candidates called their students, they expressed some fear to attend class because they were undocumented. A candidate describes in her final reflections how important it was to create a safe space for her students to share their voice.

> I've learned…how important it is for me to build that classroom community and right from the start having students feel comfortable so that they come and are able to open up in our discussions. – Teacher Candidate Comment, Debriefing Session

Language policy. Policies around language use within their classrooms was determined by the teaching teams. Because this was not a federally-funded program or embedded within an institution, there were no required language policies in place. In this particular setting, language policy manifested in how the candidates addressed their students' native language in the classroom. Within the TESOL preparation program, the teacher candidates were exposed to the historical context of language policies and how it impacted access, particularly in the public education setting. The teacher educator did not impose particular views on language policies within this context and allowed the teaching teams determine their approach. In the beginning level teaching-team, the teachers initially deferred to the bilingual Spanish-English teacher to translate all of the materials into Spanish both in writing and in providing instruction in the classroom. In a sense, it became a bilingual classroom, however, the other three candidates in this team, who did not speak in Spanish, noted in their journals that the students were capable of learning in English and that it was important for them to learn the language to use in their daily lives. In one candidate's reflexive journal entry, she wrote, "I believed that the students were able to learn through visuals and actions rather than translations and they did." The bilingual

teacher-candidate acknowledged in her reflections towards the end of the semester that though she thought using their native language in the classroom was helpful to the students and lowered anxiety, she may have been using it as a "crutch," which may counteract their goals of learning English to negotiate their voices in the community. The other two teaching teams had one candidate proficient in Spanish, but followed an English-only policy. This was ascertained from their reflexive journals where, for example, three teacher-candidates in the intermediate level indicated how they wanted to separate the language groups during group work so as to encourage their students to speak in English rather than Persian and Spanish as one candidate stated, it "alienates other members of the group who don't speak the language." As such, advocating for learners to be allowed to use their native language, which is viewed as a component of asset-based pedagogical practice, and advocating for them to learn to negotiate their voices in the language of power became a tension point for two of the teaching teams.

Elements of Teacher Candidate Advocacy in Curriculum Planning and Design

From the needs assessment data, there were several reasons that brought the adult learners from the neighboring community to attend this program. These included broader skill-related interests such as "I want to improve my writing" and "I want to improve my listening and speaking." The needs that most influenced the design of the course syllabi were related to their desire to read to their children, to speak to their children's teachers and school administrators, to negotiate work and salaries with their bosses, to have conversations with other English speakers, and to speak to their health care providers without the assistance from their English-speaking children. For many immigrant families, children often become the translators for their parents in their interactions with those in positions of power. This often puts parents in a vulnerable position in

maintaining their role and boundaries as parents. The needs assessments yielded the following

curriculum for the three groups.

Table 1

Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced English Language Syllabi

Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
Needs Assessments /Self-Introductions	Self-Introductions	Self-Introductions
Greetings	Good for You-Healthy	At the Doctor's Office
Community Places	Sense of Smell	Daily Routine
Directions	5 Senses	Job Application
Banking	Recipe	Housing
Mid-point Assessment	Home Remedies	Request for Help
Grocery Store	Traditions & Culture	News Article - Elections
Restaurant	Music/Mid-point Assessment	Letter from Parents
Mid-point Assessment	Debate – Elections	Culture
Comprehensive Assessment	Hobbies/Impromptu Speech	Idioms
	Speech/Assessment	Asking for Clarification
		Comprehensive Assessment

Within the lessons, the candidates often paused their lessons to respond to an emerging need

expressed by a student. For example, in one class, a student struggled with getting her landlord

to return her deposit, so our teacher candidates developed a lesson plan with language and skills

to support their student to convey her disappointment to her landlord in a letter.   In another class,

two of the students had trouble negotiating salaries and work boundaries with their employers.

As these needs arose, the teaching teams revised their syllabi with lessons to meet their needs or

in the case of one team, they set aside time at the end of each class working on vocabulary and

phrases their students needed for their work.

The following excerpt is taken from a teacher candidate in her final reflections where she

describes the need to empower her adult learners with the survival skills necessary to negotiate

their voices within their communities.

I felt that I succeeded in creating meaningful and purposeful lessons to meet the needs of my students in providing survival skills in the community-based ESOL program… The focus of my [work here] is to teach adult students in a community-based program English so that they can negotiate for services and resources, such as going to the doctor, interviewing for jobs, and buying groceries, among other things. These may seem like simple tasks, but to non-native English speakers, these are challenges they face on a regular basis. My students learned new vocabulary, practiced filling medical forms, participated in discussion questions, did role-play related to a job interview, among other practical things. I realized I had to make my lessons more authentic in nature. – Teacher Candidate, Final Reflections

For the second question, I was interested in how the teacher-candidates continued to thread a sense of critical consciousness within their participatory action research projects after the completion of this community-based program. The teacher candidates had the option of continuing in this community-based program or being placed in other community college and language programs within San Diego county. Compared to previous years where students often focused on improving discrete skills, all of the teacher candidates in this particular cohort appeared to ground their research in advocacy perspectives, whether it be advocating for particular marginalized groups of teachers (eg. Non-Native English Language Teachers in the US) and students (eg. Generation 1.5 students) both within higher education and in the community. However, it is unclear if this is the result of participating in this community-based program, or a result of other factors such as their personal and professional histories (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), explicit discussions around critical perspectives and advocacy-related issues within our program and the larger narrative within the institution as a change-making institution.

