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Contributions of a Social Justice Language Teacher Education Perspective to Professional Development Programs in Colombia

Contribuciones de una perspectiva de justicia social para la formación de docentes de lenguas a los programas de desarrollo profesional en Colombia

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In this article, the author discusses the social justice language teacher education perspective and how it can help language teachers to develop a political view of their work and effect change inside and outside their particular school contexts. To do this, she briefly analyzes various professional development programs for teachers of English in public schools in one city in Colombia to determine how these have or have not contributed to the development of a political perspective in teachers. Finally, she discusses what the implementation of such perspective requires, provides some examples to illustrate how it may look in practice, and discusses some implications for different stakeholders.

Key words: Language teacher education, professional development, social justice, teacher learning.

En este artículo la autora discute la perspectiva de formación de docentes para la justicia social y cómo esta puede ayudar a los profesores de lenguas a desarrollar una visión política de su trabajo y realizar cambios dentro y fuera de sus contextos escolares. Para lograrlo, ella hace un breve análisis de varios programas de desarrollo profesional para profesores de inglés de instituciones educativas públicas y determinar cómo estos han contribuido o no al desarrollo de una perspectiva política en los profesores. Finalmente, la autora discute lo que requiere la implementación de esta perspectiva, da algunos ejemplos para ilustrar cómo esta puede verse en la práctica y discute algunas implicaciones para los diferentes actores educativos.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje del profesor, desarrollo profesional, formación de docentes de lenguas, justicia social.

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Introduction

Colombia is in the midst of educational reforms in which teachers are pressured to focus on specific knowledge and skills intended to enable students to be competitive in the world market. This focus on economic competitiveness challenges professional development programs to include a social justice perspective to provide in-service teachers with the tools to construct better futures for themselves and their students. Unfortunately, for years a technical view of teachers' learning and development has characterized language teachers' professional development programs in Colombia, closing off possibilities for in-service teachers to develop a political view of their work to effect change both within and outside the classroom. Although there have been programs at the school and university level in which teachers have been offered a different type of professional development (e.g., Cadavid Múnera, Quinchía Ortiz, & Díaz Mosquera, 2009; Sierra Piedrahita, 2007a, 2007b; Usma & Frodden, 2003), most teachers have been treated as technicians (Sugrue, 2004) who should be trained to implement the reform initiatives determined by the government.

A clear example of this is the former National Plan of Bilingualism (2006-2010), which eventually became *Programa de Fortalecimiento al Desarrollo de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras* (2010-2014) and known today as *Programa Nacional de Inglés* [National Program for English], Colombia Very Well! (2015-2025) that conceptualizes teachers as unskilled and lacking the necessary knowledge that others consider important to implement such reform. Consequently, teachers are not considered as professionals who can make their own decisions based on their personal needs, interests, and working contexts. Besides, this reform has resulted in high stakes testing and fewer opportunities for teachers to make independent decisions in their classrooms since they are normally told what to teach and how to teach it (Robertson; Samoff; Sleeter; Tatto; Torres as cited in Zeichner, 2011). Therefore, language teachers in Colombian professional development programs have been trained in the content and methodologies specified by policy makers.

Given this situation, language teachers should learn to incorporate more appropriate teaching practices into their teaching repertoire to be able to educate the kind of critical and active citizens our society demands. Although this is also the job of teacher education programs, professional development programs need to include the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to social justice that may allow teachers to challenge the injustices and inequalities present on a daily basis in different spheres of society. If teaching is a political act, then a social justice perspective can contribute to the kind of preparation teachers require to move to more equal and just teaching practices, which, at the same time, will set an example for students to follow inside and outside their schools.

In this paper, I first provide a characterization of various professional development programs that have been offered to teachers of English in public schools in a major city in Colombia, and connect that characterization with the current discourses governing the professional development of teachers in many places around the world. Next, I introduce the idea of a social justice language perspective for the professional development of language teachers and discuss the importance and implications of such a perspective for the professional development of in-service language teachers. Following this, I discuss what the implementation of this perspective requires; provide some examples to illustrate how it can translate into teaching practices; and detail a specific example of learning to teach under this perspective taken from a study that I conducted. Finally, based on what scholars in the field have discussed and my own insights, I present some implications of this perspective for different stakeholders.

