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Centering Bodies in Contentious Times Using Critical Literacy to Foster Institutional Change

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Abstract

Drawing on action research conducted as part of a graduate course in Critical Literacy at a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) in the urban Southwest, this article considers how two scholar-practitioners – one working in higher education and one in a middle school setting - utilize their embodied knowledge as members of marginalized communities to increase institutional access and create opportunities for critical engagement and humanization among their students. In sharing these inquiries, we situate our work within the literature of critical literacy, draw on discourses of bodies and embodiment in education, detail our methodology and then share two distinct instances in which we used critical literacy theory and practice to unearth missing narratives, promote humanizing educational approaches, and foster institutional change. We end by offering suggestions for future research and practice in the field.



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Bodies are increasingly at the forefront of political and social discourse in the U.S. as discussions about citizenship, violence, sexuality and belonging become both more urgent and more polarizing. In the past eighteen months alone, the U.S. military has attempted to ban transgender soldiers from service (Cooper & Gibbons Neff, 2018); women across all employment sectors have revealed deep legacies of sexual harassment and abuse (Astor and Creswell, 2018; Gabler, Twohey, & Kantor, 2017; Hauser, 2018; Pogrebin, 2018); immigrants, refugees and Dreamers have been strategically targeted by policies that threaten their place in American society (Dickerson, 2017; Hirschfeld Davis and Shear, 2017; Jordan, 2018); and the killing of unarmed Black men, women and children continues unabated (Funke and Susman, 2016). The bodies we inhabit matter. How these bodies are read and interpreted by others also matters. As certain bodies continue to be “read” as deviant or criminal, these readings have profound consequences for efforts to foster equity and provide access to historically marginalized populations, notions that comprise the very core of critical literacy theory and practice (Comber, 2015). As critical literacy scholars and practitioners who, like Janks (2014), argue for critical literacy’s ongoing importance, we seek to identify how critical literacy might be contextualized within and against the current political moment. Specifically, we suggest that centering bodies and drawing upon theories of embodiment can both reveal key barriers to justice and create more humanizing conditions within P-20 classrooms.

This paper draws on action research conducted as part of a graduate course in Critical Literacy at a Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) in the urban Southwest to consider how two scholar-practitioners – one working in higher education and one in a middle school setting - utilize their embodied knowledge as members of marginalized communities to increase institutional access and create opportunities for critical engagement and humanization among their students. In sharing these inquiries, we situate our work within the literature of critical literacy, draw on discourses of bodies and embodiment in education, detail our methodology and then share two distinct instances in which we used critical literacy theory and practice to unearth missing narratives, promote humanizing educational approaches, and foster institutional change. We end by offering suggestions for future research and practice in the field.

Critical Literacy and Theories of Embodiment

Although nearly 50 years old, critical literacy continues to be a highly-relevant construct for framing work within education as achievement disparities remain intractable (Hansen, Levesque, Quintero & Valant, 2018) and the voices of marginalized populations continue to be silenced. Concerned with revealing power imbalances and advancing equity, critical literacy seeks to expose how texts function in society - not as neutral and autonomous entities (Street, 1984) - but as documents produced within specific historical and sociopolitical contexts that possess the potential to privilege particular populations and disempower others (Crawford-Garrett, Perez & Short, 2016; Taylor, 1996). Specifically, critical literacy considers the ways in which texts operate ideologically (Street, 1984), are imbued with power relations (Luke, 2000), and carry consequences regarding how we “read the world” (Freire, 1987) and act within and upon it. Specifically, one mode of action includes repurposing and reconfiguring the same texts used to marginalize and disempower particular populations (Crawford-Garrett, Perez & Short, 2016) by generating a new set of understandings and possibilities.

In conceptualizing “texts” broadly, bodies are integral to critical literacy- specifically the ways that bodies are recognized and read by society as visual and social texts (Hagood, 2005;

Johnson & Kontovourki, 2016) and subsequently interpreted “as either normal or deficient...”(Hughes- Decatur, 2011, p. 73). The bodies we inhabit not only impact our readings of the world but also how we are read by the world. These positions are seldom static; rather, they are comprised of a complex set of intersectionalities and identities that are context-dependent, socially-situated and in constant flux (Weiler, 1991). While we might be identified as oppressed in one set of circumstances, we could be read as oppressor in another. Despite these shifting subjectivities, neoliberal reform efforts have concretized certain positionalities and further stigmatized particular bodies as “the larger structures of social stratification” are inscribed onto children and youth (Campano, 2007, p. 12). Specifically high-stakes testing and accountability metrics increasingly depict communities of color in monolithic ways, highlighting only academic failure at the expense of more nuanced, complex and multidimensional depictions.

