

Action Research for Critical Classroom and Community Change

Greg S. Goodman, Walter Ullrich, and Pedro Nava

Knowledge emerges through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [we] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.
—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970

Living and teaching in the heart of agrarian California’s culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse and majority poor Central Valley, we take seriously the teaching of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire. Freire—who “theorized that education is properly a process of learning to ‘read’ the world, and from his perspective, education and social activism are one and the same thing” (Hinchey, 2008, p. 15)—inspired our pedagogy to go beyond the simple process of helping practicing teachers adapt to a school’s status quo. Rather, we furnish teachers with the tools for a transformative praxis that resists the social press for conforming to the forces of cultural reproduction in a school’s traditional process. Educating practicing teachers involves building upon, extending, and reconstructing their schooling experiences—particularly their past experiences as students and today as they study the practice and art of critical pedagogy.

Equity-oriented teacher educators must encourage individuals to design schooling to radiate a truly democratic way of life, to be consistent with the ideals of equity and justice, and to be continually informed by an action research that is, as John Dewey (Dewey, 1916, 1929, 1938) noted nearly a century ago, “educative”¹ (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kincheloe, 2010; Zeichner, 2009). This objective can be accomplished by addressing issues of cultural responsiveness between teachers and students; in doing so, the academic engagement, achievement, and productive social action increases in students and teachers alike. The action research that we employ is both critical and predominantly qualitative.

As equity-oriented teacher educators committed to a multicultural and social justice education, we have always been humbled by the “triple-consciousness” needed in this type of work. How do we simultaneously (1) model multicultural, social justice education (MSJE), (2) transform the perspectives of practicing teachers who have succeeded with many of their students in conventional school

conditions, and (3) remain steadfast in our resolve that an emancipatory orientation to teaching and learning is developmentally appropriate and egalitarian (Ullrich, 2001)? One answer is that we need to continuously exemplify these beliefs through an action research-based pedagogy and praxis based upon the example of Paulo Freire. Freire's "conscientization" is the enduring example of awakening through the thoughtful and critical examination of one's experience while fighting for equitable outcomes for all students (May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Ullrich, 1992; Ullrich & Roessler, 1997). We hold such aims sacred and evident. However, support for MSJE is far from ubiquitous, and these purposeful and liberatory goals are fraught with obstacles.

As a result of the institutionalization of high-stakes testing as well as the stultifying effects of a standardized, standards-based education the past decade, our experiences in equity-oriented teacher education yield the following generalizations. First, MSJE informed by educative action research by practicing teachers is rare, even though they can be rigorously defended on academic, personal, and socially responsive developmental principles (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Dewey, 1904, 1916, 1938; Kliebard, 1995). Second, while MSJE curriculum clearly incorporates pupils' interests and capacities while simultaneously helping them to work against inequities and injustices that detract from so many young lives inside and outside of school, it is difficult even for those receptive to equity-oriented perspectives to defend such work on academic and developmental grounds. Third, since the passage of NCLB and the current Race to the Top legislation and the associated pressures of rigid, standards-based accountability systems in education at all levels, most of our graduate students show greater resistance towards becoming students of emancipatory teaching, let alone becoming a "transformative intellectual" (Aronowitz, 2000). In short, most of our beginning teachers are reluctant to simultaneously confront and redesign existing school conditions to be more consistent with democracy, equity, and justice—particularly during this era of high-stakes accountability for pupils and their teachers. To counter the hegemonic forces of mainstream educational politics, we needed to implement a strong action research process to support the structural changes a MSJE required.

Our purpose in this chapter is to present an integrated picture of critical qualitative research conducted by graduate students representing both an online, post-credential, Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program and a doctoral student's investigations anchored in recent ethnographic work within California's Central Valley. Through these examples of action research, we hope to provide in-depth understandings upon which to base more insightful, equity-oriented teacher education. During the last decade, many universities (and school districts) have established MSJE teacher education (and professional development) programs to respond to the many challenges facing public education, particularly those associated with the demographic imperative (Zeichner, 2009) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) outlined above. As these programs continue to gain momentum, critical questions become salient. On the one hand, there are few analyses of the classroom dynamics that emerge when diversity variables (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, class, language, disability) are focal points in these programs or of the relationship of these dynamics to practicing teachers' understanding of equity-oriented teaching and learning. On the other, few studies actually examine what happens in public school classrooms as practicing teachers introduce MSJE informed by action research methods. Like others (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; Zeichner, 2009), we can provide evidence that when individuals—practicing teachers and their pupils—are provided opportunities to critically analyze and reflect on issues of diversity in school settings, their understanding of the importance of equity is enhanced, and concern for school as a site for social justice is encouraged.

Critical Qualitative Studies as Fuel for the Fight

Let us confess that our schools have never built a new social order, but have always in all times and in all lands been the instruments through which social forces were perpetuated. If our new curriculum revi-

sion is to do better, it must undertake an acceptance of the profound social and economic changes which are now taking place in the world. (Bond, 1935, p. 68)

This quotation illustrates a tradition seemingly disconnected from many common understandings of MSJE and educative action research. Yet for us and others (Noffke & Somekh, 2009), it raises issues that are at the core of equity-oriented teacher education and educative action research. First, it demands recognition of the essentially “conserving” function of schooling and highlights the need for educational responses to profound structural changes in society. Second, it comes out of a long-standing tradition of academic literature refuting the dominant narrative of educational history that claims education as a major vehicle for social advancement for subjugated peoples. Finally, it captures major questions that have haunted educators for years, namely to what extent and in what ways action research in educational work can play a role in building a “new social order” (Counts, 1932/78)—one in which economic and social justice are central aims (Noffke & Somekh, 2009).

