

Developing Socio-Political Active Teachers: A Model for Teacher Professional Development

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Abstract

Presently in the United States there are 4.4 million English language learners (ELLs) in public schools, with California public schools being home to more than 40% of these students (Rumberger & Gandara, 2004). Research indicates that it takes an individual up to seven years to fully develop a second language (Collier, 1987; Krashen, 1994). However, in many schools across the country students are being required to speak only English and be mainstreamed into English classrooms “as quickly as possible” (Kerper Mora, 2000). Such programs occur not based on best pedagogy, but are due in part to policies that claim “English for the Children” and “No Child Left Behind” As a result of such policies many classroom teachers feel they have little no voice or power when policy mandates impact the curriculum and teaching processes in their classrooms (Darder, 2002).

To address this feeling of powerlessness requires the development of spaces where teachers have the opportunity to discuss policy and begin to understand the politics and policies which directly impact their everyday lives as teachers. One space for this to occur is in a graduate level education class titled- Language Policies and Practices. This article outlines the processes, materials and outcomes of the 16-week course and the impact of this learning on classroom practice and their engagement with fellow teachers and administrators at school sites. The outcome and implications of this experience can be applied to both teacher education and school professional development seminars. The outcomes and implications articulated in this article are based on journal responses and research projects that reflect student perceptions, attitudes and actions as a result of their learning processes.

Introduction

Today’s schools mirror the increasing diversity found across the United States (U.S.). In addition to racial and cultural diversity, our schools also experience linguistic diversity. According to the U.S. Census, roughly 20% of the population speaks a language other than English in the home (U.S. Census Bureau 2006¹). There are 4.4 million English language learners in public school in the United States. California serves more than 40% of these students. In California, English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing student group, with

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 2006 American Community Survey. <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html> (accessed May 23, 2008).

nearly 1.6 million ELL students in 2006-2007 (California Department of Education, 2007 Educational Demographics Office²).

These statistics demonstrate a population shift within our classrooms. Nonetheless, the American teaching force remains mono-cultural and monolingual, with the majority of teachers being white and speaking only English (California Department of Education 2007; Ladson-Billings 1999). In addition, many teachers come from or live in economic conditions very different from their students (Ladson-Billings 1999). Thus, while research demonstrates that teacher knowledge must include a deep understanding of students' backgrounds (Darling-Hammond 1997³; Gándara & Rumberger 2006), in reality, there is an ethnic, linguistic, and class disconnect between teachers and the students they teach. This disconnect occurs at a fundamental, pedagogical level, in which teachers often lack the distinct pedagogical knowledge necessary in teaching ELLs (August & Hakuta 1997; Bryk & Schneider 2004; Gándara & Rumberger 2006). However, it also occurs on a socio-political level in which the majority of teachers are not prepared for the political battlefield upon which they often find themselves, as educators and advocates for their diverse student population. The education of linguistically and culturally diverse students both internationally and in the United States occurs within a larger political and social context; one that includes issues of immigration, distribution of wealth and power, and the empowerment of students (Varghese & Stritikus 2005: 73).

Recently, the socio-political context of language education in The United States has become more charged. On January 8, 2002, Title VII, also known as the Bilingual Education Act, was eliminated as part of a larger school reform known as the No

² California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Office. State of California Education Profile. <http://www.eddata.k12.ca.us/Navigation/fsTwoPanel.asp?bottom=%2Fprofile%2Easp%3Flevel%3D04%26reportNumber%3D16>. (accessed May 24, 2008).

³ Report titled: *Doing what matters most : investing in quality teaching* developed with the United States National Commission on Teaching & America's Future.

Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) and replaced by the English Language Acquisition Act. The long-standing tension between multiculturalists and multilingualists bilingual policies has once again moved toward policies favoring assimilationists and monolingualist version of language policies (Varghese & Stritikus 2005: 73).

While many teacher education and graduate level programs are currently seeking to better prepare their teachers with the methods and skills needed to effectively teach diverse students, very few programs tackle the broader socio-political and policy issues that in fact impact the teaching learning processes, specifically educational policy, in which the education of ELLs is situated. According to Bartolomé,

The task of successfully preparing teachers in the United States to effectively work with an ever-increasing culturally and linguistically diverse student body represents a pressing challenge for teacher educators. Unfortunately, much of this practice of equipping prospective teachers for working with learners from different backgrounds revolves around exposing these future educators to what are perceived as the best practical strategies to ensure the academic and linguistic development of their students. Gaining access to and actively creating methods and materials for the classroom is certainly an important step towards effective teaching. However, this practical focus far too often occurs without examining teachers' own assumptions, values, and beliefs and how this ideological posture informs, often unconsciously, their perceptions and actions when working with linguistic-minority and other politically, socially, and economically subordinated students (Bartolomé 2004: 97).