As such, centralizing the role of bodies within education offers both problems and possibilities. For example, scholars have documented the ways in which the bodies of teachers and students have been disciplined over time to conform to dominant educational discourses (Golann, 2015; Johnson & Kontovourki, 2016; Luke, 1992; Morris, 2016). In particular, in a reform era characterized by an obsession with achievement metrics and an emphasis on “no-excuses,” Black and Brown bodies are increasingly subjected to surveillance (Mallozzi, 2016), problematic disciplinary approaches (Nocella, Parmar & Stovall, 2014), White-washed curricula (Brown, 2017) and rote pedagogies (Au, 2007). Even as school reform initiatives attempt to rectify longstanding disparities, children are increasingly viewed as disembodied metrics or reduced to data points (Hughes-Decatur, 2011). Thus, even as reformers make claims about disrupting the status quo, by silencing and disciplining some bodies more than others, dominant ways of knowing and being are maintained (Hughes- Decatur, 2011, p. 83).

One particularly insidious aspect of neoliberal reform efforts are the ways in which “systemic approaches to assimilation are often masked in the language of measurement and quantification that is rampant in 21st century educational discourse” (Salazar, 2013, p. 124). Thus, students from dispossessed communities not only contend with persistent feelings of not belonging in school but also overt efforts to deny and remediate salient aspects of their identity like social class, race, ethnicity, culture and sexuality (Blackburn, 2012; Deyhle, 2013; Fordham, 1993; Jones, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). This persistent denial of students’ backgrounds and lived experiences, as well as the commensurate efforts to assimilate students to White, middle class norms, constitute trauma. While trauma is most often conceptualized as a single harrowing event whose reverberations continue to impact the survivor, trauma can also take the form of “uncanny repetitions” (Caruth, 1996, p. 9) and “mundane catastrophes” (Forter, 2007). As such, students who are subjected to repeated micro-aggressions like those noted above (Solorzano, 1998) experience trauma that often persists, unmitigated, in schools and classrooms (Dutro, 2013).

Given this context, the relative comfort of one’s body in classroom spaces can have significant and lasting impacts on school success and academic achievement. Jones and Woglrom (2013) note that those most conditioned to the institutional norms of classrooms often become teachers, a phenomenon that holds consequences for students who do not conform easily to the dominant practices of schooling. Specifically, the notion that the “‘proper’ postures for learning, reading, and generally participating in the social spaces of school have been internalized by teachers and administrators is evident each time a young person engages in responses that violate this silent code of behavior” (Vasudevan et al., 2017, p. 349). As students

are told to form lines, sit still, remain quiet and express docility and compliance in myriad ways, bodies become integral to how students experience and interpret what it means to be and belong in school.

In spite of these realities, theorizing the role of bodies also holds potential for fostering change. Although “performances have stability because they are culturally shaped, they are open to change and remaking - to rehearsing a different set of positions (Kamler, 1997, p. 386). Thus as forms of trauma increasingly become concealed beneath guises of “equity,”- namely, neoliberal reforms that focus on high-stakes accountability- it is critical to consider how to best prepare young people from dispossessed communities “to confront the toxicity of unjust social conditions in their lives” (Camangian, 2015, p. 425).

By introducing humanizing pedagogies, critical educators can invite students (and teachers) to recognize the partiality and situatedness of their bodies, and to use their bodies differently in different spaces, can generate new conversations and new possibilities. Jones and Woglrom (2013), for example, invite students to ride the city bus as way to problematize why certain bodies are at home in some spaces and not in others; this experience prompted students to reconsider aspects of how their own bodies are read in specific contexts as well as their readings of others. Moreover, while “bodies are made and re-made as a result of the places/spaces they move” they also hold the potential to “make and remake those same spaces” (Jones & Woglrom, 2013, p. 3), a notion that suggests that pedagogies of embodiment can disrupt the status quo within schools (Jones, 2012). Specifically, as youth actively engage in mapping abstract theories and ideas onto their lived realities and daily experiences in urban communities, they engage in a critique of unjust conditions and are able to join their personal and academic identities in ways that engender academic achievement and preserve their integrity as humans (Camangian, 2015)- both of which are key elements of holistic healing.