A Characterization of Professional Development Programs for Language Teachers

Professional development programs (PDPs hereafter) designed by professors in public and private universities or other private institutions in the country are in charge of instructing teachers on how the current reform works, and how it should be implemented. As a result, teachers are still offered the one-shot workshops, lectures, or courses, that is, the same old models that do not contribute much to their learning (Fullan, 2001; McCotter, 2001; Randi & Zeichner, 2004). Thus, their teaching practices and beliefs about teaching do not change, and even less, their visions as regards the role of teachers to effect change inside and outside their schools.

I analyzed various PDPs that have been sponsored and funded by the government in a major city in Colombia. I wanted to examine their design and organization, the theoretical foundations underpinning them, and how they were possibly working towards helping in-service teachers to develop a more political view of their work. The analysis indicates that:

- Most programs focus on language issues and do not include sociocultural, critical, and social justice approaches to language teaching.
- Most programs focus on providing teachers with the knowledge and skills determined by the government and the idea that they need to teach their students to be competitive in the world market upon graduation.
- Most programs do not include the development of attitudes and values in teachers that could help them use different teaching approaches with their students.
- The theoretical foundations of most programs include theories of language learning, communicative competence, multiple intelligences and the like; however, sociocultural, critical, and social justice theories are not included as foundations for these programs.
- Most programs focus on courses and workshops, with the exception of one program that incorporated a peer coaching strategy to support teachers in their schools.
- All programs are short-term and lack continuity as they depend on political contracts and alliances or availability of economic resources in the local government.

Therefore, these programs have focused on preparing language teachers with the knowledge and skills to be able to achieve the standards set by the government while lacking a commitment to prepare teachers in sociocultural, critical, and social justice approaches. Consequently, language teachers should be offered PDPs that include a combination of aspects or principles that are an integral part of working from a social justice perspective so that they are able to provide students with the kind of education that will lead them to become agents of social transformation inside and outside the schools. Moreover, these programs should prepare language teachers to be critical thinkers and activists who, when dealing with issues of professional development, are able to establish a balance between the interest of the government and their own interests and needs as professionals so that their individual learning is not ignored (Day & Sachs, 2004).

With the above-mentioned reform and what the Colombian government has established in terms of teacher professional development, teachers are witnessing the prevalence of one of the two discourses that currently influence educational policies in relation to teacher professionalism (Day & Sachs, 2004). This discourse, known as "managerial professionalism . . . gains its legitimacy through the promulgation of policies and the allocation of funds associated with those policies" (Day & Sachs, 2004, p. 6). It aims at

redefining what teacher professionalism means and how teachers should practice it whether individually or collectively (Day & Sachs, 2004). According to Day and Sachs (2004), this discourse is system driven, has external regulations, drives reform agendas, has political ends, is competitive and market driven, and exerts control and compliancy on teachers.

In contrast, the other dominant discourse, "democratic professionalism" (Day & Sachs, 2004, p. 5), is a preferable option for the professional development of teachers and attempts to transform teacher professionalism so that they have greater agency in their teaching (Day & Sachs, 2004). Not surprisingly, a shift to greater teacher agency as professionals has not been popular among policy makers in Colombia given that it is profession driven, has professional regulation, complements and moves beyond reform agendas, has professional development ends, is collegial, and points at teachers' activism (Day & Sachs, 2004). Although these two discourses of teacher professionalism have the intention of improving school teachers' performance and skills and, consequently, improving student learning results, what differentiates one discourse from the other is how the improvement process is done and who controls it (Day & Sachs, 2004). Clearly, the professional development of language teachers in Colombia has been designed under the discourse of managerial professionalism described by Day and Sachs.

Because professional development is political, it then serves some people's interests better than others (Day & Sachs, 2004); therefore, teachers should be attentive and make sure that the professional development they receive also serves their interests and needs. The field of teacher learning and professional development in Colombia will not advance unless we move to other forms of professional development that are planned according to teachers' needs, interests, working contexts and conditions, and with an emphasis on democratic professionalism. PDPs planned that take these elements into consideration and with a focus on a social justice perspective will give teachers the preparation they need to provide students with the kind of education that will lead them to become agents of social transformation inside and outside the schools.