As examples of critical qualitative research, we have selected five studies conducted within the classrooms of our MAT students and an ethnography from a representative Central Valley community. These examples reflect the real issues of oppressed, farm-working, and predominantly immigrant Spanish-speaking communities. All of these studies touch upon core issues of literacy and emancipatory education. In the first study, English teacher Raymundo Sanchez (all research-related place and person names are protected) exemplifies the calling of John Dewey to be “reflective.” As Mr. Sanchez tests his own curriculum in the real world of practice, he is able to bring a dynamic, action research process into the unique world of his classroom. Mr. Sanchez describes his process as follows:

I have been teaching for four years in a low-income school situated in a small community located in central California. I teach an English Language Development (ELD) course. All of the students enrolled in my ELD course are considered Hispanic or Latino of Mexican descent. The majority of my ELD students have been living in the United States for no more than two years. Nearly 85% of the students receive reduced or free lunch. The majority of the students that attend the school are considered Hispanic or Latino. The school site has a total of 172 ELLs, and nearly 98% of the ELLs’ primary language is Spanish.

In retrospect, identifying and implementing successful instructions for ELLs (English Language Learners) in the public education system challenged my pedagogical considerations. Prior to conducting my research, I superficially believed that my experiences of schooling as a bilingual were sufficient to fully understanding the context of my ELLs’ English development. Furthermore, I ostensibly assumed that the difficulties my students encounter academically and socially were parallel to my lived experiences as a Filipino American as I struggled to acquire both my native and secondary languages. Based on my experiences during my primary and secondary schooling, I held on to the belief that acquiring and mastering basic skills was the prime objective to buffer the difficulties of reading, writing, and speaking in English.

As a novice ELD educator, I often questioned the efficiency of my teaching strategies when assisting ELLs to acquire a second language. Did I integrate a sufficient amount of textual materials that are conducive and appropriate to the process of my students’ language acquisition? Did my students benefit from collaborative learning activities? Were the content and rigor of the homework assignments permissible to allow them to deem their learning significant? These lingering questions became my pedagogical concerns.

I vividly remember several of my ELLs’ adamant questions after I assigned a lesson that required them to construct simple sentences based on the assigned weekly vocabulary words. At the time, the students were exercising their skills to incorporate basal vocabulary words into simple sentences. In spite of their progressive ability to convey the required skills to form simple sentences and despite their ability to identify rudimentary nouns, adjectives, and verbs in given sentences, my students’ apprehensive reaction subsequent to assigning vocabulary homework furthered my concern. The students simply demanded reasons for their learning. In response, I justified their assignment from a context-centered point of view. I explained that the assignment was part of the process of learning how to hone their command of the English grammar. I also explained to them the amount of basic skills they needed to acquire in prepara-

tion for state-mandated exams such as the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). In response, my students' unsatisfactory facial expressions rendered my defeated explanation.

My instructional practices ostensibly overlooked the underlying implications of their uncompro-mising demand for the significance of their learning. My concerns overlooked my students' apprehension. I should have recognized the possible questions implicated as a result of my students' request for the underlying objectives of the curriculum that goes beyond mastering basic skills. I should have also considered the following questions. How could my curriculum assist students to acknowledge the underlying importance of reading, writing, and speaking in English relative to their lived experiences? How will their second language assist them in other classes? More importantly, do my lessons provide ample opportunities for ELLs to truly deem applicable to their social and cultural contexts within and outside of the school community?

The purpose of conducting this qualitative research was to enhance my ELLs' English acquisition by utilizing their social and cultural identities and experiences. The central question (and sub-questions) for this phenomenological study are the following: In what specific and measurable ways can instruction that utilizes multimodal mediums (e.g., students utilize photography, artwork, and comic strips to convey understanding) for high school ELLs that have CELDT level 1 in an ELD class promote English vocabulary by connecting their social and cultural identities? In particular, what aspects of integrating comic strips into the instruction of figurative language (e.g., metaphor, simile, personification, and symbolism) do ELLs consider helpful or troublesome based on questionnaires and one-on-one interviews? How do ELLs view themselves adapting to life in the United States based on the analysis of their poem, artwork, and photography subsequent to lessons on simile, metaphor, personification, and symbolism.

This research helped me to determine specific and measurable ways that the use of multimodal mediums for ELLs considered to have a CELT level 1 could promote English vocabulary. The products of my students' multimodal poems demonstrated to me that multiple modes of conveying information to elicit students' understanding are an important integration to my instruction. Integrating the child-centered approach to teaching balanced the curriculum's overpowering focus on mastering basic reading, writing, and speaking skills. As a result of this research, I have learned some of my students' social outlook pertaining to the difficulties of field workers picking oranges. I have learned that some of my students do reflect on their inspiration and difficulties to bridge their cultural and social perspectives to that of their new homeland. I have learned some of my students' experiences of love expressed in their poetry. I have learned the pride my students have for their family member's occupation. Most importantly, I have learned that a context-centered approach to teaching alone is not sufficient to the experience and development of ELLs' secondary acquisition.

What Mr. Sanchez has described is the quintessence of Dewey's call for reflective practitioners (1933). Sanchez became motivated to change his standard, structured English instructional approach when he used the formative assessment of looking into his students' eyes and observed their blank stares. "The students simply demanded reasons for their learning." Being sensitive to the students, following Dewey, and being a thoughtful educator, Mr. Sanchez was able to conceive of a dynamic, culturally complex set of lessons. The example demonstrates the dual nature of action research: both the students and the teachers share in the process of learning.

Eliza Cardoza has been teaching English language learners within California's Central Valley for many years. As a critical qualitative researcher, Ms. Cardoza exemplifies the work of the research bricoleur (Kincheloe, 2010). According to Kincheloe, the research bricoleur seeks a new "vantage point" from which to challenge the dominant discourse.

The researchers are no longer merely obtaining information, but are entering a space of transformation where previously excluded perspectives (in this case the student's point of view) operate to change consciousness of both self and the world. Thus multicultural research in bricolage changes not only what one knows but also who one actually is. (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 42)

In Ms. Cardoza's work, the challenge is to ignite within her students a passion for learning despite the school's support of standards-based assessments and credit banking (Freire, 1970). As a feminist, Ms. Cardoza is also keenly aware of the essential role of feelings in the education of her students. "Feminist understandings are important to both men and women who are researchers, as they open doors to previously excluded knowledges" (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 31). Ms. Cardoza's research bricolage reflects the pedagogy of love (Freire, 1970).