Methodology

The inquiries highlighted in this article originated within a graduate-level course entitled *Critical Literacy* at a Hispanic-serving institution in the urban Southwest. The course, which is housed within the College of Education but draws students from across campus, was taught by Katy, a White, heterosexual, middle-class female, for three semesters. Introductory class sessions primarily focused on the theoretical underpinnings of Critical Literacy including key critiques. We then analyzed and unpacked a range of educational issues using critical literacy as an interpretive lens. Central to the course was the development of an action research project called an “action plan” in which students identified an issue or struggle in a specific community and collaborated *with* that community to foment change. Projects were highly personal to students and ranged from working on marketing plans for small refugee businesses to deconstructing the literary canon with high school English students to investigating the biases of academic advisors within the university. Amanda, a middle-class, heterosexual, hearing Chicana and Kahlil, a Black, heterosexual, middle-class male, were both students enrolled in the course, though in separate semesters. Both elected to conduct their action plan within spaces where they were already deeply invested and had long and complex histories- Amanda as an instructor in the University’s signed-language interpreter education program and Kahlil as a middle school Language Arts teacher at a Title 1, arts-intensive, majority Hispanic, public charter school. Specifically, each teacher’s embodied identity was integral to their inquiry as Amanda investigated the perceptions and experiences of four Spanish speaking students in a

predominantly White ASL/English interpreting program and Kahlil examined the impact of stereotypes and assumptions in facilitating the development of a critical consciousness within 6th and 7th grade Language Arts students.

Katy intentionally drew upon action research methodology to inform the action plan assignment recognizing that action research is an activist methodology (Simon & Campano, 2013) that prioritizes the deconstruction of power relationships typically associated with formal research in education (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) and thus pairs logically with critical literacy frameworks. Moreover, action research centralizes “working against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 2004) and challenging business-as-usual in schools (Hulse & Hulme, 2012) by positioning teachers and other practitioners as generators of knowledge who are capable of re-shaping of educational institutions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). As practitioner researchers “theorize from the thick of things” (Simon & Campano, 2013, p. 22), they aim to construct counter-narratives that highlight students’ capacities and capabilities (Carini, 2001; Moll, Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) in lieu of relying on deficit discourses (Comber & Kamler, 2004). Specifically, the detailed portraits of classrooms that serve historically-marginalized youth generated by action researchers collectively illustrate the profound capacities these youth possess even as they are positioned as academic failures by educational discourses that disproportionately privilege test scores and other metrics to gauge success (Ballenger, 1998; Campano, 2007; Morrell, 2008).

Integral to practitioner inquiry methodology is positionality as the interplay of insider-outsider roles shapes research questions, data collection, analytical approaches and specific actions (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Shifting positionalities proved central to the experiences of Amanda and 3 as both identify as members of populations who have experienced marginalization within the educational system - albeit in different ways - and both now hold positions of power within these same systems. As a result, their work focuses on naming the systemic inequities that disempowered them as students and critically redesigning schooling to generate different, more equitable conditions in their respective classrooms. To highlight their voices and to honor their unique perspectives on their practice, each inquiry is related in the first person by Kahlil and Amanda, respectively.

Data Collection and Analysis

Throughout the action plan assignment, teachers collected data from their respective research sites. For example, Amanda facilitated focus groups with four Spanish-speaking students who had expressed concerns about the lack of language diversity in the signed-language interpreting program. She recorded notes on these conversations and also analyzed program syllabi, classroom practices, and course materials to determine, alongside the students, key elements missing from the interpreter education program. Kahlil documented his practice of allowing trauma narratives to surface in his classroom. He collected stories of personal loss, sexuality, anger, existential pondering, oppression, anxiety in student journals, essays, poems, and other creative writing, and documented students’ discussions surrounding trauma in class readings of texts including *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006), and *Enrique’s Journey* (Nazario, 2014).

The data students collected in their individual research sites were shared in class to inform the next steps of their inquiries. Specifically, we utilized Anderson and Herr’s (2005) framework of plan/act/observe/reflect while consistently posing critical questions about our

positionalities, biases, and assumptions as we examined the data. When the semester ended, both Amanda and Kahlil self-selected to continue their inquiries as they engaged in ongoing work in their research sites and also met regularly with Katy to delve deeper into discussions of critical literacy theory and practice. Elements of these discussions included looking across the individual work of Amanda and Kahlil in the hopes of identifying common themes and insights. As we discussed data in-depth and mapped it onto key theories we had discussed in class, we recognized the role of institutional obstacles as central to impeding access and equity for historically-marginalized youth. Moreover, we noticed the role of bodies- not just the students' bodies but also our own- as we each spoke, wrote and taught from very different positions. Thus, we discovered that considering theories of embodiment alongside critical literacies yielded insights into how we might humanize our efforts to foster social justice in our respective spaces, phenomena which will be discussed in detail below.

