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PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS LEARNING TO ENGAGE RELUCTANT WRITERS: THE POWER OF EXPERIENTIAL CRITICAL LITERACY PEDAGOGIES

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Abstract. The purpose of this author's own classroom inquiry was to document the process of prospective teachers' learning to engage reluctant writers by participating in a *living language workshop*. This was the primary scenario in which they experienced firsthand the pedagogy they were learning about. The sources of data were students' course work, portfolio evaluations, course evaluations, and the instructor's reflective journal and notes. Most pre-service teachers embraced these critical literacy pedagogies, but there were also resisters. Course participants experienced firsthand the effectiveness of these pedagogical strategies with students at their practicum schools.

Keywords: Teacher education, critical pedagogy of language, critical literacy, writing with purpose, living language workshop, experiential pedagogy

Introduction

At last, critical educators have been able to 'connect the dots' to reveal who is behind the disastrous educational policies and the growth of the educational-industrial complex (standardized tests, textbooks, teaching materials, commercialization of schools, tutoring, teacher training, online courses, alternative certification programs, school closings, for-profit charter schools, and so on). The issues surrounding such policy change have now been documented by both researchers and practitioners (Schneider, 2014, October 26; Schneider, 2014; Ravitch, 2014, January 28; Ravitch, 2014). Importantly, we now have a better historical perspective of when this comprehensive and systematic attack on public education started, and recognize that it is mostly based on fabricated myths and crises (Berliner, 2014).

As a teacher educator and researcher of my own teaching of critical literacy, I felt a responsibility to dig into what I could not explain as accidentally correlated events. For instance, the demands and implications of policies, starting with the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and its sequels, which have intensified high stakes standardized testing, the privatization of school services, and the discrediting and dismantling of public education, teachers, and community schools. It is clear by these actions that we are witnessing the implementation of the neoconservative / neoliberal market-driven agenda, which holds that public education (and, indeed, all public services) will improve if privatized (Anyon, 2005; Apple, 2006; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Demarrais, 2006; Emery and Ohanian, 2004; Hursh, 2008; Kohn, 2004, Kumashiro, 2008).

Literature Review

The latest education policy Every Student Succeeds Act (US Department of Education, 2015), in the words of President Obama (President Obama, 2015), asserts that ESSA is meant to fix NCLB concerning its “too much testing”; “cookie cutter results”, “one size fits all” approach to educational problems. Although Schneider (2016) points to ESSA’s elimination of the Common Core Standards testing component, Stotsky (2016) indicates that Lamar Alexander, the leading sponsor of the bill, assures educators that ESSA continues measures of academic achievement, disaggregates data, and cedes to each state’s schools, teachers, and parents the decisions concerning scores and their improvement. This confirms the continuation of standardized testing and the requirement by the federal government to test 95% of the students in order to receive Title I funding.

By studying these educational policies, prospective teachers can learn about the conditions under which they are going to work, which can be an opportunity to develop a critical view of those policies. Concerning literacy, I have learned from experience that it’s necessary to provide scenarios for prospective teachers to facilitate their understanding of the meaning of “critical” in ‘critical literacy’. As Edelsky and Cherland (2007) illustrate, the ‘popularity effect’ of critical literacy has led many good teachers to claim they are “doing” critical literacy, even though they are not examining systems of oppression with their students (e. g. dominance, privilege injustice, inequity, segregation), and taking action upon those issues at school or local levels. As critical educators, our work includes digging into the origins, history, and workings of the regressive forces behind policies, practices and campaigns that de-professionalize teachers, bash teachers’ unions and public schools, corporatize schools, and consequently harm children, youth and the future of this nation.

Under the corporate takeover of schools and educational policies, many problems have been created. Hursh (2008) documents those ‘reforms’ that have caused the real crisis of the education system in the United States and worldwide; but nothing of this appears in the corporate media, even though the evidence is abundant. Part of the conservative/neoliberal agenda (Demarrais, 2006) is precisely to have a well-organized

media system that amplifies and repeats their messages, no matter the facts and research evidence. Who are to blame for the decline of education but teachers, children and families who are not doing what they are supposed to do?