As a social justice educator, I view my role to be a facilitator for my students. I want to validate that the feelings they may have from situations of discrimination or abuse *are* actually injustices in society, not just isolated feelings they're experiencing. I work in an agricultural town. This community's assets include a no-nonsense attitude where people take a direct approach about speaking their thoughts. The town rallies around community events and winning high school teams. Unfortunately, crime and gangs do play a part in the neighborhoods where most of my students reside. The town is quick to criticize, but this is mainly in the interests of wanting the best for their children and their futures.

Teachers share the feeling that their students all have great potential, and we are frustrated when we see students who do not see this same promise in themselves. Considering *potential*, I believe the ESL students I teach can be successful for several reasons. My students are immigrants, many of whom are non-citizens at this point. They came to the U.S. along with their parents' dreams. Usually children immigrate without having had a choice in the matter, and they hold either resentment or fear of new cultural experiences. Once they are given opportunities where they *can* be in control of something that affects their lives—their education—they often rise to the challenge. Challenges bring strength of character, and I always try to present challenges in a positive light. Many of my students also have to show determination—determination to find time to study while being responsible for younger siblings or determination to do well at school while working to add to their family's income. In this current school year, ninety-seven percent of my students are Hispanic, one is Punjabi, and another is Egyptian.

Through my studies of social justice and my experiences as an educator, my attention was especially drawn to the issue of high-stakes testing in my subject matter of English as a second language. Not only have I observed effects of these assessments on my students, but I also wondered about the effects of high-stakes testing on teachers. My researchable question is in what specific and measurable ways does high-stakes testing affect the teachers' role in secondary ESL classrooms? I conducted a phenomenological research study. Initially, I read over twenty professional journal articles regarding prior studies on high-stakes testing ramifications on minority populations, teacher workload and burnout factors, high schools that have produced successful high-stakes test results with ESL students, and comparisons of types of achievement tests. Secondary ESL teachers and teachers working mainly with English language learners—not to be confused as the same—were then sent an on-line survey. The survey included open-ended questions, ranking questions, and multiple-choice responses. Topics which the participants considered were the pressure felt for accountability of high-stakes test results, teaching style, curricular issues, changes perceived over time, and awareness of different aspects of high-stakes testing. After receiving the completed survey responses, I first organized the data into two categories, teachers who had had significant amount of ESL experience and teachers who had little ESL experience, but who taught a high percentage of English language learners. Next, I analyzed the participants' responses for those indicating a negative or a positive effect of the high-stakes testing climate. Finally, I reviewed all my research findings to make sure ESL teachers' roles were specifically addressed, along with a discussion of how secondary ESL teachers face greater injustices. The compiled results indicated several benefits that have developed *due to* the challenges and demands of getting improved scores on high-stakes tests, although there are equal or greater negative ramifications on both ESL students' and teachers' motivational levels, as well as a blow to the level of respect given to the professionalism of teachers by administrators and politicians.

Throughout my research study, I have learned that injustice is apparent in situations where any of us are involved; it is not an inequity of "those other people." Although injustice is systemic and institutionalized, I found evidence of how groups of people—parents and educators in my study—have proactively taken the incentive to create more just alternatives for ESL education. These alternative schools, programs, and means of assessment also meet the political demands for improved student test results even more successfully than the methods for "improvement" strongly recommended for use in the majority of schools, districts, and states. This evidence of successful collaboration of stakeholders in

students' education tells me not to lose my sense of optimism for my ESL students. I need to stay in the teaching profession because my students need an advocate who recognizes their daily growth and knows that they are valuable individuals for more reasons than merely the scores they produce on standardized tests.

Ms. Cardoza faces some daunting obstacles in her resistance to the school administration's almost exclusive attention to the state-mandated assessments. But her courage to resist is reinforced by the data she collects from her students. As Cardoza knows, "Once they (my students) are given opportunities where they *can* be in control of something that affects their lives—their education—they often rise to the challenge." Kincheloe (2010) would concur: "Indeed, bricoleurs refuse to be confined to one cultural way of seeing and making meaning" (p. 34). This is the true critical qualitative research methodology at work supporting a resistance to testing's domination of the instructional process.

Juan Gomez is a third-grade teacher who has a clear passion for critical qualitative research. His extensive travel and foreign teaching experiences have given him a global vision of possibility. This is a CQR ready for action. As John Willinsky (2001) observed, "In the study of education, the action in action research is located in and around the classroom where teachers teach students, or better yet they educate each other" (p. 329). Mr. Gomez clearly loves this process of reciprocal learning.

I am a teacher who has struggled to find his way since I first began six years ago in Quito, Ecuador. While employment in Ecuador did not prepare me for the rigorous commitment of teaching and being obligated to standards and assessments, it did teach me about being the outsider in a classroom. This position required a certain openness to learn about the students' culture, families, and way of life, while learning the most successful ways for them to grasp the English language. This experience translated quite well to my current situation as I ensure that my students are not left to feel excluded. My students feel comfortable in *our* classroom. They know that I respect them and will keep them safe while doing my best to teach them the California third-grade standards.

As a social justice educator, it is my responsibility to familiarize my students with the world around them. Though my classroom lacks diversity, by introducing different literature and expanding on lessons with various cultures, my students can learn about the various cultures in our world. Being in such a small community also allows the students to recognize that coexistence requires compassion for others. Students need to understand as they grow up and leave their community that they will experience events and people that do not think or act like them. They will need to adapt and remember what they have been taught in regards to acceptance and caring for others.

The community I teach has many assets to include close-knit families, ambition for their young students and up-to-date technology at the student's disposal; most important is the hard work demonstrated daily. Most of our parents and adults go to work before the sun rises and come home after the sun goes down, sacrificing comfort for the needs of their children. In appreciation, these students want to make their families proud, striving to do their best. In each of the four years I have been a part of this working community, the school pride increases. This year we had the most family involvement on campus and in our school functions. The community is working hard to establish connections with the school for student success.