Inquiry 1: Making Space For Whole Bodies

What questions are dangerous? In the spring of 2017, I began thinking about the “dangerous” practices in my 6th and 7th grade ELA classroom, that is, knowledge that is off-limits and contested. I began to understand that when the national narrative of education “focus[es] on what is assessable” (Dutro, 2013, p. 308), there is also an implicit message about what is not valued (i.e. teacher and student identities). For me, the pursuit of “dangerous” knowledge meant questioning the positioning of my body and students' bodies in these narratives, as I realized that the most dangerous thing I could be in the current school system is myself.

Scholars remind us that our body is constantly being made and remade in response to spaces we inhabit (Hughes-Decatur, 2011; Jones and Woglom, 2013). As a young, liberal, Black male teacher, I recognize that my own body is the result of intersecting positionalities. Further, the institution of schooling consistently asserts which aspects of my identity are valued or appropriate and which are not (Hughes-Decatur, 2011). For example, when I was labeled “Minimally-Effective” on a teacher evaluation rubric administered by the state, or when I, like many others, considered the ramifications of Trump’s presidency, I came face to face with the ways in which my various identities, my intersectionalities, and my *body*, did not fit in school. As a result of previous exposure to critical scholarship (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2013), I recognized that this knowledge had historical context. Historically, Black bodies have been displaced and appropriated in white spaces (Coates, 2015; Lorde, 1984; Rankine, 2014). As a people who are disproportionately affected by violence, and sexual and institutional oppression, Black people (and I would argue all marginalized peoples) eschew embodiment of their identities for the sake of safety. In these spaces, speech, dress, and other habits of being become the mark of the other, and, as a result, the source of constant tension. In response to this tension these selves are constantly interrogated for signs of being too brown or too Black and thus unpalatable. Coates (2015), specifically, asserts that society encourages this disembodiment because the presence of Black bodies undermines American ideology. Not only because Black bodies carry visible difference from the idealized image of an American (i.e. one that is White), but because they also bear a history of oppression -slavery, lynching, disenfranchisement - embodying them is a literal threat to the institution.

Reflections upon how I inhabit my own body (or not) in certain spaces echo this assertion. At school, I dress conservatively, covering my tattoos with long sleeves, lie to students

about my age, and passively nod or shrug off any of the numerous microaggressions that surface on a daily basis in order to embody the role of teacher. Yet, my body also holds internalized knowledge of my experiences as a Black student (Mallozzi, 2017), and I remember being a part of a system that rewarded me for fitting into the model of the “good” student (i.e. silent and docile), but ultimately left me disinterested and disillusioned (Fordham, 1993). The result of this dichotomy is fracture. Unable to inhabit both of these bodies, my whole lived experience, I produce a watered-down version of myself.

At first, I sought to heal myself, but in this process I realized that my students, too, are fractured in a setting that separates learning from lived experience (hooks, 1994). And as I considered my own context - my largely white contingent of colleagues, the deficit perspectives of students held by staff, and a clear restriction by administration of what can and cannot be discussed in the classroom - I felt compelled to (re)construct my classroom into a space of resistance, a space where bodies show up whole. This recognition shaped my research questions as I sought to explore the following questions alongside my students for two semesters: What student narratives are present in my classroom? Where and how is trauma located in student writing?

I documented these narratives through classroom discussions and assignments, and, in doing so, brought to light narratives not previously visible. As I shared my own stories of trauma, students, too, were able to share their experiences. These stories were often those of marginalization, as students dealt with issues of race, sexuality, and coming of age. Through this consistent sharing, my classroom became a stronger community where students and I were able to subvert expectations of what knowledge is appropriate and necessary in the classroom, and bear witness to more complete versions of each other through the sharing of stories.

Disrupting Institutional Barriers

According to Bruner (2003), stories are told from a particular perspective and are embedded with innate meanings. Further, he argues that the stories we tell are often those that we live. In questioning the dangerous practices in my classroom, I found myself at the intersection of stories about my classroom and in turn my and my students bodies. At the federal level, mandated evaluations provided a very specific idea of what kind of knowledge is valued, at the state level, my students and I were deemed incompetent through test scores and minimally effective ratings, and at the local level, “best practices” are conceptualized as pedagogies that do not ruffle any feathers. Through these narratives, my students and I are positioned to view teaching and learning in ways that were read as “neutral” and “innocuous.” However, the trauma uncovered in student writing repelled these narratives. Trauma, paradoxically, has a humanizing effect; making space for these stories makes space for marginalized bodies. In light of this, I asked students to testify and stand witness to trauma (Dutro, 2013). I developed assignments and systems that would facilitate a discussion of narratives not typically found in classroom spaces.