Reluctant writers are easily created in this manufactured crisis, which has caused the real crisis of the education system. The latest literacy policies, such as Reading First Initiative (No Child Left Behind) and Common Core (Race to the Top), are regimes of top-down standards and standardized testing, which control to a great extent what to teach and how to teach. The new 'bottom line' is raising achievement scores, not the relevance of schooling to students' lives and interests, nor the content and the pedagogy for teaching literacy. In elementary school the practice of writing is often an ancillary activity, coming after reading time; it is mainly assigned but not taught; and when it does occur, writing is almost always solely for writing's sake. Consequently, writing becomes an unpleasant experience, with no purpose or meaning. We should not be surprised that students, as would many other intelligent people, shrink from writing as a defense mechanism. Knowing the most realistic explanation of the 'why' of reluctant writers, we can address the problem with a higher probability of success.

Uprooting and Countering the Real Causes of Reluctant Writers with Critical Literacy Pedagogies. Several large-scale studies have shown the ineffectiveness of the *Reading First Initiative* (NCLB special component) for teaching literacy in elementary schools (NAEP, 2009; National Center for Education Evaluation, 2008). Obama's Race to the Top (RTTT), with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) continues the same trend: top-down standards and standardized testing, which drives everything in schools, squeezes teacher autonomy and dismantles democracy in the classroom. Concerning literacy, the CCSS at least recognize writing as a subject matter that needs to be taught. However, this reform clearly does not have the interests of children at heart. On the contrary, it is "NCLB on steroids", as Krashen (2010) puts it; it is a rainmaker of federal money to make even more money, rather than a redeemer (Pennington *et al*, 2012). The CCSS, Schneider (2014) explains, from her own experience as a classroom teacher, are actually national standards, which the federal government cannot impose directly on states but somehow forces the states to accept, along with the tandem standardized tests, in order to receive federal funds: "It was requiring the states to agree with the CCSS in order to escape the pain of NCLB for the fire of RTTT." (p.165).

In her keynote speech to the 2014 Modern Language Association meeting, Diane Ravitch (2014) connects the dots about what we need to know about the Common Core Standards: who developed them, who supports them, whose interests are served, why the rush to their adoption, and who are sidelined as the CCSS are pushed on the states in exchange for federal money. The conditions attached to this federal largesse are: raise students' test scores; evaluate teachers depending on those scores; increase privately managed charter

schools; and reconstitute or “turn around” schools whose students are not achieving the expected test scores. These Draconian measures may include firing the school personnel and putting the school under private management, or closing it. These conditions are the materialization of the neoliberal/neoconservative agenda to dismantle public education and turn it into a profitable business for special interest groups. Ravitch also notes that among the supporters of this agenda are Arnie Duncan (secretary of education in the Obama administration), Bill Gates, Joe Klein, Michelle Rhee, Exxon Mobile, and the Chamber of Commerce, to mention a few. Given that literacy is one of the two major components of the CCSS, the teaching is completely conditioned to these standards and their accompanying standardized tests.

Poor, and mostly minority, students are ‘tracked’ at lower levels, which harms them not only academically but psychologically; and it is a commonplace that the poor and minority schooling experience is that of unchallenging curricula, prescriptive programs, less experienced and qualified teachers, more irrational practices, and more pressure to raise scores in standardized testing (Gandara & Rumberger, 2009; Garcia, 2000; Oakes, 1985; Valenzuela, 2005). Hence, these tracked (so declared or not) students have no chance to develop sophistication and confidence in their academic writing (Breeze, 2008). A common practice in teaching writing at schools is to emphasize grammatical correctness at the expense of purpose, meaning, and creativity (Valdes, 2001). The unequal and inequitable education that students from poor and minority backgrounds face throughout the school system leads one to conclude that the education system and its failing literacy policies itself produces the reluctant writers we find in schools and colleges. An alternative theory to explain this chronic injustice is advanced by Ladson-Billings (Ladson-Billings, 2006) as the theory of “education debt”. For her, the accumulation of deficits along the whole US schooling process for non-white students explains far more accurately the so-called ‘achievement gap’.