The students that I teach will be successful! They have a great attitude towards education requiring encouragement and nurturing. Many of the students in my class had a taste of success in second grade and they liked it, they now crave it, striving to achieve better scores with each lesson or assignment with success in mind. Students will also succeed because of my commitment to them. I want the best for them and I try to provide them with lifelong lessons that challenge, encourage, and promote personal growth. My students will succeed because I will guide them toward successful behaviors. I will teach them that mistakes and stumbles are acceptable if we will learn from those mistakes. At the end of our school year we'll be able to reflect on the mistakes that we learned from.

This study helped to identify the best program for students to comprehend English while allowing them to feel comfortable in the classroom. The programs being studied were an immersion program and mainstream English Program using SDAIE strategies. The identified issues included the studies of

English Learners' successes and weaknesses in order to best help the students. Since my school is comprised of mostly English language learners, I studied different ideas on how to best support my English language learners and how to help them adjust better to a classroom with proficient English language learning. We looked at the *Mainstream English Program Using SDAIE* strategies as it compares to *Structured English Immersion Program*.

In my research, I was responsible for obtaining data, interviewing participants, discerning data on teacher's observations from videos taken, and conducting the observations in my classroom. The data was collected from student class work, homework, teacher's observations, my observations and assessments. By collecting these data, I was able to gain a more accurate view of what the students' needs were and where they could be the most successful. The videotaped lessons allowed me to observe the various teaching strategies of my colleagues as well as my own use of the strategies, the similarities and differences, providing insight regarding whether or not the data correlated with the lessons that were taught. Observing the teachers that use an English program that implements SDAIE strategies (which is the majority of my school) and comparing the data to the teachers that implement an immersion program provided me the data validity needed to give this project the integrity needed. The use of teacher and student surveys and interviews provided me with the evidence that was used to determine how teachers felt in the environment and how they felt students responded, but more importantly I will have an indication of how students think, what is comfortable, and what provides a sense of accomplishment or frustration in the two different techniques of teaching.

The results indicate a greater improvement for the students in an English immersion program. The students stated that they felt more comfortable learning English with students with similar challenges. They felt that they could take more risks and didn't have to worry about mistakes being made. The data shows the success of immersion programs at our site and at other similar sites. Based on this success, I have learned that students want to learn English, but more importantly, they are more concerned about the non-judgmental atmosphere that the other students and teacher can provide. The students want to feel like they won't be punished or mocked for incorrect answers. Going forward in my career, this project has showed me that the students crave acknowledgment and freedom to explore their thoughts and ideas; I have the responsibility to provide this atmosphere.

By providing a natural approach and maintaining a "low anxiety situation" (Krashen, 2003), Mr. Gomez has synthesized the social justice multicultural education notions of valuing the experiences of the second language learner. Using action research, Gomez gleans an assessment yielding tremendous accountability in support of his thesis, that the non-judgmental atmosphere of English immersion is an effective tool for second language learning.

Ms. Sharon Johnson is a second grade teacher, teaching in one of the most violent and economically challenged communities in California's East Bay. Because of the enormity of the community challenges, Ms. Johnson has chosen a participatory action research design to create a collaborative process among her classroom constituency (Hendricks, 2009). Her research included the use of Learning Centers based upon Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. This is an excellent example of participatory action research because it follows Hendricks' (2009) definition of being "emancipatory (the action researcher is able to explore practices within the limits of social structures), critical (the action researcher's goal is to challenge alienation, unproductive ways of working, and power struggles), and transformational (challenging both theory and practice)" (p. 10).

I chose to participate in the Kremen School of Human Development's Master of Arts in Teaching program because of its emphasis in multicultural and social justice education. The students at my school are approximately 70 percent African American, 25 percent Latino, and 5 percent Pacific Islander. Over 95 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, a common marker for poverty. The city was recently recognized as the 9th most dangerous city in the United States. Furthermore, my school is situated in the Iron Triangle area of the city, an area of higher violence and poverty.

I have always held the belief that it is a teacher's duty to create an environment that is a safe haven for all students and conducive to learning. My role as a teacher at Richville College Prep K-5 Charter School carries with it some additional expectations. When teaching from a multicultural and social justice perspective I need to allow students to discover their own heritage, create lessons that embed standards within the context of social justice, and educate my students about how to create change. My future as a teacher will be a constant evolution of my practice to meet the needs of whoever my students may be. I have been working on identifying problems in my classroom and posing questions that get me thinking about how to reach the goal of social change. I have found this method of education to be a powerful force in moving our educational system to a better place.

I am proud to work in the Richville College Prep K-5 Charter School community because I am motivated by the excitement of many parents. Although parent participation is still lower than the school would like, it is on the rise. The enthusiasm of the parents that do participate is infectious, and it is clear that they want something different than their public schools can offer. The City of Richville, though, labeled negatively at the present time, is a city of rich history for the State of California and the United States military. The Kaiser Shipyards were the site of immense warship production during World War II. The never-before-seen speed at which the ships were built is often hailed as the reason for the United States gaining the upper hand against the Japanese during the war. Furthermore, it was women who were building these ships. Richville College Prep's permanent school site will be the renovated historic building that once housed the first state-run preschool, created to care for the children of these women. I would like for my students to learn as much as possible about the rich history of their city and work to begin changes that will restore its former reputation.

I believe the students I teach can be successful because they are so inquisitive. They are constantly asking questions and have a desire to know everything. Much of this may be due to their age, and I want to cultivate this thirst. I fear that if I do not cultivate this thirst now, it will be lost as they grow. I believe that allowing a child to question, explore, and investigate while young will keep these doors open throughout life.

The cultures of the students I serve are a mixture of African American and Latino with some Pacific Islander. The majority of Latino students and all of the Pacific Islanders are also English language learners. This poses additional challenges in the classroom as we do not yet have a school-wide ELD program and all of the ELD requirements must be met by the classroom teacher. This has pushed me to work heavily on vocabulary with the use of visual aids for all students, and I have seen the benefits of this work among English-language learners and native English-speakers.

My researchable question is: in what specific and measurable ways do Learning Centers improve mathematic concept attainment among English language learners, students performing below proficiency, and students of a low socio-economic status?

After obtaining parents' written permission, I identified and sorted my participants. Some students fell into more than one group. The participants are 23 second-grade students attending Richville College Prep K-5 Charter School that have been receiving academic intervention. Of the 44 second graders enrolled in the school, 23 have been identified as needed academic intervention based on school-wide benchmark assessments. Due to one student moving to a different school, complete data exists for 22 of the 23 students.