In a research study conducted by Varghese and Tom Stritikus (2005) it was found that teacher development for teachers of ELLs lacked the inclusion or focus on language policy. Based on responses from bilingual teachers from two regions of the United States, the authors noted that there is a need for policy to be included as part of the content on teaching English language learners. However, they concluded that the inclusion of policy as part of curriculum in teacher education should not be a didactic process. Rather, they noted the importance of teachers learning to know, and suggest that teachers should review, discuss and reflect on different types of language policies that exist. This critique and review should be engaged so as the teachers

have the opportunity to relate to their own pedagogical and professional knowledge as teachers, the local contexts in which they teach, and their personal beliefs (84).

The present article provides an example of this constructivist approach, utilizing literature and readings on language policy and classroom practices as the core content of the course. The course that is the focus of this article, Language Policy and Practices, responds to the challenge to include, as part of teacher education, the examination of social and political assumptions and current realities that inform the teaching and learning processes. This article will first outline the context of the course in the larger Master of Arts program by providing a brief overview of the MA program, including its philosophy and goals. This is followed by a description of the specific course objectives and instructional processes, materials and outcomes of the 16-week course, and the impact of this learning not only on participant's classroom practices, but their engagement with fellow teachers and administrators at their school sites. Data includes student evaluations, journal responses and research projects that reflect student perceptions, attitudes and actions as a result of their learning.

Context

At the beginning I'll be honest I did not pay a lot of attention to the (course) reader but once I started to [do] research ...I realized how useful this online reader really is. It was very interesting to find out detailed information on No Child Left Behind, Prop 227, and prop 187, among others. [...] Unfortunately the public does not have access to it [course reading and materials], fortunately for us masters students we do, and [as a result we] may be able to still change a few minds or at least provide some information to those who do not know the rules of this game as we [now] do.

This quote is the voice of one teacher, but reflects the sentiments of many who have walked into this graduate course. Over the past five years over 100, K-12 teachers have enrolled as graduate students in this course. The students enrolled range from monolingual English, to bilingual Spanish, American Sign Language (ASL), Taiwanese, Chinese, Korean, among other languages.

Forum on Public Policy

They teach in settings from mainstream English, to English as a second language (ESL) or English language development (ELD) pullout, or Structured English Immersion to special education and many teach in bilingual programs including two-way immersion and early and late exit transitional. What 90% of these graduate students, have in common in the beginning, is the little interest or desire to discuss politics and policies, not because they are single-minded, but because they have developed a negative attitude and feeling that there is little they can do to change policy or the system.

The course, Language Policy and Practices, is derived from the first author's experiences working with teachers in a graduate program focused on issues of equity and social justice in education. The course is specifically concerned with how educational language policies impact and influence curriculum and teaching practices in K-12 classrooms settings. The overall goal of the MA program is to prepare educators "who are reflective and transformational practitioners in addressing the needs of ethnically and linguistically diverse learners through collaboration with schools, families and community" (Policy Studies Department Mission 2008⁴). Housed within one of the California State University Schools in southern California, the Department of Policy Studies in Language and Cross-Cultural Education (PLC) offers bilingual teacher credential programs, as well as graduate level programs, for educators seeking a Master's of Arts or Doctoral degree. In its efforts to prepare transformative educators, critical literacy is a theme that permeates all program levels of the PLC Department.

At the MA level, critical literacy is explored through several courses as students actively engage in processes such as reviewing current literature and research in literacy and language

⁴ From the Policy Studies Department Website: <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/PLC/index.htm>.

Forum on Public Policy

policy as it relates to school programming and educational standards; analyzing the socio-linguistic environment from world, national and local language communities; and describing, analyzing and recommending appropriate language policy for local language groups. It is through these processes that the PLC Department anticipates students will develop a deeper understanding of the socio-linguistic and socio-political struggles faced by linguistic minority students. This goal fits within the larger objective, being that students develop the analytical skills needed to recognize how ideologies, politics, standards and assessment impact education for language and literacy development, both on a global and local level. We believe that in order to engage in transformation, one must first develop the skills needed to recognize, analyze, and problematize the conflux of these areas and the ways in which they can impact linguistic minority students and perpetuate the status quo. Coursework for the MA program has been designed to focus on six areas of study that build the candidate's knowledge base on critical literacy. These areas are: Foundations of Critical Literacy, Socio-cultural Context, Language and Cognition, Teachers as Mediator of Culture, Curricula Change; Evaluation and Transformation; and Transformation for Democratic Schooling.

Two courses that have been particularly powerful in engaging students in the transformative process are, “PLC 600: Foundations of Democratic Schooling” and “PLC 601: Language Policy and Practices.” The focus of this paper is on PLC 601, however because PLC 600 plays an instrumental role in preparing students for the deeply reflective and analytical work they engage in through PLC 601 we provide a brief description of PLC 600 before delving into PLC 601.