To make a difference with students who already struggle with writing, we need to implement critical literacy pedagogies that: a) integrate social justice issues as the substance of reading, writing and speaking — the basic components of the language arts curriculum; b) place students’ lives at the center of the curriculum; c) use the newly acquired knowledge about policies and skills (e.g. writing letters) for social justice activism; and d) build socially responsive curricula from the bottom up. The notion that literacy is the “reading of the word and the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987) is profound and comprehensive, yet it clearly helps us understand what critical literacy is about. If we learn to read and write by reading and writing our worlds, literacy becomes an instrument of social action and empowerment (Shor, 1999).

Embracing critical literacy implies that we are always asking hard questions, which children also should ask, about what they read, hear or witness: Is this fair? Is this right? Does this

hurt anyone? Who benefits and who suffers? Whose voices are suppressed? (Sweeney, 1999). Critical literacy pedagogies should provide students, including children, with opportunities to question (Freire & Faundez, 1989) and understand the world in the light of social justice ideals.

How can prospective teachers be engaged in learning critical literacy pedagogies? Following Dewey's (1938/1963) notion of 'experiential education' and the Bakhtin Circle's (Bakhtin, 1986; Voloshinov, 1973) idea of 'living language', I have put together a *living language workshop* that serves as the scenario for these teachers to experience the pedagogy they are learning about firsthand. It thus becomes a sort of *experiential pedagogy*. For Bakhtin (1986) living language is the most appropriate subject matter of language studies, and refers to the language in actual use, the utterance or discourse that happens in socially organized human activities. Language is therefore the link of all human activity and the primary data of human and social sciences. The stress on living language is in contrast to the structuralist view of the study of language, which Bakhtin refers to as a self-contained system of grammar rules, phonemes and lexical content which is semantically closed and consequently not alterable by language users. He referred to it as dead language. By 'living language workshop' I mean the segment of the class period when pre-service teachers engage in writing, after I demonstrate for them the strategies to get students to write authentic texts (connected with their life experiences, life projects, goals and aspirations).

Methodology

Purpose of Study. The author, a teacher educator and researcher of her own classroom of language arts pedagogy, examines and documents the successes and challenges concerning: 1) teaching critical literacy pedagogies through a *living language workshop*; 2) devising learning scenarios for prospective teachers to experience, themselves, the critical literacy pedagogies, thus facilitating their application in their own classrooms; 3) responding to the demands of schools and the literacy mandates of the state by boosting prospective teachers' creativity and understanding in order to change meaningless and purposeless mandated literacy practices into living, engaging, empowering, anti-oppressive ways of teaching and learning.

Studying my Own Teaching. The self-study of one's own teaching and classroom practice is a research paradigm in its own right (Pine, 2009; Samaras, 2002; Cochran-Smith & Little, 1994; Elliot, 1991). Pine (2009) synthesizes the fundamental practices of teacher action research such as intentional and systematic mindful reflection, focused observation, documentation, collegial dialogue, journaling and writing. Studying our own practice makes teacher action research a distinctive paradigm constituting an "epistemology of practice", as Schön (1983) calls the performance of a reflective practitioner. The ultimate goals of this inquiry include: 1) transformation in the understanding of our practice; 2) transformation of our practice by using the new understanding; and 3) transformation of the conditions in which our practice takes place (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Participants and Setting. This paper is a synthesis of patterns of achievements and challenges, and the emergence of the author's ongoing classroom research--Language Arts Pedagogy--during a 10-year period, in a middle-size state university in the southwest US. Participants are prospective teachers in their senior year prior to their student teaching semester. Too many of my undergraduates, and even my graduate students, have an academic history of being struggling writers, especially those coming from poor and/or minority backgrounds, for many of whom English is their second language. They have experienced firsthand a system of education that is in debt to them. This is why in my course I also include the development of participants' writing skills while learning how to teach their own students how to write with meaning and purpose.

