

CRITICAL TEACHER AGENCY:

CENTERING LOVE, TENSION AND PERSEVERANCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

GUEST EDITORS

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a significant role in the achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students in PK-12 classrooms. For the past decade, teachers and educators working in diverse settings have navigated a sociopolitical minefield to enact culturally and linguistically sustaining praxis (Paris & Alim, 2017). Through macro and micro level policies, teachers have been targets of legislation designed to dismantle educational initiatives that pursue diversity, equity, and inclusion and, as such, have been denied access to critical resources, support, and infrastructure. Consequently, teachers have had to provide services to today's evermore pluralistic PK-12 students with minimal support from school administration and in the face of societal discrimination. Furthermore, new education policies targeting higher education have resulted in teacher preparation programs being stripped of funding targeted to support the academic achievement of historically marginalized students in PK-12 classrooms. The current educational environment has challenged teachers and educators to re-imagine teacher agency.

With so much systemic injustice, the role of educator agency to pursue justice for Black and Brown students with rich cultural and linguistic diversity matters more than ever. This volume examines the way in which teachers, through collective agency, shape the manner in which culturally and linguistically diverse students and families are supported and honored in PK-12 classrooms. Further, the edition chronicles the advocacy efforts of pre- and in-service teachers in PK-12 schools and consequently, outlines ways in which mindful caring teachers name and challenge systemic barriers in school communities. The collective scholarship in this volume is informed by Critical Pedagogy, Teacher Agency, and a Cycle of Liberation Framework. Through detailed cases, critical reflection, and theoretical innovations, authors showcase strategies while positing possibilities for institutional change.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL TEACHERS & AGENCY

Critical pedagogy (CP) has been acknowledged as a process in which teachers and educators are able to challenge, question, and transform existing status quo practices in public schools (Giroux, 2008). In doing so, teachers/ educators work towards enacting humanizing practices that honor and value the lived experiences of students. Authors in this particular edition draw from a critical pedagogical lens to re-examine the way in which pre- and in-service teachers and educators seek and challenge power structures in teacher education and the public school system so that historically marginalized PK-12 students experience an equity-informed education supported by resources and sustained through community building.

According to Freire (1974), a liberatory education is guided by love. Studies regarding the influence of love and critical caring in schools (Valenzuela, 1999) have demonstrated that both constructs are significant to the success of youth in the PK-12 educational system. Bartolomé (2010) contends that love must be authentic in education settings where teachers serve culturally and linguistically diverse learners. The pre- and in-service teachers in this edition illuminate these particular perspectives and teaching practices in diverse educational settings.

TEACHER AGENCY

Bound closely by acts of love and caring, teacher agency is a component of critical pedagogy that challenges and transforms schooling conditions shaping the lives of students and communities (Freire, 1974; Giroux, 2008). A myriad of studies (Bartolome, 2010) about urban teachers working in restrictive school settings have revealed that teachers enacted agency to do so. They were risk takers with students and the curriculum - and associated their teaching with the struggle for human dignity and justice. These studies also reflect the need for examining the manner in which power is used to control teachers. The seminal works of Apple (2005) and Foucault (1977) have outlined the manner in which the power of institutions is exerted on teachers. More specifically, Foucault reminds us that those with the most power in society are also those whose ideas are considered to be universal and unbiased truths. In teacher education, there is a need to illuminate how these structures of power operate and to undo the accepted, hegemonic “universality” of accepted truths in systems of education and, instead, pursue liberation with students and teachers in search of new truths generated by communities. Thus, it is imperative to challenge power structures in the educational system through agential actions. Teachers who take on this challenge seek a power shift in education so that authentic democracy may be enacted, surveillance dismantled, and schools become a place where all individuals are valued.

CYCLE OF LIBERATION FRAMEWORK

A Cycle of Liberation Framework (CLF) (Harro, 2000) is helpful in analyzing actions enacted by classroom teachers and community members to understand the role, process, and result of enacted agency. This special edition uses a Cycle of Liberation lens to chronicle the way in which pre/in-service teachers and educators challenge racist structures impacting the lives of historically marginalized students, families and communities.

The CLF illustrates the process for analyzing inequities and action towards liberation (Harro, 2000). The CLF involves a process of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and systemic change with love at the core of all action (Harro, 2000). Tension is considered part of the CLF

because it derives from institutional constraints that cause stress on individuals seeking equality and liberation. Often, this tension is what propels individuals to invoke their agency to take action for change. Teachers and educators in this edition chronicle tensions impacting the lives of students and their families. Specifically, the CLF is composed of three stages: (1) Waking Up and Reaching Out; (2) Building Community and Coalescing; and (3) Creating and Maintaining Change. A description of each stage follows.

Waking Up and Reaching Out: In the first stage, the intrapersonal tensions caused by critical incidents create an enlightenment of one's place in the world, where one's known reality is now questioned and challenged as being true. Individuals or groups in this phase begin to take steps toward self-empowerment by further questioning and understanding the contradictions they have brought to their consciousness (Freire, 1974). For instance, a multilingual teacher who is forbidden to speak Spanish by a school principal realizes that their view of education must change given the circumstance: it is unjust to deny teachers and students their home or heritage language. The teacher uses this critical incident to empower themselves and consequently, names injustices happening in the school. Authors in this volume document this stance.