(Re)Defining Critical

Embracing a humanizing narrative has been a major shift in my teaching. The first advice I was given as a teacher was to keep *my life* separate from *my school life*. Students, I was told, want to know everything about you, and if you get too close they will not respect you. Throughout my career I have heeded this advice and learned that invisibility, above all other

traits, is valued in teachers (Alsup, 2005). These ideas echo those enacted by James Baldwin (2017), who, as a writer, felt it was his duty to “move as largely and freely as possible,” (p.31). Despite the fact that he was a Black man, similarly oppressed by the people he was writing about, he felt that he could not complicate and attach himself to the various movements and ideologies of his time. In his mind it was only by remaining unattached that he could bear witness to the truth.

Teachers occupy a similar position. Although we have survived the gauntlet of education as students, and although we, too, see our identities fractured by the narratives surrounding education, we frequently adhere to the same practices that we were previously oppressed by (Weiler, 1991). This is true for myself. Even though, I inhabit and teach bodies visible in schools as “other,” I have also taught to an imagined “norm,” decontextualizing the bodies in my classroom.

However, focusing on trauma humanized my classroom space. Instead of constantly evaluating my students, comparing them to past students or using state or federal metrics to consider where they *should* be, I was impelled to bear witness to their entirety. Trauma demands presence in the classroom, and it has reframed my understandings of my students. Regardless of whether we acknowledge it, teachers are always embedded in trauma; we are never unbiased or unattached, as teaching is a political act (Freire, 1987). So, despite perpetual conditioning toward passivity, as critical practitioners we need to reconsider the of role teacher as witness in the classroom.

Baldwin (1963) posited that racial inequality was so embedded in our culture that any major shift in the status quo would require decisive action by those with privilege. If classrooms are to be transformative, a similar realization must take place. Although we must always be on guard for the innate power our role gives us (Dutro, 2013), critical practitioners must complicate themselves in their contexts by embracing the complexity of our practice. We cannot be satisfied with our role as facilitator, we must also take part in testifying and creating a culture of dialogue, and it is through this dialogue that students are able to rename the world (Janks, 2013).

In the semester following my research, I have seen many of my students strengthened by the embodiment of their marginalized identities (Wortham, 2001). For example, one student created a memoir in which she reflected upon how the positioning of her body exposed her to marginalization. Specifically, she composed vignettes to elucidate instances of sexism that she had already experienced in her life, and she discussed with me how this reflective writing—testifying—had made her realize just how pervasive this oppression was in society.

The culmination of my research not only developed a critical consciousness, and resilience within my students, but it strengthened my resolve as well. It allowed me to see the value in, and remain committed to, making space for vulnerability in the classroom, as allowing space for the whole bodies of our students, arms them with the ability to protect their bodies from a world that seeks to rob them of them.

Inquiry 2: Embodying Identity And Enacting Critical Literacy Within Interpreter Education

In Fall 2017, I enrolled in a graduate-level course on critical literacy at a local university that instilled critical perspectives and re-shaped my pedagogical approaches. Specifically, as a Chicana scholar and practitioner who recognizes my body as a site for critical change, I began to

examine the missing narratives of Spanish speakers within interpreter education through humanizing pedagogies. Through the exploration of how texts are used to transform, manipulate, conceal, and perpetuate the agendas of those in power, I felt compelled to both acknowledge and confront potential inequities within interpreter education. Situating and examining my own positionality proved essential to this process.

Positionality

As a product of a generational language shift resulting in the loss of Spanish, I grew up identifying as Chicana but not speaking the language of my family. According to Shin (2013), when language loss is experienced, a complete language shift almost always occurs within three generations. In my teens, I felt I carried a linguistic wound that left a scar on my identity and severed my heritage. I grew distant from my culture and yearned for belonging. Villa & Villa (2005) point out that although Spanish is the second most widely spoken language in the US, research illustrates an “inexorable intergenerational loss of the language among those of Spanish-speaking origin.” The Southwest has long experienced punitive language policies rooted in the history of colonization (Ebright, 1994) - such as, the ban of Spanish being spoken in schools at various periods in history and the oscillation between Spanish being recognized as an official state language or not - which has resulted in the imposition of Euro-American linguistic, political, social, and economic domination (Zentella, 2004). The process of acculturation over the years has de-incentivized families from exposing their children to Spanish, which is the dynamic that influenced the loss of my language.

In college I began to cultivate awareness about the physical spaces I was embodying and started studying American Sign Language (ASL). I found it refreshing to immerse myself in another culture and language that was not imbued with the historical trauma of my family (Borell, Moewaka, & McCreanor, 2018). When learning about Deaf Culture and Deaf identity, I related to the Deaf experience of living in a world of others. Although the Deaf community collectively share their own cultural value systems, “their theories about themselves and their language are powerfully colored by beliefs held by others” (Padden & Humphries, 1988). “Deaf American Culture” resides within “Mainstream American Culture,” which often view Deaf Americans as simply having a physical impairment (Stokoe, 1989) and as a result, see them as unable to successfully assimilate with hearing persons, reinforcing their marginalized status.