PLC 600: Foundations of Democratic Schooling provides an academic space for MA students, many of whom are teachers and administrators, to “examine the ideologies that

Forum on Public Policy

inform unequal power relations and social stratification” (Cadiero-Kaplan 2007⁵). The course utilizes a self-reflective, problem-based approach, with the first two-thirds focusing on constructing (recognizing) and de-constructing (analyzing and critiquing) schooling conditions that are discriminatory (and at times, oppressive) in nature. In the last third of the course, students critically reinvent potentially effective methods, strategies, programs, curricula, or restructuring efforts in response to the problems and issues posed earlier in the course. Through course readings, dialogue, class assignments, and honest reflections, students⁶ are supported to recognize, engage, and begin to critique (so as to transform) any existing undemocratic educational social practices and institutional structures that produce and sustain inequalities and oppressive social identities and relations in schools. One of the course’s primary objectives is for students to develop the ability to clearly articulate, verbally and in writing, their ideological orientation to education and its implications for democratic education. Ideology forms the basis of how we understand our world, which further informs our teaching practices. Ideology, as defined by McLaren (1998) is “the production and representation of ideas, values, and beliefs” (180). PLC 600 takes the position that ideology informs not only the knowledge of the individual, but also the knowledge they present and represent both personally and professionally. As such, this course lays the necessary foundation for students to engage at deeper levels of reflection and critique of both the educational system and their role in it.

The purpose of PLC 601: Language Policy and Practices is to provide students with the background and knowledge base of current literature and research in literacy and language policy

⁵ As stated in the Fall, 2007 PLC 600 Course Syllabus

⁶ Students is used throughout the article and refers to the K-12 teachers who participated in this course of study.

as it relates to school programming and educational standards. The broader goal is to guide students' in developing the skills and ability to describe the socio-linguistic environment from world, national and local language communities connected with schools so that ultimately students will be able to analyze and recommend appropriate language policy for local language groups. This pedagogical approach of the course,

Focuses the knowledge teachers need to teach well and is generated when teachers treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation at the same time that they treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999: 2).

More specifically, PLC 601 utilizes problem-posing processes including reading reflections and research activities that examine global, national and local contexts. These educational processes provide the space for students to understand the formal and informal policies underlying education for linguistically diverse students both within and outside their own classroom contexts.

It is with this tone and spirit that PLC 601 thus becomes a very special space in which educators are not only given the physical space, but also the academic license to explore, analyze, and problematize the educational system via a series of processes, that prior to enrolling in PLC 601, many had never had such an opportunity in which to engage. In the sections that follow, we delve more deeply into the construct and processes of PLC 601, providing more detailed descriptions of the course objectives, the course structure, curriculum and related activities that are key to engaging the political impact on education. The course further serves to prepare educators to define their role as transformative educators who are able to articulate and understand the role policy and research play in their daily practice.

Entering the Course

Forum on Public Policy

Graduate students⁷ enter the PLC 601 classroom every year with a superficial awareness and a vague understanding of the policies and politics that inform and often times hinder their teaching of English language learners. Most often teachers are aware via directives for program or curricula change via their school or district leaders. This knowledge usually does not go beyond what they read in their union newsletters or the local newspapers. In addition, many of these teachers, who have been teaching from one to eight years, have much resistance to learning about “politics” and “policies” due to feelings of powerlessness. The key objectives that are addressed in this course are for students to:

- use problem posing processes including reading reflections to understand the formal and informal policies underlying education for linguistically diverse students at world, national and local levels.
- understand and analyze how ideologies, politics, standards and assessment impact education for language and literacy development.
- become conversant in bilingual education models and their history, in order to be able to analyze the politics of literacy and language acquisition in education for diverse learners.
- understand and apply a global perspective on multi-lingualism and the education and politics surrounding the use of the English language.

In order to meet these objectives the students participate in a variety of activities and assignments that are critically reflective. These core topics and learning processes include: Journaling with intent, a process where students reflect and respond to key readings and discussions; and language policy review and critique. Journaling with intent occurs throughout the 16-week course. Course requirements also include three research-praxis projects that examine education policy impacting English language learners from global, national (U.S.) and local (California) perspectives. These separate research projects involve the process of praxis. Praxis is defined as dialogue, action and reflection (Freire, 1983). For the purposes of examining

⁷ Graduate students enrolled are all K-12 classroom teachers.

educational policies and practice in the course, the concepts informing praxis are brought together in the following manner: *Dialogue*: It is only in praxis with others that we can engage in dialogue, speaking by naming the world and processes in which we engage, then take *action* in the form of questioning and examining via research issues, politics, and concerns, and during and after the process of data collection, or action, take up *reflection*, examining outcomes or what was learned both individually and in dialogue with others. Thus the cycle continues. It is towards the full description of these activities and their outcomes that we will now turn.

Core Topics, Learning Processes & Outcomes

Journaling with Intent

One core requirement of the course is for the students to maintain a journal during the semester where they write responses to class readings and discussion. The readings students are asked to critically engage and respond to include the texts: *The Socio-Politics of English Language Teaching* (Hall & Eggington 2000), *Political Agendas for Education: From the Right to the Green Party* (Spring 2005), and *The Literacy Curriculum & Bilingual Education: A Critical Examination* (Cadiero-Kaplan 2004), along with on-line readings that include policy documents and articles⁸. In order to ensure that the students consider the reading from both their perspective and the context within which the documents were written, they are encouraged to utilize the following prompts as a guide for their written responses:

- React to the class discussions/readings
- Discuss relevance/application to your own experiences both personally & professionally
- Relate the readings and/or discussions to your experiences as a teacher, student, etc.