The subgroups studied included English language learners (6 students), students of low socio-economic households as determined by qualification for free or reduced lunch (21 students), and students still performing below levels of proficiency by the date of the most recent benchmark assessment (9 students).

I focused on designing Learning Centers that appeal to Multiple Intelligences and content chosen based on areas of need. The three instruments for this investigation are (1) the Multiple Intelligence assessment obtained from an online source, (2) a pre-test obtained from the Assessment Guide of the school's mathematics program, and (3) an identical post-test to be administered at the end of the study period.

The procedure for the Multiple Intelligence assessment was to read each yes or no question as students circle their responses. The procedure for the pre- and post-tests was to read each question out loud while projecting a copy of the test on the StarBoard. These assessments were read out loud so that they accurately assessed what was intended and were not influenced by the reading abilities of the students. Students filled in the bubble for their answer choice on their copy of the test. A piece of scratch paper was also be provided.

Results of the Multiple Intelligences survey indicate no students identified with Natural Intelligence, however there was a heavier concentration of students that identified with Linguistic, Logical-Mathematical, Musical, and Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligences. Centers activities were designed to appeal to these four intelligences while also incorporating some activities that appeal to Spatial, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal Intelligences.

When interpreting the results of the pre- and post-test by standard, I calculated that there were seven standards in which less than 60% of students chose the correct answer. Of the seven standards, I chose to focus on the four that I felt were most representative of their areas of need based on what I observe in the classroom. One question on the test that measured proficiency in measurement was not an accurate measure of their concept attainment. The question was poorly designed and results were not utilized when choosing content.

After implementation of the Learning Centers, the post-test was administered. There was a measured increase in the concept attainment for each of the focus concepts except those relating to counting and manipulating money. In addition, the average score of each of the subgroups increased. The greatest increase in performance was among English-language learners followed by students performing below proficiency, then students of low-income households. These results may suggest that incorporating Learning Centers, when planned based on student need and type of intelligences of the students, can significantly increase student achievement.

Since a classroom is by no means a static environment and good teachers are ever adjusting to meet the needs of the students, there are a few confounds to this study. First, at the same time that the study was being implemented, there was also heavy instruction in math vocabulary during the regular math period. This may attribute to the significant gains made by the English language learner subgroup. Also, there were a few content standards assessed that demonstrated a drop in proficiency. This may be due to the heavy focus on other standards resulting in students being “out of practice.”

Overall, the results of the study to imply that Learning Centers can be beneficial to increasing the performance of students in a mathematics classroom. With proper planning and well-thought-out activity choices in addition to quality basic instruction, Learning Centers can be a beneficial teaching strategy. I will continue to use Learning Centers in my classroom in order to ensure that all students are receiving the support and style of instruction that they need to be successful.

Ms. Johnson’s participatory action research is critical in its relevance to her daily practice within one of America’s most challenging communities. Ms. Johnson needed to test a question specific to her unique situation, and her choice of building a community of learners within her second-grade classroom was both empowering and life-enhancing for her students (Mills, 2007). Rather than taking a standardized, cookbook approach to the problems of achievement, Ms. Johnson hit on the solution by carefully examining a unique and personally meaningful path using multiple intelligence theory. This study created an excitement for learning in her classroom.

Danvi Tu is a dedicated teacher/researcher. Her teaching follows Sumara and Carson’s (2001) conceptualization of action research as a lived practice. In their view, the teacher/researcher does more than simply apply research techniques within their classroom. “Rather, action research is a lived practice that requires that the researcher not only investigate the subject at hand but, as well, provide some account of the way in which the investigation both shapes and is shaped by the investigator” (Sumara & Carson, 2001, p. xiii). What Ms. Tu demonstrates to us is that these data are her life and her lived practice.

I am a teacher by definition, but a learner by choice. I am constantly observing, reflecting, and seeking to find opportunities to grow as a professional. From all of the different workshops and classes I attend, I take away so many fresh ideas. The tricky thing is being able to aggregate all the data and pulling out what I need to work with the students I have. Whenever I plan for a lesson, I am always thinking of my students first: What do they need to know? What will be interesting to them and make learning stick? How can they apply this to their lives?

As a social justice educator, this is my observation of my current role as a teacher: In teaching the primary grades, there has been little emphasis on writing besides what is expected of us from state

standards. For example, in third grade, students are taught to write a descriptive paragraph, yet they are expected to write an essay in four different genres at the end of fourth grade for the state writing exam. Eight months is simply not enough time for students to learn all the skills necessary to tackle such a daunting task, especially considering 70% of my students are English language learners. Students need a lot more exposure to quality writing and time to practice writing in the primary grades. Many students come into my third-grade classroom unable to write a complete sentence. Some still struggle with spelling three-letter words. They are unmotivated to write and find story prompts boring and uninspiring. The challenge is finding ways to motivate these students to write profusely with creativity and accuracy. How can I structure my writing time to be meaningful? I need to be able to teach my students not only the mechanics of writing, but also the craft of it. How can I plan for the year ahead, so that by the time my students are in fourth grade, they are not completely overwhelmed by the state exam?

The community I work in has many assets. It is diverse and brings in different perspectives, ideas, and wonderful food. All parents want their children to be successful, and are willing to help out if given the opportunity. Families are working class, but they can contribute in other ways through chaperoning on field trips, volunteering in the classroom, or donating supplies. They can come into the classroom and share different cultural traditions and stories with the students.

I believe the students I teach can be successful because they are eager to learn and are pleased when they see how much they have accomplished. Some students are still struggling to sound out letters while others are on to chapter books. This has forced me to differentiate my teaching. In reading, we split up into groups of reading ability. For math, I also differentiate with the level of difficulty I give to students. By the end of the year, students will have made progress, whether it's a year's worth of growth or are working beyond grade level.

The language and culture of the students I serve is a mix of Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and English. Many students have parents who came from another country, including Vietnam, Mexico, Philippines, and Cambodia. I enjoy teaching such a diverse group of students because we learn so much from each other. I enjoy hearing their stories and they enjoy hearing mine. It has also broadened my horizons by searching for books and other literature that will speak to my students, written by people who look like them.