A Social Justice Language Perspective for the Professional Development of Language Teachers

The literature about social justice teacher education (SJTE hereafter) indicates that there are at least three conceptions of the term social justice in teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Zeichner, 2009, 2011). One conception is about distributive theories focusing on a just or equitable distribution of material resources and services in society. Another conception is related to recognition theories focusing on social relations among individuals; that is, caring and respectful social relations where people are treated with dignity. The third conception focuses on both distributive and relational justice theories (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; McDonald as cited in Zeichner, 2011; Zeichner, 2009). Zeichner (2011) states that

> SJTE aims to respond to preparing teachers to teach in ways that contribute to a lessening of the inequalities that exist in school systems throughout the world between children of the poor and children of the middle and wealthy classes, and the injustices that exist in societies beyond systems of schooling, in access to shelter, food, healthcare, transportation, access to meaningful work that pays a living wage and so on. (p. 7)

Moreover, he observes that social justice involves "the forming of linkages inside and outside education aimed at working for broad social change" (p. 18). Thus, preparing teachers to work under this perspective, although challenging, is worth the effort to reduce the inequalities and injustices existing in

schools and society; however, it requires different stakeholders to learn to work together and with other actors in society to effect the desired social change.

Accordingly, the goals of SJTE are to recruit and prepare a diversity of teachers to teach all kinds of students; to prepare teachers capable of working inside and outside their classrooms to change inequities in schools and in society, more than focusing on diversity (McDonald & Zeichner as cited in Zeichner, 2011; Zeichner, 2009); to acknowledge the social and political aspects of teaching and recognize the contribution of teachers to students' life possibilities or opportunities; to prepare teachers to become leaders in reconstructing society through equity in opportunities and outcomes among the various groups existing in society; and to prepare teachers to teach in contexts where they are forced to accept forms of accountability that are narrow and punitive and that do not match the views of what they want to achieve with their students (Hamel & Merz; Johnson et al.; Sirotnik as cited in Zeichner, 2011).

Social justice language teacher education (SJLTE hereafter) is about moving beyond issues of language such as grammar, the four skills of language learning and so on, as well as sociocultural and critical approaches to language teaching to directly concentrate on teachers' agency and responsibility to effect local and larger social change as they understand how societal structures affect educational and life chances for their students and their families (Hawkins, 2011). Scholars situated in both SJTE and SJLTE perspectives agree on a vision of advocating for social justice in education and teachers' responsibility in being agents of change in their classrooms, schools, and in society at large.

Therefore, there is a need for committed teachers to educate and advocate for democracy and contribute to reduce existing inequities not only in schools but also in society by redistributing educational opportunities for students (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Such work requires preparation of teachers who possess a combination of "knowledge; interpretive frameworks; teaching strategies, methods, and skills; and advocacy with and for students, parents, colleagues, and communities" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p. 350). Moreover, it requires teachers who are able to critique the larger structures, arrangements, and policies of schooling and consider the role they might play to challenge the system that promotes inequities (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). In other words, teachers need to be activists and advocates for students (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). To count on this kind of teachers, and more specifically language teachers, PDPs should focus on helping in-service teachers develop a more political perspective about their profession.

A social justice language perspective can offer in-service teachers a different view about their work and provide them with a focus for learning different from the knowledge and skills determined by reform initiatives promoted by the government. Such initiatives normally embody a managerialist vision of teacher learning and development that is concerned with efficiency and productivity and excludes social and human benefits (McInerney, 2007). Hawkins (2011) observes that language teacher preparation and professional development programs often take into account competencies dealing with issues of language; that is, grammar, function, structure, and usage. To a lesser degree they take into account issues that align with sociocultural perspectives; that is, linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogies. However, they almost never provide teachers the opportunity to explore critical issues and approaches and even less a social justice approach to language teaching. Accordingly, a SJLTE approach not only emphasizes changing understandings of language learning, teaching, and usage; accepts the existence of inequities in education and imagines just social futures for people but emphasizes the responsibility of teachers in being agents of social change (Hawkins, 2011).

Nevertheless, teachers' work in Colombia is increasingly constructed around narrow, instrumental, and apolitical ways. These issues are reinforced through scripted and prescribed curriculum and standardized testing and other accountability measures that seem to be created to control teachers and not to promote their creativity or talent (McInerney, 2007), and their potential to be critical thinkers and agents of change that can work to improve the life chances of their students.