⁸ PLC 601 Online Reader: http://edweb.sdsu.edu/PLC/faculty/cadiero_kaplan_plc601read5.htm

Forum on Public Policy

- Argue for or against something you read and/or discussed with classmates, peers, and family
 - Explore pedagogical implications of what's been read or discussed
 - Question the application, uses, and/or the significance of what has been shared or learned
- These written responses are shared orally in small groups via dialogue in class as well. The following excerpts illustrate how students both examine the perspective of the author or context of a reading within the context of their own experiences or realities.

After a discussion and reading dealing with the issue of equal opportunity and access one teacher wrote:

For me, going to college was almost a foregone possibility (if not probability); I did not make many concerted efforts to prepare myself for college and I ended up enrolling at a community college with no real direction or plans. My students do not have such luxuries.

The deck is immensely stacked against them: they are still learning English, they are recently arrived from other countries, they are mostly from working-class families and do not have relatives who have attended college, etc. Knowing all this, I am driven to push my students to question such an educational system that often does not serve their needs, but at the same time I have to prepare them to survive in the very system that restricts their opportunities while presuming to be a fair and just system.

Another student wrote, in response to the same article:

The article mentions how some people have given up on the idea of living in a society that is more desegregated in racial and economic terms. This is exactly why it is so important to become more involved and aware of the policies that are being implemented in our society. I believe that segregation in schools, in the work place, and in our society in general, roots from higher power.

After reading a passage about the Proposition 227 campaign in California that articulated both sides of the issue regarding the law, one teacher reflected,

I realized how little I knew about the whole campaign process. I was shocked to discover how unfair it was. There were so many complex factors that supported arguments for and against prop 227. This reading made me realize that I need to be aware of the many layers involved with such propositions, and that I should be careful when the time comes to vote on them.

Another student stated,

Forum on Public Policy

Politics can be so deceiving to the public. I've learned that one cannot "judge a book by its cover." There have been so many policies that have been passed because they sound "nice" or they imply a "progressive" future for our children. What is most discerning is that the layperson will fall for this trap. Ways to improve this system, to improve our current way of thinking is by working in collaboration with each other; that way correct information is distributed throughout the community.

What these statements illustrate is how once students begin to engage with readings that not only explain policy, but the ideologies and processes that inform them, they can then examine their own position and realities through the lens of critical analysis. This process, which occurred not only in writing but in classroom dialogues, helped move teachers towards what Bartolomé refers to as ideological clarity:

Ideological clarity requires that a teacher's individual explanations be compared and contrasted with those propagated by the dominant society. It is to be hoped that the juxtaposing of ideologies forces teachers to better understand if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and support unfair and inequitable conditions (2000: 168).

By engaging in a critical examination of the politics and ideologies that inform literacy practices for English language learners, teachers can then begin to understand that they either "maintain the status quo, or they can work to transform the sociocultural" definitions of what it means to be a literate person and a teacher of literacy (Bartolomé, 2000: 168).

Research-Praxis Projects

The course is designed to engage language policy from global, national and local perspectives. In order to achieve this, students are required to complete three research-praxis activities designed to assist them in understanding varying perspectives and then juxtaposing those perspectives against their own. Each project has a different design, however the goal is the same, to bring students through the process of praxis that includes, dialogue, action, and reflection. Each project informs the next as students begin from the macro, or global perspective on political issues, concerns and realities and apply the knowledge in the end to their micro, or

local context. The following sections provide a brief overview of each assignment, the resources utilized to inform it, and students' responses, results or actions that illustrate the final outcomes or reflections on each of the three activities.

Global Contexts: Language Ideology & Policy Position Paper

The first five weeks of the course is concerned with defining literacy and language as these terms relate to language teaching and education. During these initial weeks students also engage in the examination of the global context for English language education and development. The goal is to provide students with the information and space to first clarify understandings around the concepts of literacy and language ideology in the context of teaching⁹, this sets the stage for the 'practice' and how they understand definitions of literacy, language and ideology. Throughout these first few weeks students also read discuss and research global perspectives on issues such as bilingualism, mono-lingualism, language education, and linguistic human rights. Resources utilized as readings to examine these issues include the required text readings, web-based articles and policy sites, included are sties such as, Canada Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, and The World Congress on Language Policies.

Students are asked to write a position paper that examines the global perspective of language policy from both ideological and policy perspectives. The assignment directions state,

Identify your position/ideology, the linguistic outcomes, educational processes and cultural support or incorporation of various language groups based on the ideology. Be sure to articulate questions or issues this review raises? Identify key areas of connection to national, state, and/or local school contexts.