My researchable question was: In what specific and measurable ways does the use of writer's workshop motivate English language learners to write creatively, use detail, and apply correct grammar skills to their writing? Sub-questions included: How can writer's workshop increase motivation for elementary school writers? Is it possible to integrate teaching the craft of writing with the mechanics of writing? What components should be added to aid English language learners? Can writer's workshop be combined with other writing programs such as Step Up to Writing? Will the workshop format translate to higher writing scores?

My qualitative research design is an inquiry on the use of writer's workshop inside a classroom and the effects it has on students' motivation to write. I gathered interviews, observations, and documents from my students. Specifically, I conducted an unstructured, open-ended interview with each of my students on their attitudes towards writing and took interview notes. I also gave them a survey on writing attitudes before the inquiry and at the end of the inquiry. I gathered field notes by conducting ongoing observations of my students while they were writing. Finally, I examined writing produced from my students throughout the inquiry to see their progress. To grade student writing, I used a rubric that scored students on having a story structure, details, conventions, and creativity.

I have learned that all students possess wonderful stories in their hearts. They are all capable of writing these stories if given the opportunity. They can be engaged to write even if they hated writing before. Implementing writer's workshop in my classroom has led to students writing for longer periods of time, writing longer pieces, and being reflective of their behavior and writing. I also learned that I was not able to bring all of my students' writing up to proficiency, but many factors came into play, including English learners. However, I still celebrate the small successes that all of my students were able to achieve. For example, I had one student who would only write one sentence at the beginning of the year. I knew he was capable of so much more, but refused to pick up his pencil to write. By the end of the inquiry, he had written an entire story with a beginning, middle, and end. He had many spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, but the success is in having him motivated enough to get his story out.

Overall, all of my students became better writers, both in their craft of writing and in mechanics. They were also more motivated to write and viewed writing in a positive light. Going forward in my career, I will continue to implement and refine writer's workshop in my classroom. I will integrate writ-

ing across all subject areas, especially in reading and science. Writer's workshop will be a constant part of my schedule, no matter what grade I teach, because all students can benefit from it.

Ms. Tu's work "shows the connections between researcher and subject of inquiry" (Sumara & Carson, 2001, p. xvi). In her own words, she iterates, "my research met Creswell's (2009) criteria because the inquiry took place in a natural setting, in the classroom where students normally learn, the researcher (myself) was a key instrument in collecting data, and multiple sources of data were used." In this case, the data are a living part of Ms. Tu's practice as a teacher. She stands up for her students and actively includes them in the writing process: an engagement that contagiously connects them to their learning and their teacher.

The Pedagogy of the Fields: The Labor and Educational Histories of Migrant Farmworking Parents

My passion to become an educator is born from my experiences as the child of migrant farmworkers. I decided to conduct a study that examined how the life experiences of Mexican-origin, farmworking parents shape how they choose to engage in the schooling process of their children. I wanted to understand how farmworking parents, many who have little prior formal education, think about and support their child's education. The literature within the field of education over the past 20 years has demonstrated a *link* between parents being involved in the education of their children, and their children doing better in school, especially in the lower grades (Chavkin, 1989; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1997). While a growing and significant amount research has been conducted on understanding the educational involvement of Latino families, especially in urban areas (Auerbach, 2001; Ceja, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 2001; Lawson, 2003; Lopez, 2001; Valdes, 1996), less research has focused on Mexican-origin migrant farmworkers families, a subgroup primarily located in rural areas. How do farmworking parents who often work so many hours manage to have a presence in the education of their children (Perez-Carreón, et al. (2005)? Answering this question and others led me to the community of *Trabaja*² to conduct my research study and investigate an understudied population within the field of education.

The city of *Trabaja* is a small, rural farmworking community located in Central California. The population of the city is almost entirely Latino, mostly of Mexican origin, with a high percentage of residents living in poverty. Furthermore, over half of the population of *Trabaja* is foreign born, with most in the community speaking a language other than English at home. The characteristics of this largely (im)migrant farmworking population is reflected in their low levels of educational attainment, as some estimates point to 20%³ having completed high school—a total of one-fourth of the national average. The geographical isolation of *Trabaja* makes it increasingly difficult for its residents to have access to employment, education, health, and other public social resources that other communities often take for granted.

Trabaja has both an elementary and middle school, but does not yet have a high school. The students from *Trabaja* are bused to a nearby and more racially mixed community, which houses the high school for the district. The most recent demographics available for both of the schools at *Trabaja* show that the student populations mirror those of the community and are almost entirely Latino with a high percentage of Spanish-speaking English Learners. Both of *Trabaja*'s schools have high rates of students who qualify for a free/reduced lunch, reflecting the high poverty levels of the community and the poverty wages that their farmworking parents earn. In terms of performance on statewide standardized tests, both of the schools have consistently received an API ranking of "1" for the last 10 years, the lowest score possible. At least by standardized measures utilized by the state of California, the two schools in the community are some of the lowest-performing schools in the state. In the following section, I

detail a promising pedagogical approach towards creating the type of learning conditions that can potentially lead to stronger home, school, and community collaboration.

As a social justice educator, the work of Paulo Freire (2000) has been essential in helping me understand how education can either be used as a tool for oppression or for liberation. While Freire's work has commonly been utilized to examine the educational and political situation of urban schooling populations, hardly ever has his work been used in the context in which it originated—in rural communities and schools (McLaren & Giroux, 1990). Two of Paulo Freire's most useful pedagogical concepts are the notions of "banking" education and "problem-posing" education. For Freire, a banking education consists of teachers "filling" or creating deposits in the "blank slated minds" of their students. A banking education presumes that students from these communities and their culture have nothing of value to offer. Their prior "failure" to become "educated" is not a result of schools ill-serving these students and their families, but rather, their backwardness and inability to become civilized. Freire (2000) adds:

The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken." (p. 74)

Specific ways in which Freire's above explanation has been manifested have been through cultural deficit theories (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997; Valencia & Black, 2002), where the solution to "properly" educating these communities has been through the eradication of their culture, often seen as anti-intellectual. In the community of *Trabajo*, an educator espousing a "banking ideology" would be someone more interested in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation[s] which oppress them" (p. 74). This ideology seeks to deny and silence the voices of these families and their struggles.