For language teachers to become the kind of critical thinkers and activists our profession requires, PDPs should be geared to include a combination of aspects or principles that are an integral part of working from a social justice perspective. Furthermore, they should be designed and structured taking into account many of the main characteristics of effective professional developments that the literature suggests and which come from a broad consensus among researchers, scholars, policymakers, and professional development specialists (Elmore, 2002; Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Towards the Development of a Social Justice Language Perspective in PDPs

PDPs working from a social justice perspective should include a series of aspects, and these are not limited to the ones I present here. These programs should:

- Provide teachers with opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, reflection, and work to empower/legitimize teachers (Hawkins, 2011).
- Provide teachers with many opportunities to consider and understand concepts, issues, and ideas related to teaching for social justice (Enterline, Cochran-Smith, Ludlow, & Mitescu, 2008), concepts related to social theory can contribute to teachers' understandings in this sense (Brennan & Noffke, 2009).
- Provide teachers with assignments that help them develop social justice principles and practices as well as assignments that address broader institutional inequities that impact students' experiences (McDonald, 2008).
- Plan activities in which teachers spend time interacting with community activists and people from neighborhoods who experience inequalities and injustices (Zeichner, 2011) which will allow them to see and live things first hand.
- Help teachers become aware of the importance of enhancing students' learning and their life chances (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).
- Invite guest speakers to talk about their experiences as people who normally deal with social problems in their own neighborhoods.
- Provide teachers with the possibility to not only develop knowledge and skills for good teaching but also dispositions toward social justice.
- Emphasize the development of teachers' behaviors, attitudes, and values that will help them to teach those to their students so that they can live as good citizens.

Once teachers learn the principles and practices of a SJLTE perspective and the possible strategies to apply it in their classes, they can start to transform their teaching practices. Nevertheless, given that teacher learning for social justice is not an easy job and teachers might be resistant to work from this perspective or might not want to assume this role of leaders of social change (Zeichner, 2011), programs should start by promoting teachers' awareness of the importance of teaching from this perspective, therefore, they can move from awareness to action in the work place (Hawkins, 2011). Since working from a social justice perspective may require many teachers to change their world views to understand the structural aspects of schools and then analyze and criticize the macro level structures, it is not realistic to expect teachers to work as activists (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) in the early stages of their professional development process. Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) argue that dealing with

social justice issues at the individual level, that is, in teachers' own classrooms, is an important starting point. Once they accomplish this first step, they can be prepared to deal with social justice at the structural level, i.e., in the school and society. Working this way might provide a bridge for them to move to criticize the larger structures that create schooling inequities (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Nonetheless, for an appropriate implementation of PDPs of this kind, designers and facilitators of programs should possess a number of qualities that would allow them to reach teachers and accomplish programs goals. Designers and facilitators should see teachers as professionals, that is, as people who possess a broad body of knowledge about their area (Noffke, 2009; Zepeda, 2008) and a degree of autonomy to make decisions about their teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hoban, 2002); as people who are able to work collaboratively with others to reflect on and discuss their work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hoban, 2002; Noffke, 2009); as generators of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hoban, 2002; Noffke, 2009); as people who have the capacity to think critically about their work and promote changes; as people who can become critical and activists and aware of the consequences of their work in society; and as people who can develop moral and ethical values that guide their work. Understanding these issues is paramount for designers and facilitators of PDPs and as such they may require their own professional development in all the aspects, principles, practices, and qualities described above.

A Social Justice Perspective Translated Into Teaching Practices

Very often teachers wonder about the ways in which they can translate a social justice perspective into teaching practices. Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) provide examples of some of the practices that teachers who work from this perspective carry out with their students. It is important to acknowledge, however, that such practices are related to the different conceptions of social justice in teacher education presented above and it is also important that teachers understand which of them they ascribe to and want to promote through their teaching.

Teachers working from a social justice perspective:

- Pay a lot of attention to the knowledge and skills proposed in the curriculum and critique them in order to improve them.
- Redesign or design curricula including social justice issues.
- Connect curriculum to issues of oppression and racial and economic inequities.
- Challenge and alter the standard curriculum.
- Encourage students to question traditional ideas and expand their worldviews by exposing them to different points of view.
- Build on students' cultural and linguistic resources, and attempt to reach every student.
- Accommodate and differentiate instruction.
- Promote critical thinking and deep questioning in students.
- Have and hold high expectations about all students and push them to meet those goals.
- Build good relationships with students and their families and respect student's parents and work with them.
- Develop a culture of respect among students and between students and teacher.
- Know their students and care for them.
- Advocate for all students.
- Engage in community work and get students engaged in these kinds of activities for any sort of work that would contribute to the improvement of that community.
- Participate and build collaborations/coalitions to support students and improve schools.
- Participate in activism.