The courses of the elementary teacher education program at the senior level are organized in two blocks, A and B. Students take the courses of their block together. When prospective teachers enter block B, they have spent a semester together as block A. This allows them to develop a unique group dynamics, which often is carried into Block B. At any rate, as their instructor of language arts pedagogy in block B, I am to some extent an outsider to the class, which impacts the development of a relationship with individual students in the class. Of course there have been other factors that directly affect the degree of success in teaching critical literacy pedagogies, as I will describe later in this paper.

By and large, the overarching structure of the classroom activities is what I call a *living language workshop*. This evolution of the 'writers' workshop' is what I used in the first semester I taught this course. The main reason for this perspective change was based on my own observations of writing at nearby public schools and what the students themselves observed in their practicum. The writing assignments were hardly inviting and meaningful for students: "write two sentences"; or "write the responses to the questionnaire..."; or "respond to the questions at the end of Chapter X". At the same time, in my class, I became aware of some difficulties several course participants had in trying to engage in writing. I found it helpful to engage course participants in various activities involving reading, writing, and speaking (dialogue) about social issues and life experiences which were connected to or helped trigger participants' interests and memories.

Data Sources. As is often the case, data sources in teacher action research originate as part of the process of teaching and from the students' coursework. In this study the data came from: the instructor's reflective journal after each class session, which gave me the basis for preparing the following lessons, changing the syllabus' thematic units, assignments and activities, as well as students' writing projects; lesson plans; reflective journals; students' self-assessment and students' course evaluations; and practicum lessons and reports. As each semester went by, I took notes of participants' work, reflections, practicum reports, and evaluations, in order to make the necessary changes for the next semester.

Building the Conditions to Enthuse Reluctant Writers. In the context of the living language workshop, prospective teachers had the opportunity to face their own resistance to engage in writing while learning strategies and activities to use in their respective classrooms. This implies that, as their instructor, I needed to model those strategies and activities for them so that they could experience how they felt as well as understand them conceptually and practically.

Thematic Units. Each thematic unit of the course in language arts pedagogy includes modeling how to introduce a particular writing genre and connecting it to a social issue, depending on which reading, writing, speaking, and action activities are planned and developed. These activities also help me and course participants to start exploring the issues that concern them, thus introducing their life experiences into the curriculum and increasing their chances to engage in meaningful and purposeful writing. The course consists of broad thematic units based on predominant writing genres (poetry, narrative, essay writing), plus critical media literacy and alternative, authentic assessment of writing. Keeping track of what issues matter to students helps me plan the following class activities and thematic units. For the most part, this day-to-day planning of activities works well, yet some 'hot topics' provoke often heated debates and splits, for which in the end I get most of the blame. Those situations can be very stressful but also engender reflection and careful planning for later course development.

Experiential Pedagogy at Work. Dewey (1938/1963) called *experiential learning* his theory of "learning by doing". In this self-study of my own practice, I used this concept to explain how prospective teachers can learn critical literacy pedagogy through experiencing that pedagogy themselves. For every thematic unit and the accompanying writing genre, we started by modeling the type of pedagogical procedure I want prospective teachers to adopt for their lesson plans to teach the same genre to school children. I explained to them how it feels to get excited and emotional when writing about their own experiences and thereby finding meaning and purpose in writing, not just writing for the sake of writing. This experience will help them to devise writing activities such that children find meaning and purpose in their writing beyond the schoolwork type of writing they are often assigned to do.