⁹ The text used for this examination is *The Literacy Curriculum & Bilingual Education: A Critical Examination* (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004).

Forum on Public Policy

The International Labor Organization (I.L.O.) has established general guidelines regarding language rights globally¹⁰. These guidelines are supposed to be in use, as necessary, for implementing language policy. The intent for the project is for students to review the document resolution from the I.L.O. specifically in relation to article 23, which states,

1. Children belonging to the populations concerned shall be taught to read and write in their mother tongue, or where this is not practicable, in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong.
2. Provision shall be made for a progressive transition from the mother tongue or the vernacular language to the national language or to one of the official languages of the country.
3. Appropriate measures shall, as far as possible, be taken to preserve the mother tongue of the vernacular language¹¹

Students are given the choice to work individually or in pairs to explore the implications of the statements above. They are asked to state their position, ideologically and practically, concerning at least one of the three statements that are part of this declaration. In addition, students are encouraged to work together as they plan their responses, even if they are not working with a partner. In order to complete the project they really have to examine closely the terms and implications of the policy to determine implications and outcomes based on one policy statement. This project places them in the roles of “policy maker” and the “decision maker” of how to interpret the individual statements and how they would be applied in a particular community or place. Below is an excerpt from one student paper where she links research to

¹⁰ C107 Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention established in 1957 as part of the ILO Convention concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries.

¹¹ From The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation 1957: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C107> accessed 05/30/08.

support her interpretation of the ILO Declaration; the student begins with this quote by James Crawford¹²,

According to a broad consensus of researchers, there is no basis for the concern that native language instruction might impede the acquisition of English. To the contrary there is considerable evidence that skills and knowledge learned in the first language “transfer” readily to the second” (Crawford, 1997: 1).

Below is the paragraph that follows where the student utilized this quote to further analyze the text of the ILO document and applies it to support her understanding of the global situation she is addressing

In other words, James Crawford concludes that recognizing mother languages as an essential and valuable resource in the learning process is beneficial. The International Labour Organization incorporated a similar view when discussing The Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries. In particular, Article 23 supports a pluralistic, diverse and enriched society where the prevailing dominant ideology does not ignore cultural diversity, yet promotes and cherishes it. When creating a disparate and multi-cultural environment, linguistic factors, which include the maintenance and preservation of native languages as well as the acquisition of the majority language are of utmost importance. In the declaration of Article 23, the International Labour Organization provides the framework for a policy, which strives for bilingualism and biliteracy, and therefore, encourages a pluralistic society.

Another pair of students state in their introduction,

Is learning English a barrier or a means of equality to minorities? What about the mother tongue? What happened to the high status of learning and maintaining the home language together with perhaps English? Is it the intention for English dominant countries to lower the status on other languages? If they are, they are not respecting linguistic human rights and are in fact participating in language genocide, the killing of languages. We argue that learning English is important to most people around the world, but should not be posed as a barrier. A second language should be an ADDITIVE language which would be more successful, normal and not subtractive to their mother tongue. “Both globally and in Europe, there is an increasing awareness about the necessity of high levels of multilingual

¹² From: *Best Evidence: Research Foundations of the Bilingual Education Act*.

Forum on Public Policy

competence in the future if one wants to have a high-level job...” (Skutnabb-Kangas in Hall & Eggington 2000: 39) Multilingualism is highly valued in these countries as it should be globally.

The excerpts above illustrate how students can formulate their position regarding a policy statement by drawing from specific research and using the readings and applying research to help them to make sense of language issues at a global level, which later assists them in framing their understanding of local language policy issues. This in turn helps them to make informed decisions that are based on more than personal opinion and experience. So, in this way, teachers are broadening their understanding of the key issues that implicate teacher practice in politics, and demonstrating how they might make more informed decisions as teachers and educational leaders.

Other students approach the project by analyzing the language of the ILO statement both from an historical context (comparing past to present) and for linguistic content. The following text from one student paper highlights this form of analysis.

Well intended, I believe the efforts of The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention was a humanitarian effort, occurring in a different time era (1950's) to establish fair opportunity for the integration of Indigenous and Tribal peoples into the national community. This adoption of general international standards was intended to facilitate action to assure the protection of the populations concerned. Fifty years later, in year 2007, careful analysis of the language embedded in article 23 shows wording which can be interpreted in many ways, dependent on the situation and the interpreter. It would seem that behind the “good intentions” of the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention lays a hidden agenda, which today in year 2007, aims towards assimilation and conformity (.

The formulations of language used in the educational article 23 include a range of what Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) refers to as “opt-outs.” This “opt out” language can, “permit a reluctant state to meet the requirements in a minimalist way” (Skutnabb-Kangas in Hall & Eggington 2000: 28). Utilization of this type of wording legitimizes both action and inaction. Included in article 23 is a broad range of interpretive and value laden language such as: “the population concerned,” “where this is not practicable,” “language commonly used,” “to

Forum on Public Policy

which they belong,” “progressive transition,” “appropriate measures,” “as far as possible.”