Although I am hearing and have no audiological connection to Deaf people, as someone who struggled to reconcile my personal language practices, I felt at home within the Deaf community. Specifically, being immersed in Deaf culture and ASL allowed me to access to my own identity, my corporal presence, and my place within juxtaposed communities. Understanding this paradox from a Deaf culture perspective has allowed me to embrace my own culture, to assess my intersecting positionalities, and most importantly, acknowledge the role of my body as a hearing Chicana. For years I struggled to find solidarity among English speakers and Spanish speakers and felt constricted by my identity, and thus, invisible. Zavella (1991) emphasizes the various factors, such as, class, race, gender, language, and culture that influence the diversity within the Chicana community, which contributed to the perplexities I faced in discovering my identity. Inhabiting these “border” spaces (Anzalúda, 1987) as someone who has struggled to find my place as an English speaker in a Spanish speaking family, a hearing interpreter working within the Deaf community, thus an inside-outsider, has facilitated my passion for supporting Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Hispana/o interpreting students.

As a young Chicana studying signed language interpretation, I was one of only a few minority students in a predominantly white program. My body was a physical reminder of how I was different. Corvarrubias (2011) refers to the formal and concrete ways in which we are conditioned to perceive differences among people. The shared values assigned to these differences often serve to elevate the status of some people while diminishing the worth of others resulting in widespread stereotyping. Intuitively aware of how I was being read by others, I attempted to avoid drawing attention to my struggles and, by extension, my identity. I concealed my presence as a Chicana to the best of my ability to assimilate with my peers in hopes of having equal opportunities (Vasudevan, Kerr, Enriquez, Johnson, Kontovourki, & Mallozzi, 2017). I was pressured by the norms of the majority to censor my physical curves with loose-fitting clothing with the specific brands and styles that my peers were accustomed to wearing. I had to quickly learn to speak up and share my thoughts aloud in class more often, which involved interrupting conversation, speaking over others, contradicting someone else, and processing information more quickly than I was socially familiar with. I was not yet conditioned for this type of discourse. I also had to keep up with the fast pace of living and doing, which was the antithesis of my *mañana* culture. I benefited from the privilege of having lighter skin, *con las güeras*. I also lightened and straightened my hair, but it was not enough to appear the same as others; I had to sound the same. Luckily I had years of practice disguising my Spanish accent when speaking English (Zavella, 1991). To succeed, I had to embody the values and morals of a White body by talking, dressing, and behaving within the norms of the other White students. My body was unknowingly hijacked by the pressures of society to integrate with the majority and, as a result, I was not perceived as a threat to an all-White faculty or majority White student demographic.

Accepting a faculty position within the same department where I once felt powerless as a student, initially felt counterintuitive. Yet, I knew if I could have a part in altering the path for future Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Hispana/o students, I could mitigate the effects of historical trauma and support students by dismantling a system that favors those with privilege (Borell, Moewaka Barnes, & McCreanor, 2018). Introspective of my own educational experience and the continued political assault on Latinx people (Dickerson, 2017; Hirschfeld Davis and Shear, 2017; Jordan, 2018), I have tried to embody critical consciousness and humanizing pedagogies (Freire, 1970) by advocating for the voices of marginalized students to be recognized and accompanying them in creating shared spaces so their bodies, too, can be the impetus for critical change. Encouraging students to recognize the social injustices they face in the educational system offers them an opportunity to acknowledge and give voice to their consciousness (Freire, 1970).

Story of the question

My journey from ASL student to a certified interpreter has led me to interests in interpreter education. In fall of 2016, I joined the faculty of a signed language interpreting program at a Hispanic-serving institution in the Southwest. My positionality within the institution was unique because I graduated from the same program ten years earlier. Thus, the factors guiding my desire to improve practices in interpreter education stem from my own experiences as a student of that program. Historically, the signed language interpreting field has privileged a bilingual/bicultural model that requires interpreters to become proficient in ASL and English and navigate between Deaf culture and mainstream culture (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2001). Although the evolution of the signed language interpreting profession acknowledges the