Example of a Thematic Unit and a Lesson for Engaging Reluctant Writers. As basic textbooks, I used Linda Christensen's (2000) *Reading, Writing and Rising-up*, and *Teaching for Joy and Justice* (2009). These books have a wealth of ideas and activities for teaching critical literacy and, especially, are 'reluctant-writer proof'. An additional package of readings includes Freire's chapters on literacy or on problem-posing pedagogy. I also developed several activities and exercises to involve small children in writing, since Christensen's books are mostly for teaching at high school level. The vignette that follows is

an example of how I developed the thematic unit one, which includes the narrative writing genre.

Vignette 1: Thematic Unit: Writing Our Lives for Joy, Healing, and Advocacy

Writing Genre: Narrative Writing. The overall objective of this unit is to have students experience what it feels like to write narratives with authentic purpose and how to teach narrative writing to elementary and middle school students.

Sample Lesson: Writing a personal narrative. “I know what it’s like ... I remember one time...” The main goal of this lesson was to create a situation that could unlock participants’ resistance to engage in writing by changing the purpose from writing for mere practice to writing with purpose, to unleash emotions and put them into words that have deep meaning for them.

I passed out to each student a copy of at least 3 poems (e.g. “As Live was Five”) from Jimmy Santiago Baca’s book *Healing Earthquakes* (2001). We first had a conversation about the author, who despite having roots in the same state, is largely unknown to students. We watched him speaking (Baca, Barchus & Krusic, 2003), explaining how each poem is a narrative of a life experience that left a scar on his soul, and that writing poetry saved his life, was a healing experience, and became the path to literacy. Then, in a read-around manner, each participant read a stanza of a poem with good intonation and enunciation, until we finished all three poems. Then we heard, in Jimmy Santiago Baca’s voice, the poem “As Live Was Five”. This poem is a narrative of his first experience of racism against his grandfather, which was a very traumatic experience for a ten-year-old boy. After listening to the poem, I passed out a list of about 15 different common situations where people can be victims of discrimination or any other traumatic situation. The handout is called “I know what it’s like... I remember one time...”. For instance, “I know what it’s like to be told by my teacher that I will not be successful in school. I remember one time...”. I invite participants to choose any such situation that brings back a memory, and to write freely and as long as needed. Often they asked me if they needed to share, to which I responded that it isn’t mandatory. Using these prompts, everybody wrote continuously for about 20-30 minutes. If we had some time left, a couple of volunteers read their first drafts.

For the following class, course participants needed to complete their narratives, make revisions and edit as necessary for reading to the class or to a small group of classmates. They read and gave feedback to each other to improve the formal conventions of writing. I also read to the class a healing narrative piece. During the readings there were always tears, laughs, suspense, and demonstrations of mutual empathy. At this point some narrative devices were introduced such as character descriptions, dialogue, setting descriptions, etc., aimed at improving their skills for narrative writing and revising and editing their own narratives.

As prospective teachers engage in this process of narrative writing, they are learning a specific empowering strategy for teaching personal narrative writing to their own students. Then, we reconstruct the process that they went through to learn the art of personal narrative writing: the reading-around of the poems of Jimmy Santiago Baca or any other poet's samples; the conversation about the author; his own reading of a poem based on a very intense experience to build an emotional atmosphere that helps trigger memories in the listeners; the extensive list of common situations as prompts to trigger memories; the sharing of those readings with peer feedback; and finally the more formal techniques of narrative writing to facilitate revision and editing. I encouraged prospective teachers to use this same narrative (if appropriate) to trigger their own students' memories to start writing about their experiences.

To complete this lesson, participants worked in pairs on writing a lesson plan for teaching personal narrative writing to their students in grades 4-8. If allowed by the cooperating teacher in their practicum schools, prospective teachers taught this lesson and shared their teaching experience with the class the following week.

Even in the lower grades, students can write personal narratives when given examples they can identify with. We read Laliberty's (2001) chapter, written by a second-grade teacher who 'hooks' students into writing by engaging them in writing about their own life experiences. She modeled for those second graders her own sad story of her father's absence. She also scaffolded the second grade children's preparation for starting the writing of their individual narratives, by writing various narratives as a whole class.