The solution to the banking system of education for Freire rests in a "dialogic education" (multi-directional) where the student and teacher both recognize that they are jointly responsible for educating one another. This pedagogical standpoint requires that the teacher be humble enough to have faith in his or her students' ability and capacity to become "critical co-investigators in dialogue with their teacher" (p. 81). According to Freire (2000),

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p. 83)

For youth and families residing in communities like *Trabajo*, an emancipatory, problem-posing education would allow their voices to be heard and require us to listen closely to understand what the causes of their continued poverty and social isolation are. An educator committed to a problem-posing education and deeply engaged in dialogue with the community would soon come to realize that the structure of farmwork is not just difficult and under-appreciated labor, but an intersection of multiple forms of oppression structured into their daily existence. For example, one might begin by posing questions like the following: Why do many (im)migrant farmworkers continue to live at or below poverty levels when their labor propels the state of California to a \$36.2 billion agricultural output? Why then would a geographical region that produces so much wealth be identified in a recent study of human development indicators examining educational, health, and economic wellness as one of worst regions in the nation—worse off than even Appalachia? These types of questions would shift the discourse of parent involvement from "why didn't Juanito's parents come to the parent meeting?" to "Why do Juanito's parents work so much *yet* earn so little?" Problem posing in this way interrogates the political economy structure that allows these injustices to be created and perpetuated in the first place. These questions lead to complex answers which would challenge the dominant narrative about educational attainment, achievement, and inequality, held by many practicing educators. Unfortunately, in the current climate

of NCLB and high-stakes testing, where students are often reduced to just a test score, these types of questions become harder and harder to ask—especially when the incentives structures are not aligned with this type of pedagogy and when most teachers are not prepared to teach or work closely with families in this critical manner.

This research study seeks to contribute to the professional educational literature that examines teaching, learning, and family-school relations and the social context of diverse communities of color. The researchable question informing this study is 1) How do the educational, migratory, and labor histories of Mexican (im)migrant farmworking families mediate their educational engagement? This study explores how the life histories of (im)migrant Mexican-origin farmworking families inform their engagement in their children's educational process. To answer this question, I utilized a qualitative methodological approach and case study design (Yin, 2003). This design allowed me to investigate the complex and rich life histories of farmworker parents in the context in which they occur. In exploring their life narratives, I examined the ways they support their children's educational endeavors and sought to understand what messages they are sending to their children about education. For me, parent engagement refers to more than school- or home-based forms of "involvement"; it also includes parents' "orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do or choose not to do" (Calabrese-Barton et al., 2004, p. 3).

For the study, I began by conducting life history interviews with ten families, both mother and father, and specifically focused on their educational, labor, and migration histories. The principal selection criteria of families for this study was that they live in the community of *Trabajo*, work as farmworkers, and have at least one child attending the elementary or middle school. I would visit them at their homes and conduct interviews with them in Spanish, usually in the evening after a long day of work. The purpose of the oral history interviews was to gain an understanding of the socio-political factors that led these parents to migrate to Central California. What were the different life processes that brought them to the community of *Trabajo*? In other words, how have the families' perspectives on education been shaped by what they have experienced in their own educational process, their work experiences, moving from place to place, and now living in Central California?

The findings for this study revealed three significant themes. The first finding demonstrates that the parents' own prior educational experiences profoundly shaped their aspirations for their own children's educational trajectories. For example, all the parents were forced by finances to abandon their own educational pursuits in Mexico. Their own desires and goals for schooling were crushed, as their families' limited financial resources made it impossible for the majority to continue their schooling past the ninth grade. One parent indicated that her inability to continue her education in Mexico drove her to attend night school in the United States to show her daughters that if she was capable of obtaining her GED in the face of multiple obstacles, her daughters had no excuse not to succeed and reach their goals. She stated that conversations with her children are now about *what* university they will be attending, not *if* they will be attending.

The second significant finding pertains to the concept of *educación* and being of service to others. United Farmworkers of America (UFW) leader Cesar Chavez once stated, "The end of all education should surely be service to others." In that same spirit, several parents in the study shared that their own parents had instilled in them the value of service to others being a component of a good education, or *buena educación*. Part of having a *buena educación* goes beyond simply doing well academically in school; it also includes being "serviceable to others." This ethic was echoed by parents as they gave several examples of specific ways they ensured that they were responsive to the needs of others. A parent shared how her grandparents—by modeling multiple ways in which they helped and supported their neighbors—taught her that one should always think about others before thinking of one's self. She also gave the example of her father taking clothing and materials to less fortunate people in the U.S./Mexico border region when he would return to Mexico to visit his family. In a similar fashion, this

parent would regularly volunteer at the local elementary school where both of her children attended to help some of the young students who needed additional academic support. The examples provided by these parents show that having a high-quality education should include a communal dimension that accounts for what one does for others as well.

The third and final set of findings pertains to the experiences that adolescents had when their parents took them to work alongside them in the agricultural fields of Central California. This “Pedagogy of the Fields” resulted in the children having direct experience with the type of labor exploitation their parents experience on a daily basis. One parent shared how he would take his son to work with him during his high school summer breaks so that he could have money to purchase his school clothing. In exposing his son to such a “life depriving” line of work, he hoped to teach him that a formal education was an escape from the poverty they lived in. Another parent indicated that she took her teenage daughter to work one day at an onion-packing house after the daughter began failing in her academics. Her goal was to show her daughter that if she did not want to do well in school, working in that type of job would require maximum sacrifice and effort. After her experience leaving their home at 4 a.m. that morning and returning at 10 p.m. that night, the daughter shortly thereafter began showing academic improvement in her classes. Finally, another parent indicated how she frequently tells her three young children who are not yet of working age how it would be heartbreaking to see them in the same “life depriving work” that she is forced to endure. These parents skillfully used their children’s labor experiences working alongside them as a “generative theme” to discuss with them systems of oppression that control their lives and are “limiting-situations” (Freire, 2000). The new consciousness about labor exploitation that emerged from the children in the above examples allowed them to recognize and put into practice educational success as a “limit-act” that could allow them to escape a similar fate as their parents.