importance of culture in relation to language, it fails to recognize the multilingual and multicultural intersections of the Deaf community (Doe, 1994). Increasingly scholars are paying attention to the issues affecting the lives of Deaf Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Hispana/o people. As the general population continues to become more ethnically diversified, so does the Deaf community (Torres, 2009). The current interpreter education model proves problematic given the lack of adequately trained signed language interpreters equipped with the proper trilingual linguistic capacities and cultural competencies to serve Deaf people from Spanish speaking backgrounds. Multicultural Deaf people associate strongly with their cultural group, which places them into the position of a multiple minority—members of Deaf culture, but also of their own ethnic cultures (Plue, 2003). For the interpreting field to meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Deaf community, it is my theory that interpreter training programs must evolve further to recruit and pedagogically support underrepresented interpreting students to serve an equally diverse and underrepresented Deaf community effectively. Thus, the demand for trilingual (ASL, Spanish, English) interpreters is prevalent, but currently few post-secondary institutions are addressing these issues programmatically.

However, as I question my place to support the Deaf community as a hearing interpreter, my place to support trilingual interpreters as a non-Spanish speaking Chicana, and my place to effect change as a newcomer faculty member, I rely on Nieto's (2013) notion that multicultural teaching is social justice teaching. Drawing on Janks' (2000) notion of "dominant deconstructions," Comber's (2015) call to center social justice within curricular spaces, and Shor's (1999) conceptualization of the intersections of language and history, I was inspired to assess and rectify some of the missing narratives in Interpreter Education. I set out to reveal the need for trilingual interpreting curriculum through critical literacy initiatives and investigate what might happen if my Spanish speaking interpreting students and I co-created a proposal to add an elective course to the signed language interpreting program that incorporates trilingual interpreting.

Call to Action

In the Spring of 2017, I initiated a focus group comprised of four seniors, three who were first language (L1) users of Spanish, and one, a heritage speaker of Spanish, a term used to describe a person who has a cultural connection to a minority language learned at home as a child and who falls on a fluency continuum (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007), meaning they may or may not be fluent speakers of their home language because they often become more proficient in a dominant language as adults. The students identify as Mexican, El Salvadorian, Northern New Mexican, and Venezuelan, and they contribute a variety of Spanish dialects. Interactions with these students revealed a similar set of struggles, one that was reflective of my own experience in the program. My class time with these students confirmed the gaps and discrepancies in performance as compared to their non-Spanish speaking peers. When interacting with these students individually, several common themes surfaced. For example, students expressed low confidence using English during classroom interpreting activities and practicum interpreting assignments. They expressed their frustrations during class discussions and their inability to fully articulate their thoughts and opinions openly, which often resulted in minimal participation. They lacked a sense of belonging within the interpreting program. Lastly, they all emphasized that they were unaware, until I brought guest speakers into class to discuss trilingual interpreting, that their Spanish speaking skills could serve as an asset in working with the Deaf community. After

realizing this, they expressed interest in pursuing trilingual interpreting after graduation but conveyed the concern that they lacked the necessary tools to be successful. The content raised in my critical literacy course galvanized my attempt to bring these students together for a deeper inquiry. I began my examination with the following questions in mind: What improvements do native Spanish-speaking students in the interpreter training program suggest in order to even the playing field and create more inclusive conditions? How does the current curriculum in our interpreter program limit marginalized L1 Spanish speakers' ability to fully participate in classes that are designed to teach American Sign Language (ASL) through English? How can creating space for a community of minority students empower students to individually and collectively advocate for change?

Ultimately, we co-constructed a proposal for a trilingual course be offered in an effort to cultivate space for Spanish speaking students to explore their language and identity through an interpreting skills building course. This initiative was co-created with students that I have taught for two consecutive semesters, and although they may perceive me as an ally, I am simultaneously positioned as their instructor and, thus, I represent a system that has historically oppressed them. Similarly, while we share cultural backgrounds, I am not fluent in Spanish, which comprises a key barrier to our shared efforts. Therefore it is essential that I consistently revisit my positionality within this group and problematize my role as both an authority figure and English speaker (McDonough, 2009).

Additional barriers that surfaced during the proposal-writing process were rooted at the program level but highly influenced by the field of interpreter education in the United States. Historically, signed language interpreters and interpreter educators are White and female, contributing to a homogenous body of interpreters that serves a very multicultural and diverse Deaf community. Erica West Oyedele (2015) explores the lack of diversity within the predominantly White, female field of sign language interpreting by noting that 88% of interpreters and interpreter educators are White, and only 12% represent people of color. I'm currently the only full-time faculty member of color teaching our interpreting students. Without more people of color in positions of power, our program will continue to limit the opportunities for Spanish speakers and other students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to contribute as whole bodies to a dynamic, diverse, and multidimensional Deaf community.