Contrary to the widely-held belief that it will be difficult to have course participants consent to share these very personal narratives, my own experience is that very few choose not to share their writing with the whole class. Perhaps their studying together for more than one semester in Block A creates mutual trust in the group as they enter block B. On a couple of occasions, there was a student who considered Jimmy Santiago Baca 'inappropriate' for teaching at school because of his denunciation and confrontation of racism. Depending on course participants' openness, I chose his or less intense narratives as triggers of writing. The selection of the narrative examples was carefully done, and is a key component in the process of creating the emotional atmosphere needed to trigger memories.

Analysis of Data: In a teacher action research project, the teacher continually examines the various sources of data (students' writing projects, class participation, lesson plans, and reflection on her/his own practice journal) for making decisions about the following lessons, activities, emphasis and repairs. As a teacher researcher, I do so as an ongoing process during the semester. I also take notes for documenting participants' understanding and

appropriation of the pedagogy of living language by examining their writing projects, lesson plans and practicum reports. I especially look at how authentic was their writing and the ways they recreated in their own lesson plans the pedagogy they had experienced themselves, as well as their success as judged from their students' work. At the end of each semester, I review my after-class journals, the notes taken from the assignments submitted concerning their understanding and appropriation of living language pedagogy, and to identify broad transformations and issues of course participants and of myself, which allow me to prepare the following semester syllabus, including assignments and activities. What I present in this report are the broad and prototypical changes acknowledged by prospective teachers who participate in my courses of language arts pedagogy. Furthermore, I also found those changes in my journals and field notes from evaluating their portfolios where all their work was compiled. In other words, their own acknowledgement and my own records and observations of their changes ratify this conclusion.

Results and Discussion

Significant Transformations of Pre-service Teachers: If I Can Do It Now, My Students Could Do It Too. Even though the prototypical changes were identified from different data sources including direct observations consigned to my journal, the place where they were most clearly stated was in participants' portfolio self-evaluations and in the overall course evaluations. Some of these statements are reproduced here to illustrate the patterns of change.

1. Feeling the relevance of their own experience by engaging in writing as inspiration to create learning situations to engage their own students:
 - I enjoyed writing a story that touched my heart. It was hard to get started but once I started I did not want to stop writing until I finished... I think children will have the same experiences in writing about themselves (Lucinda, midterm self-evaluation, 2006).
 - I enjoyed getting the chance to interact with one another in class. The activities that you provided were engaging and I feel comfortable using them in my class. I learned to see things more critically (Nina, 2005, final self-evaluation).
 - I think the main thing that I learned from doing all the work in this portfolio is the importance of somehow including students' lives in the writing that they do, no matter what type of writing it is. This is crucial to making writing an enjoyable and meaningful experience for our students. They can also take action by writing about an issue that they care deeply about (Jane, final self-evaluation, 2007).
 - Coming into this class I thought we were going to study grammar, mechanics, and literary elements. Well, we did all that and a whole lot more. I learned the importance of valuing students' lives and how to use that to empower their writings (Anonymous course evaluation, spring, 2003)
2. Some participants found the activities and writing in class useful for improving their knowledge about language arts and their writing skills:

- I wasn't too excited when I saw the title of the chapter. I hated poetry throughout school. As I was reading I was kind of glad to see that there are better forms to teach poetry to kids. I always looked at poetry as something that somehow had to rhyme and not really make sense (Laurie, journal on poetry writing, 2005)
3. Feeling empowered, validated and willing to share
 - I am very pleased because in this course I had the opportunity to practice my native language. In this class I felt valued and respected, and I am going to do this to my students. As a future teacher I will respect my students for who they are and who they will be. .. My writings in Spanish in this portfolio are very important to me, because during the time I have been in this university I never had the opportunity to do so (Lola, final self-evaluation, 2003)
 4. Feeling ready and prepared for teaching language arts at schools by connecting the university course with the 'real world'.
 - In trying to look back in my practicum experiences, I still think that this is the first and only time that I have seen something (poem) in the classroom that relates back to what I have read or been taught in my classes (Laurie, practicum observation report, 2005).
 5. Sharpening prospective teachers' critical thinking and their commitment to provide their students with learning situations to develop critical thinking as well:
 - I am more aware of issues around my life. I look at things more critically and I feel that I will be able to share that with my students. I also think that it is important to teach your students to be critical thinkers. Overall, I feel very good about this course. I learned a lot and I had a lot of fun. Thank You! (Naomi, final self-assessment, 2004).