Building Community and Coalescing: In the second stage, the interpersonal tension that drives the CLF involves a change in an individual's worldview triggered by the need to further understand the personal, social, and systemic forces that cause inequitable conditions (Harro, 2000). Building community allows a space for dialogue with individuals or groups that have similar and different perspectives. A classroom teacher that participates in professional development seeks to build relationships with all members, regardless of ideological and linguistic differences, in the pursuit of equality in education is generating a community that will collectively understand issues of injustice more deeply and, therefore, raise awareness of a need for change.

Creating and Maintaining Change: The final stage, creating and maintaining change, is fueled by tensions that challenge existing structures, assumptions, philosophies, rules, and roles that stifle

transformative change (Harro, 2000). The challenge is to strengthen and integrate change into the daily lives of everyone, through dialogue and cooperation, towards the possibilities for equality, justice, and humanness (Freire, 1974; Giroux, 2008). A teacher who wants to integrate a program that will benefit communities, such as technology classes for Latine parents, uses dialogue and hope to challenge power structures and institutional barriers undermining students' and families' potential. Authors illuminate the collective and meaningful work of teachers and community members in schools where systemic barriers have impacted their lives.

Love, which is the core of the CLF, is a fundamental quality needed to battle oppression waged against historically marginalized students and communities in the educational system. A praxis of love is necessary to a) be in community with students to empathetically understand effects of inequitable institutional structures and practices; b) build community with folks in myriad roles, with varied ideologies, and across spaces; and c) create change that genuinely modifies institutions and people's experiences within them. In this issue, authors not only capture how love fuels the work of pre and in-service teachers, they also document their loving lens as researchers uplifting efforts of justice within and through education.

INTRODUCING THE ARTICLES

The special volume begins with "Exploring the Impact of Latinx Children's Literature on Bilingual Teacher Preparation: A Study of Beauty Woke and *Le dicen Fregona*," by Carla Espana, Luz Herrera, and Maricruz Sánchez Hernández. The authors present a bicoastal qualitative case study that explores the impact of Latinx children's literature on Latinx preservice teachers enrolled in courses at a Bilingual Teacher Residency Program. Focusing on two particular children's texts, the authors found that Latinx children's literature raised participants' critical consciousness on *Latinidad*, expanded their language ideologies, and inspired classroom applications to examine issues of language, identity, and culture.

Next, Arturo Nevárez and Diane Nevárez in "But is their Kindness Rooted in our Liberation? Teacher Educators of Color Reimagining

Critical Pedagogy through a Critical Funds of Caring Approach,” highlight four components of critical funds of caring pedagogy that extend a broader understanding of how teacher educators of Color utilize their critical teacher agency to confront hegemonic, assimilatory and subtractive schooling practices. These four components include: 1) enacting teaching as political work 2) caring rooted in collective liberation, 3) humanizing vulnerability and 4) culturally and linguistically sustaining praxis.

In “Critical Teacher Agency through Relational Pivots: Insights from Latina Mothers,” Jie Park’s case study illustrates how teachers can enact critical teacher agency even in times of heightened political and social uncertainty. The author explores the role of intersectional justice which includes language and racial justice and its impact on families and communities.

Next, Nallely Arteaga, in “Maestres que Tienen la Voz y el Coraje: Cultivating Bilingual Teachers Linguistic Capital through a Raciolinguistic Approach @ El Instituto,” explores a case study of *El Instituto*, a critical professional development for bilingual teachers in Southern California. The author examines the critical needs of K-12 Spanish bilingual educators teaching in multilingual contexts through a Critical Professional Development and Raciolinguistics. The findings suggest that the *El Instituto* not only disrupted the normalization of English-only professional development, but also exposed bilingual teachers to critical theory and research while centering their linguistic repertoires to engage in collective action towards transformed ideologies.

Drawing from a case study method, Melissa Mendoza in “Teacher Advocacy in Community: Supporting Bilingual Families in Special Education through Support Networks,” explored a network of support available to bilingual Latino/a and Hispanic families of children with disabilities ages zero to five. The author identified a multitude of supports available including school resources, institutional resources, government resources, supply resources, and community resources. Findings affirm that teachers’ agency not only advances equity for students with disabilities and their families, but also functions to inspire families’ agency and advocacy.

Lastly, Brian Tauzel, Saraswati Noe, and Elizabeth Schust in “Teacher Educators’ Narratives of Practice and Possibility From Multilingual Newcomer Schools: A Community Autoethnography,” draw from a community autoethnography to examine memories of teaching in newcomer schools, which shaped their development as critical pedagogues. The authors apply Harro’s Cycle of Liberation to explore how their memories inform current work with teacher candidates, including the agentic practices; namely, disrupting deficit discourses and supporting asset-based framings, engaging newcomers in critical dialogic pedagogies, and centering students’ prior knowledge and lived experiences

Taken together, these authors expose and uplift the power of teacher agency in advancing goals of equity and justice in the face of calculated sociopolitical and sociocultural efforts to deny culturally and linguistically sustaining education to marginalized communities. Through their work, readers gain a more robust and critical understanding of how critical agency is shaping the field of teacher education and, consequently, impacting the preparation of teachers working in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Their critical voices showcase not only why teacher agency is important across all facets of education but also inspire possibilities through tangible actions. Ultimately, authors model how a loving praxis sustains our collective, persistent struggle for liberation.

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