As the one instructor of color on our faculty, I have questioned the efficacy of accepting students of color into our program without a well-designed support system and curriculum to foster their growth. Understanding the complex and intersecting embodied identities of students and what these identities might allow them to contribute to the field, is an important entry point to critical literacy work in interpreter education and attempts to humanize the field of interpreting. Evaluating the dimensions of power is fundamental for change during these contentious social, historical, and political times when the rights of Dreamers are being debated, refugee families are being separated, and Deaf accommodations are being refuted.

Ultimately, our proposal for a trilingual course was approved by the college and was successfully offered in Summer of 2018. Through this course, students' had access to curriculum in their native language. Moreover the course provided hope as their vision of a more humanizing and equitable educational space became a concrete reality as they found belonging among a community of other trilingual interpreters and expressed feeling better prepared to contribute to the workforce. Although the outcome of our inquiry was positive, it is only a primer for further critical work to reduce the alienation of marginalized students by foregrounding their

cultural funds of knowledge in the hopes of increasing their academic resilience and strengthening their own construction of a strong academic identity.

Discussion

Looking across these two inquiries yields important insights about how critical literacy theory and practice can be used with historically-marginalized populations to promote educational transformation. Specifically, we note that change begins by recognizing the ways in which our unique embodied histories have been shaped by institutions. Acknowledging these experiences and making them visible in our work for social justice can reveal narratives and positionalities that would otherwise remain obscured. We argue that this is a humanizing process as these modes of recognition shift the conversation away from disembodied metrics towards a more comprehensive and holistic view of teachers and students.

For the past two decades, schools have faced enormous pressure to quantify the processes of teaching and learning through standardized tests, teacher evaluations, scripted curricula and other approaches aimed at making school more efficient (Au, 2011) even as the nuances of people, practices and educational purposes are elided (Crawford-Garrett, Sánchez & Tyson, 2017). Amanda and Kahlil have complicated histories in the institutions in which they teach. Both experienced oppression as students and attempted to conceal their identities in order to assimilate to the normative practices of school. Both then assumed positions of power in the very institutions in which they had previously felt oppressed. Recognizing the role of these embodied histories and the complicated interplay of positionalities proved essential in their journeys to critical consciousness. Moreover, bringing these tensions to the surface enabled Amanda and Kahlil to actively disrupt these same paradigms for their students.

Both authors sought to unveil the masked identities of students who have acclimatized to fit dominant norms by questioning how their bodies are read and interpreted differently in particular spaces. By bringing what was once invisible to the forefront, each author called into question specific practices that have become normalized in various educational settings. Specifically, these inquiries suggest the importance of directly engaging students in ongoing critical inquiries into curriculum frameworks, disciplinary systems, and pedagogical approaches that function as the status quo within schools and are seldom questioned or problematized by either students or teachers.

By being invited to critique and reimagine these processes, students are participating in humanization (Freire, 1970). Specifically, humanization involves the development of critical consciousness as historically-marginalized populations begin to name, analyze and re-design institutions and policies that have previously disempowered them (Carmen-Salazar, 2013). Humanizing pedagogies involve cultivating political clarity among teachers and students- a process which situates teaching and learning as inherently political endeavors and focuses on engaging the oppressed in their own liberation (Bartolome, 1994). As students become emboldened to imagine new realities and take on active roles within their education, the possibilities for transformation are profound (Cammarota & Romero, 2014).

Lastly, our collective research- across a range of formal institutional affiliations and racial/cultural/linguistic positionalities- offered a collective opportunity to re-examine our understandings of critical literacy theory and practice, unpack our own experiences as insiders and outsiders within educational contexts, and consider the affordances and challenges of

implementing humanizing pedagogies in our respective spaces. Thus, as much as the specific interventions described in each inquiry proved powerful and transformative, so did our process as researchers tasked with finding ways to honestly and compellingly represent the work to a wider audience.

Conclusion

Bodies are inextricably tied to critical literacy theory and practice. We live in particular bodies that shape our readings of the world as well as how we are read and interpreted by others. Moreover, our bodies become conditioned across time and space to accept particular ideas, practices and realities as normal. In this article we not only document how our experiences in schools were shaped by the bodies we inhabit; we also consider ways to disrupt dominant paradigms and foster institutional access by centering bodies that have been historically-marginalized. By unpacking our unique, embodied histories and making these visible to each other, our students, and ourselves, we illustrate the power of uniting critical literacies with discourses of bodies and embodiment. Specifically, as certain bodies continue to be surveilled, disciplined, misunderstood, targeted, criminalized, and victimized, employing critical literacy takes on increased urgency. Re-positioning our bodies in the world and critically re-reading and reimagining our shared histories as teachers and students is integral to humanization and essential to the work of social justice.

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