The thematic unit on Critical Media Literacy is the occasion for prospective teachers to examine how critical they are, as well as to engage in taking action which often is in the way of writing advocacy letters to media outlets and programs aimed especially at children. They also developed lesson plans to teach children critical media literacy (e.g. identify stereotypes in cartoons) and how to write self-advocacy letters.

Not everybody found the content and pedagogy of the course useful. Some students (roughly 2-3 in most of the classes), found them offensive and reflective of my political agenda, which I only found out in the anonymous course evaluations: "This teacher (a liberal) was constantly pushing her political agenda on the class. I was highly offended" (2007). Another student wrote: "We need a new professor that focuses more on methods and less on politics" (2010).

I was not surprised to find some students resisting a critical literacy perspective for teaching language arts. After all, most of these students have been ingrained with the more

traditional teaching of language that reinforces their own experiences and views of teaching.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that student transformation is mostly based on self-reporting of their own learning experiences, as well as what they present and write in their practicum reports. In this university, field supervision is separated from the courses on methods. During these ten years I only supervised 6 students in their student teaching semester following my course on language methods. Two of them were very skillful in combining their cooperating teacher requirements with the type of language pedagogy they had learned in my class. Two other students moved back and forth between the cooperating teacher pedagogy and their own learned pedagogy. The rest just followed the cooperating teacher's pedagogy and told me that when they had their own classroom they would use the living language pedagogy they had learned.

Conclusion and Implications

Reluctant writers are for the most part the result of teaching practices and education policies that focus on discrete skill development through writing assignments only for the sake of writing. Writing, if it occurs at all, is a schoolwork exercise, which often becomes meaningless and purposeless, and has no authentic connection with students' lives as expressive beings and agents of change. The teacher action research reported here aimed at countering these malpractices by facilitating pre-service teachers to experience critical literacy pedagogies. These practices are about teaching writing that triggers students' life stories, engaging them as expressive beings in authentic writing for meaning and purpose. Experiential pedagogy provides pre-service teachers with the embodied reasons and skills, that is, experiential knowledge and practice for teaching writing

The experiential pedagogy for teaching writing I describe in this paper did not exist when I started teaching this course of pedagogy of language. It was the result of my reflective practice of teaching this course, progressing from just reading and talking about how to teach writing, hoping to construct authentic texts, to embracing experiential pedagogy as described in this paper. Examining critically my own practice and the students' course work, especially their lesson plans and practicum reports, I found no clear indications that our readings and examples were reflecting in their practicum. Actually, course participants were using their own experiences of writing in schools with a bit more 'fun' activities, not the authentic writing we had been reading and talking about in class.

I kept records of students' work and my own journals and notes for various years, but I did not go back to examine more thoroughly the data accumulated. I came to realize that in teacher action research data analysis goes parallel to teaching. This implied that I needed to be analyzing the results for the purpose of preparing my own teaching of the course as well as for revision of the course for the following semester, in addition to my research on this process. I started developing a strategy for the analysis to happen in a systematic way and not just at the end of the semester or multiple year periods. In other words, analysis of data became part of my own teaching of this course. At this point I understood what Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993) and Pine (2009) have stressed: that in teacher research, teaching and research become intimately connected one to the other. Therefore, a very important part of the report on a teacher action research project is to document the process of teaching while doing research on our own teaching, as opposed to using a questionnaire or test to assess our teaching.

About the Author

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