Under a close examination of the words intended to articulate language rights in article 23, one can discover a foundation of “ideological hegemony.” Tollefson (2000) states, “In critical social theory, this acceptance of the “reality” of English is a manifestation of the “hegemony” of English- that is, the uncritical perception that it has achieved supreme global status” (in Hall & Eggington 2000: 16).

All of the examples in this section illustrate the thoughtful and critical analysis that students utilize to not only understand and interpret policy, but to apply the readings and theories of what they have learned to a larger global political context. It is a struggle oftentimes for them to begin this project, and students state that is very difficult to develop their position initially. However after completing the project the majority of students state that it was one of the most “powerful learning experiences” they have had, in that they were challenged to not just “report back” what they had read or learned, but that by having to apply their position to the current global contexts of society and policy, they understand better how policy can be informed, misinformed and often times misunderstood. After the completion of this project students then turn their attention to national policy considerations. The foremost being the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, which is the focus of the second research-praxis project.

National Contexts: Deliberation & Application for Informing Public Policy

The goal of the NCLB Deliberation project is to help students understand how varying political ideologies inform this federal policy and how varying ideological perspectives lend themselves to certain goals and outcomes. To complete this project students have to first read the text by Joel Spring titled, *Political Agendas for Education: From the Right to the Green Party* then formulate responses for online and in-class dialogues. The online dialogue consists of two discussion topics for which every student is required to respond. The topics for the online

Forum on Public Policy

discussion are the Compassionate Conservative and Neo-Conservative Perspectives of NCLB, as outlined in the text by Joel Spring. The task of the online discussion is not to "critique" or summarize these two perspectives, but rather to understand the goals, benefits and costs or trade-offs of each perspective. Students are asked to respond to the following questions for each perspective:

- What is the goal of NCLB according to this perspective?
- What "problem" in education does this view propose to solve?
- What value or benefit does this perspective have?
- What are the trade-offs or consequences?

Table 1: NCLB Perspectives from On-Line Discussion, highlights a few student responses for the two perspectives and each question posed. These responses mirror the format that students were required to take. The activity proved very informative in that students had to work to articulate their understanding of the perspective that may have differed from their own, and articulate not only how education was understood, but also the value a different perspective holds. Finally, they responded to state the various benefits, consequences and tradeoffs of the two perspectives.

Table 1: NCLB Perspectives from On-Line Discussion

| Prompt/Perspective | Compassionate Conservative | Neoconservative |
|--|---|--|
| <p>What is the goal of NCLB according to this perspective?</p> <p>What "problem" in education does this view propose to solve?</p> | <p>The goal of this perspective is character development through self-help aided by exposure to religion and character values. The problem this view proposes to solve is negative character traits such as poverty, crime, and eroded family and character values. The problems according to this view are due to government welfare, secular humanism and liberal education. The problem in education is attributed to teaching the evolutionary theory, sex education, bilingual education, multiculturalism, and banning school prayer.</p> | <p>The goal of NCLB according to the perspective of the Neo-conservative is to create a free market in education. The belief is that this competitive approach, which allows consumer choice, would force school to improve in order to stay keep enrollment. This education marketplace is regulated by state and national standards. High stakes testing tracks the success of schools keeps the consumers informed and allows parents school choice.</p> |
| | <p>The goal of NCLB according to the Compassionate Conservative perspective is Americanization. This perspective believes that a transformation of character and acquisition of "positive values" will make positive contributions to the "American society." This belief identifies a failure to educate personal character and values as the culprit for poverty, crime and other problems facing our democratic society. With a self-help approach, compassionate conservatives stress that exposure to religious values, and the teaching of morality and Western cultural values will help us overcome these plagues on our society.</p> | <p>Similar to their ideal of an unregulated free market naturally producing the best products via competition, they believe that education should be a "marketplace of schools" (p.28) According to this theory, natural competition between schools would force them to improve due to the potential loss of customers (in this case, students). School choice, in the form of charters and vouchers, is an important aspect to the Neo-Conservative view. This freedom will either assist the economically disadvantaged to attend private schools, or further clear the path for "intelligent" students to pursue better opportunities to advance their educational and societal climb.</p> |
| <p>What value or</p> | <p>The positive outcome for students,</p> | <p>The benefit that this perspective</p> |