The findings from this study point to the importance of listening to and learning from the life stories of the parents whose children we teach. Engaging in these types of pedagogical exercises may not only serve as an important way of getting to know the families that work and live in the communities we teach, but also in them getting to know us more profoundly. If Mexican-origin, farmworking families possess the desire for their children to attain a higher education and support their efforts in doing so, how might we best build upon those assets? Also, how can structures be created in their communities that put into use the desire of many of these parents to be of service to others? While many of them are not materially rich, they possess a desire to see improvements in their community and are willing to participate to create greater opportunities for their children. Finally, how can educators create learning opportunities within the classroom which draw from the pedagogies of the fields? What can be learned about the structure of agricultural work directly from parents who are experts in what it means to be at the frontline of labor exploitation?

Do we have the will and the courage to include the voices of these parents in classroom spaces that are traditionally structured to deny their existence and contributions to the larger society? To answer these questions requires a problem-posing pedagogy in which teachers are willing to concede power to community members and acknowledge their expertise within the local, social, historical, and political context of the community.

Conclusions

Broadly conceived, education can be viewed as either domesticating or liberating (Freire, 1970; Macedo, 1994; Ladwig, 1999; Whitty, 1985). A domesticating education prepares students to acquiesce reflexively to the dictates of authority figures, uncritically consume information, and feel no compulsion to question or act. This might not be problematic if the world were harmonious and just. Because it is not, we have found post-colonial, critical, anti-racist, and feminist theories to provide essential insights into ways of achieving an education that frees students (and practicing teachers) from blind obedience, ignorant bliss, and complacent inaction. Post-colonial theorists, for example, draw atten-

tion to how dominant groups use research and knowledge to control those depersonalized as “others” (Smith, 1999). More precisely, defining “what counts as valued knowledge, skills, and traditions,” as well as determining “who gets to ask,” “what,” and “to whom” afford great power to structure the world in a way that maintains power and privilege. Consequently, first-generation college students tend to go to schools that are less well-funded than many private and research-focused universities, and are structured around a “knowledge transmission” factory model rather than a “knowledge production” model (Aronowitz, 2000). This distinction means that students from historically underserved communities, such as our students and those in other CSUs (e.g., Sleeter, 2005) are likely to attend a university that is structured to enable them to consume knowledge produced by those from more affluent institutions.

Since the online MAT’s inception in 2005, we have worked to disrupt the educational status quo or institutionalized domesticating system outlined above. By intentionally orienting this graduate program around knowledge production wherein practicing teachers work with knowledge frameworks and critically oriented, theoretical, and methodological traditions arising within historically oppressed communities, they create knowledge that is of, by, for, and about their community and its own empowerment. More specifically, we embraced the concept of transformative, emancipatory knowledge that “is based on different epistemological assumptions about the nature of knowledge, about the influence of human interests and values on knowledge construction, and about the purpose of knowledge” (Banks, 2006, p. 9). Transformative, emancipatory knowledge offers “an alternative narration of the arrangement of social space” (Gallegos, 1998, p. 236), and provides conceptual tools to address conditions that have historically been oppressed or excluded.

One such tool, our concept of social justice collaboration, involves our graduate students/practicing teachers using knowledge to enhance the collective condition. We use the term social justice from a Freirian perspective that focuses on transforming the school structures that perpetuate the unequal distribution of social power. Freire (1970) contends that changing the status quo involves naming injustices that oppress and then taking action with other people through dialogue and work. Naming injustice, particularly that in schooling, is critical, since so much of it is taken for granted or viewed as “common sense” (Kumashiro, 2004).

As alluded to earlier, teaching is inherently political and ethical because teachers have direct influence on the lives of others. As a social institution, education affords or denies access to resources that directly impact one’s life changes. Because we see teaching as a process of engagement with knowledge that arises in part from lived experience, we value engaged pedagogy that facilitates honest, critical dialogues that allow consideration of significant issues among people who share experiences of oppression, as well as with those who do not. Understanding teaching as both a political and ethical act substantiates the need to prepare teachers who are able to act as committed transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1983)—who have the confidence to use their knowledge, skills, and position to work toward positive change in classrooms, schools, and communities. The transformative intellectual must grasp the precondition of a collective process of liberation by participating in a community that values the need to change the social conditions of oppression inside and outside of school (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Huiskamp, 2002). This is why many of our core program learning outcomes, described later and illustrated in the student mini-action research studies, reflect the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to work as a change agent.

As traditionally structured, higher education does not support the vision sketched above. Structural conditions inside and outside post-secondary institutions privilege the academic success of students who are white, native English-speaking, and from affluent backgrounds. Beginning in 2005, we implemented a post-credential, Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program to support practicing teachers with complex lives and varying degrees of preparedness for academic rigor. Consequently, we have organized this chapter around three broad themes: a pluralistic academic community; student learn-

ing anchored in MSJE and educative action research; and support for student learning in an online environment.

Notes

1. While the critical pedagogies developed by educational scholars differ significantly, they do hold a number of common assumptions (Gitlin & Price, 1992; Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996). The central purpose of these alternative pedagogies is to produce a political form of knowledge—a knowledge that makes problematic the relations among schools, the larger society, and the issues of power, domination, and liberation. Critical pedagogies also try to enable those traditionally silenced to play an active role in the learning process, consequently empowering the student in ways that reflect egalitarian and democratic ideals. Finally, critical pedagogies attempt to further consciousness and critical thinking where students delve into their own histories and meaning systems to learn about the structural and ideological forces that influence and restrict their lives (see, e.g., Apple, 1986; Apple & Beane, 2007; Camangian, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Giroux, 1983; Giroux & McClaren, 1986; McLaren, 1997).
2. The name of the community has been changed to protect the participants. Trabajo means “to labor” in Spanish.
3. This statistic refers to the population over the age of 25, a marker utilized by the U.S. Census.

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