In this section, I highlight the work of one of the teacher candidates who continued working within this community-based setting. The inquiry question guiding her participatory action research was as follows: *In what ways can teachers help adult ESOL refugee and immigrant students engage in meaningful conversations outside of the classroom?* She defined *meaningful*

as lessons that would support her students in being "able to engage in conversations in order to negotiate for services and resources, such as medical needs, salary increases, or communicating with their children's teachers, among other things." Based on the needs assessment she conducted, her curriculum focused on three overarching themes including daily communication, health and jobs. In the needs assessment, students reported that they wanted to learn English to "improve English speaking, reading, and writing skills," "to improve in my job or get a better job," "today everything is working with computer … and most words, international words, are English [sic]," "to communicate with the teachers of my son and with the doctor [original in Spanish]." For the health segment, this teacher candidate taught the students language related to daily communication, going to the doctor, completing medical forms and understanding the health care resources and services available in the local community. For the job segment, she focused on introducing a variety of jobs, completing job applications, and interviewing for jobs. It is clear from the design of the curriculum and from her reflections of engaging in this participatory action research project, that the undergirding theoretical orientation of this study stemmed from a sense of critical consciousness.

As mentioned earlier, it is challenging to pinpoint where this sense of critical consciousness arose for this candidate. However, in her reflections, a specific childhood experience appeared to impact the way in which she saw her role and purpose within this community program.

> I remember like it was yesterday when I was 4 or 5 years old standing in front of an ice-cream truck. My mother was with me and in return for handing money to the ice cream man, she was presented with an ice cream sandwich. Little did I know that telling her I did not want the "white" one, but the one with "three colors," that it would turn a conversation south between my mom and the ice cream man. I stood there staring at my mom as she tried her best to speak English only to see the man getting mad and yelling at her. I never got my ice cream sandwich with three colors. I actually did not remember getting one at all, but my mom did not look angry. Instead, she took my hand and we walked away. All I could see was the frustration and sadness on her face. This was one of

the many situations she encountered as an English language learner (ELL). I wanted to become a TESOL instructor because it will help me reach out to immigrant and refugee students who face the same struggles my mom went through… The students here reminded me so much about my mom who went to adult English classes when I was a child. I remember her bringing home homework for me to help her with. – Teacher Candidate, Final Reflections

It appears that for those that experienced some form of marginalization in their own lives or those of others, this work took on a deeper significance.

Discussion and Conclusion

Understanding the development of advocacy capacity in teacher candidates is a very complex process, particularly when many of them are just learning to apply pedagogical theory and methods into their instructional practice. Through this study, it became clear that this process is developmental and that a multitude of factors play a role in how teacher candidates approach this work. These include their previous personal and professional histories (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), where they may have personally or professionally experienced and noticed some form of marginalization either in their own lives or in the lives of others. They may also have had opportunities to think deeply about and deeply reflect on social justice issues through particular mentors who embody these values in their own life's work. However, it is important to recognize that knowing about social inequities and working towards addressing these issues in society are two, very different things.

Though this program was a smaller initiative within a larger, university and community-wide systemic approach critical for social change, our teacher candidates provided language support to enable our students from the community to negotiate their voices within their locales. Some examples of this included negotiating salaries and professional boundaries with their employers,

accessing community resources, discussing their children's progress with school teachers and administrators, and sharing health concerns with doctors without their children or grandchildren serving as translators.

However, during our debriefing sessions, we began to reflect on whether our instruction was serving those of position and power (i.e. homeowners, bosses, administrators) in our community rather than really addressing the social and structural inequities that exist in our society. It became evident, that with the expression of voice comes a certain level of risk. For example, in supporting our adult learners in writing letters to their landlords or negotiating salaries and work boundaries, they run a certain risk, whereby, they can lose their livelihood as a result of attempting to enact change in their own lives. To this end, Crookes (2013) cautions us that though we may be able to support students with their needs to negotiate their voice in their daily lives, the larger social and political issues that contributed to the perpetuation of these inequitable practices in the first place may not necessarily be impacted. Goulet (1973) further warns us that "Those who are truly oppressed do not enjoy the freedom to fail, the luxury of experimenting" (p. xiii). Does this mean that our work as language teachers is all in vain, or can the nurturing of critical consciousness in our teachers and our students potentially lead to a more just society, where the benefits of enacting change, however small they may be, can outweigh the risks in due course?

Reflections Questions

1. In what ways can TESOL instructors advocate for their students in community college, language academy, and community-based settings?

2. What kinds of placement opportunities can teacher education programs provide to support the development of advocacy capacity in teacher candidates?

3. Given Crooke's (2013) cautionary note about the unlikelihood of these types of curriculum on the larger political and societal structures that perpetuate these inequities, how do you understand our work and purpose as language teachers?

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