Forum on Public Policy

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| <p>benefit does this perspective have?</p> | <p>teachers, and society is believed to be a greater moral context. In turn, the enhanced quality of schools will directly impact increased test scores, which will improve character values and abolish poverty. The benefits based on this perspective are touted as a common morality and collective American culture with citizens showing their joint allegiance to God in English.</p> | <p>has is that it is motivating schools to improve to be able to compete with other schools. I agree that schools choice will create more efficient ways of implementing government-established national academic goals and standards. Parents having the choice of what school they want there children to attend is also a great idea because they are not limited if a bad school is their home school.</p> |
| | <p>The belief is that by implementing character education this will contribute to a well functioning society. From the perspective of the compassionate conservative, these values taught should be traditionally moral. The instillation of this Christian morality and common culture also advocates a common official language. Compassionate conservatives are pro family and believe that allowing school choice shifts powers onto the parents and local control is obtained. The institutions of religion and politics play side by side.</p> | <p>Some of the positive outcomes, as mentioned before, are school accountability and parental choice. One benefit to the communities, etc., is the creation of a more efficient way of establishing goals and standards established by the government. This provides the mirage of a "level playing field," however those of us implementing these goals and standards see through the illusion. As my colleague stated in her post, "<i>... if all schools are going to be compared, then they must receive the same resources to work with.</i>"</p> |
| <p>What are the trade-offs or consequences?</p> | <p>As discussed by my colleagues, this approach would solve the "problem" of poverty caused by a lack of personal values and character. I agree with some of the postings in the sense that this view is overly simplistic, and place the blame solely on individuals and not on the societal structure.</p> | <p>There are two very important points that concern me about this philosophy, in addition to the ones exposed by my colleagues. One is the emphasis of gifted education and gifted education programs. Although these programs are important and should be supported, the neo-conservatism philosophy tends to place "mediocre" students aside, and pool its resources on the "best and brightest". So what happened to "No Child Left Behind"? Who are these children that are left behind? Probably the ones that need that extra push to succeed: language</p> |

Forum on Public Policy

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| | | and culture minorities. The other concern has to do with the teaching of "traditional" American history. What is "traditional"? We go back to indoctrination vs. critical fostering critical thinking skills. |
| | Ideally, the trade off would be poverty and crime. But in reality the trade off would be multiculturalism, bilingualism, and an individual's self-identity. Instead, Compassionate Conservatism would replace it with what they believe a "Good Individual" must know, value, and possess. A person's lived experience, and history would be wiped away and devalued. Our languages would be lost, values ignored, and our customs would evaporate; it would be genocide of the self. | The trade-offs or a consequence of a Neo-Conservative perspective is Americanization. National and state standards do not address the cultural identities, which occupy the classroom. The process of educating through a neoconservative perspective builds up common culture and breakdowns multiculturalism. Misappropriation of money is another consequence of this thought. As a result, schools and therefore many children are being left behind. |

A table similar to the one above was created in class as students broke into groups to then discuss the final two perspectives presented by Spring (2005), The New Democratic and The Grassroots Progressive (Green Party). Groups typed up the in class discussion similar to the table above and then the following week all four perspectives were viewed on one table. The students then discussed where they felt their attitudes fell on this table. It was interesting as many discussed that in looking at NCLB in this manner that they saw it was difficult now to hold just one point of view. That is, since each point of view held merits and drawbacks it was not possible to hold to just one position. One of the consensus items that came out of the discussion was that maybe it would be helpful if policy makers actually presented their positions to teacher and educators prior to writing final policy. In addition, all agreed that they could see why one policy can have

Forum on Public Policy

many forms of interpretation and implementation. These readings and discussion play a key part in informing how students then decide to take up their final project in this sequence.

Local Contexts: California Impact of NCLB & Proposition 227 School-Based / Community Inquiry Projects

For their final project students develop a language policy research paper based upon a case study of how international, federal and/ or local language policy affects a particular classroom, school and/ or district. This goal of this research is to describe how a local or federal language policy (e.g., Prop 227) is being implemented or not in a particular classroom, school and/ or district. This paper should offer real-life instances (examples of practices or activities) of how federal and state legislation influence the design and implementation of programs for English language learners based on data collection activities that can include: first-hand interviews of school-based specialists, observations of classrooms, the school setting or both, and analysis of relevant documents found within the school or district as policy directives of mandates.

Whereas the first two projects focus on developing a global and national framework surrounding the sociopolitical contexts in teaching linguistic minority students, this research turns to the local context. The project is specifically student-centered, in that it is site based at the students' individual school or district sites and includes key stakeholders who either implement policy or are impacted by it, or in some instances both. Students are also required to use at least two different research tools such as surveys, interview protocols, observation forms or focus group questions. The outcomes or recommendations that result from this research should then be directed towards the local context from where they drew the data.

Forum on Public Policy

Most students choose to review the language policy in place at their schools sites. In doing so, they examine if other teachers or staff are aware of the policy and if they understand how the policy is enacted in practice. Approximately 40% of the class participants share their data and project with their school or district leaders in hopes that the information will have an impact on local policy and procedures. Others use the data to better inform their own work with English language learners at their school site. Project titles include:

- *Investigating Policy and Practice in one Elementary School*
- *Educational Placement of Newcomers: A case Study of a School and its Placement of Newcomers*
- *Pursuing Praxis for English Language Development Practice: Measuring ELD Policy at Our School Site*

These titles contain words that are common to much of the research completed by students over the years demonstrating the emphasis on investigating how policy is linked to practice at their local school sites. Research projects typically examine the perspective of teachers, administrators and staff and how the process is effective or not. For example, one student developed the following:

To guide my understanding of the district's policy, I have two research questions:

1. What is the district policy for ELL instruction?
2. How does our school implement the district's policy?

As the (charter school) expands, the alternative bilingual and structured English immersion programs are disappearing. As a matter of fact, next year there is scheduled to be one more two-way immersion program kindergarten and no alternative kindergarten.

These research questions are typical examples of the types inquiries made by students in this course. Often times the outcomes are very informative not just for the students, but also for those with whom they work, including fellow teachers, principals, and district administrators

Forum on Public Policy

When looking at issues of student placement, another common topic students are concerned with how English language learners come to be placed in particular classrooms or programs, and are further interested in how such placements are determined and the appropriateness of such placements. One student documents, via his research, the future of the newcomer program at his school-site that has an ELL enrollment of 45%. Via his investigation he found that there were inconsistent patterns and no clear guidelines on how these students were placed, and no clear direction on how best to meet the needs of these students. In his conclusion he states,

In the meanwhile, what is (school name) going to do with newcomers? And when the structured English immersion program finally disappears, will the (school name) take newcomers in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade? Regardless, more research still needs to be done in the field of newcomers and the appropriate program placement for them.

This example highlights what many students find when they complete their projects; that they need to learn more and go further with their questions and research. Hence, the praxis portion, many students, approximately 40% take the questions raised from the research in this course into their final thesis projects.

Other students, when examining the connection between policy and practice are often times surprised to see results that disconfirm their initial preconceptions, which were often limitedly based on personal opinion For example,

Based on our research we found that the teachers are not well informed about the implementation of the school sites cohesive ELD instruction program. The majority had little knowledge about ELD standards and instruction, and many did not know how to assess growth in English and others lacked the knowledge of how to interpret CELDT¹³ scores. It has been confirmed that there is a missing link. We do not want to place blame on the

¹³ California English Language Development Test

Forum on Public Policy

teachers or administration. However, it can be inferred that there has not been urgency towards enhancing or prioritizing improvement within the ELD program (at this school site).

Following this conclusion the student's listed recommendations for the school site, including the need for further research. In all cases students find the need for further research, which is common to most graduate level course projects, however they also see more clearly how their everyday work in programming and practice for ELLs is a part of policy and politics. They end the course with a greater ability to identify how certain decisions are made or not made, and most importantly can begin to identify those spaces where change can be made. As Linda Darling-Hammond (2002) states,

Learning to teach for social justice is a lifelong undertaking. It involves coming to understand oneself in relation to others; examining how society constricts privilege and inequality and how this affects one's own opportunities as well as those of different people; exploring experiences of others and appreciating how those inform their worldviews, perspectives, and opportunities; and evaluating how schools and classrooms operate and be structured to value diverse human experiences and to enable the learning of all students (201).

Implications

While students enter the course knowing there are policies and politics that impact education, they leave with not only a greater understanding of the larger contexts and processes in which decisions are made, but also with more confidence in articulating the needs of their students and programs. Many students note at the end of the course that while they now have greater clarity and understanding, they are also uncertain about how to take what they have learned back to their school administration, colleagues and communities. As mentioned, many students do continue to develop their research projects further at their schools sites, while others leave not feeling there is sufficient support present to raise such critical questions. That is, they believe if they dig too deep or are too critical they will be seen as causing problems and in some

respects challenging the administration. Such feelings of reluctance or fear are important to consider, since the classroom dialogues, readings, activities and research processes are engaged in a supportive environment with teachers who are willing to examine their own practices, share their stories, listen and question, in a space free of fear. Thus, students end with both a sense of hope and fear, we discuss this via the work of Paulo Freire, who his writings notes that fear is necessary in order to move individuals towards courageous acts¹⁴. Darder (2002) in discussing Freire's concept of fear notes that "our fear is a signal that we are engaged in critical opposition to the status quo and in transformative work toward the manifestation of our revolutionary dreams" (37). That is facing our fears is a necessary part of the work when we begin to unveil inequities and have knowledge of how to move towards more appropriate and equitable education models. While discussing these critical concepts of fear and revolutionary dreams may not result in these teachers changing the conditions at their schools, it does give them a context in which to name their experience and a space where they can draw courage and hope. In this manner then,

One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles maybe. After all, without hope there is little we can do (Freire, 1995: 9).

It is in this spirit that we end our classes each semester. The challenge we, as teacher educators, are left with is this: How can we begin to engage similar processes of professional development with principals and other school leaders? That is, how do we design and engage professional development with school leaders, who have the influence and power? How do we take the

¹⁴ *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000).

Forum on Public Policy

processes learned here to leaders and guide them to further understand such policies and processes as they relate specifically to English language learners and their roles as educational leaders? It is our contention that teachers prepared with processes such as those who pass through our classroom doors, have the possibility to improve conditions and programs for English learners to the extent to which they have supportive school environments with administrators who are aware of the policies, politics and practices that impact the daily lives of children and teachers in schools. It is our hope that the work here will begin this dialogue.

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