- Break down racial or class barriers for students.
- Teach their students about democracy and civic engagement.
- Affirm and build on students' differences.
- Create learning opportunities for their students being aware of how these would influence their life chances and live a successful future.
- Build on their students' knowledge and skills.
- Make curriculum relevant and applicable to students.
- Know and understand students' social and cultural contexts.
- Are fair to all students in the classroom without showing favorites.
- Challenge students' stereotypes or biases related to race, class, gender, or sexual orientation.
- Value students' diversity and establish a caring and inclusive environment (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Clearly, these and other practices apply to language education and all subjects and areas of knowledge in schools, and thus, it is up to teachers to decide which practices they want and can carry out with their students because they believe they can contribute to their education. The following example illustrates how two English teachers in two public schools decided to incorporate a social justice perspective into their teaching practice and what they were able to achieve with their students.

Learning to Teach for Social Justice Within a PDP

Between January 2009 and December 2010, I conducted a case study with two public high school English teachers who participated in a PDP that a colleague and I created. This program consisted of a teacher community which included a study group, peer coaching, and workshops for a group of nine English teachers from two different public high schools that were located in a very poor and violent neighborhood. The study had as one of its purposes to understand the knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to social justice that both teachers developed as they were involved in this community. I include in this paper some examples of what was found in this sense to illustrate how a PDP that included a social justice perspective contributed to teachers' learning and how what they learned helped them to change their teaching practices at the classroom and the school level.[1]

Data collection sources were interviews, class observations, documents, and tape-recorded meetings of the study group and planning and feedback sessions with the teachers. Data analysis included a combination of a deductive and an inductive approach. For the inductive approach I followed Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson (2001) and Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) data analysis procedures. I read all sources of data several times and highlighted the passages that I considered relevant to my research questions. Then, I coded passages using themes and categories relevant to these questions. For the deductive approach, I used concepts related to teacher learning and development and the theoretical framework that guided the study which provided some of the themes that emerged from the analysis. I compared and contrasted categories looking for relationships among them, wrote analytical memos to make sense of the data, and drew some preliminary interpretations. To ensure the validity or trustworthiness of my interpretations, I triangulated the different sources of data and did member checking by sharing the findings with the teachers (Stake, 2006).

Data indicated that the two teachers developed a more critical perspective about their work which allowed them to change certain teaching behaviors that favored their teaching practices and, as a consequence, their students' education. Such teaching behaviors are in accord with the practices that teachers

1 It is not my intention to present the findings of the study in this paper. My intention is just to provide an example to show how teachers can learn to teach for social justice within a PDP.

who, according to Cochran-Smith et al. (2009), work from a SJLTE perspective carry out with their students. This is, having and holding high expectations about all students, building good relationships with students, knowing students and caring for them, participating and building collaborations to support students and improve schools, making curriculum relevant and applicable to students, and knowing and understanding students' social and cultural contexts.

Knowing Students, Caring for Them, and Building Good Relationships With Them

One of the teachers did not have a good relationship with her students. She did not treat them well since she became very impatient when they did not pay attention in class or did not want to participate. However, during her involvement in the PDP, she was able to consider the many social problems that affected the lives of her students and the difficult situations they have to face such as coming to class without having breakfast or being worried about the violence in their neighborhoods. Being able to consider student's social problems and their difficult economic situation gave this teacher the capacity to understand students' behavior in class and thus she started to build better relationships with them by treating them well, dialoguing with them, and caring for them as illustrated by the following quote:

> Before I was very indifferent or I told them off all the time and it didn't help at all. I got very angry when I saw that they were not doing things the way they should. But now, I try to be more patient, to dialogue with them, to see that if they are not paying attention or working it is because something is happening and I have to find out what is happening. Thus, I think that I have improved in that aspect; in the way I treat the students . . . I try to get along well with them, to dialogue with them, to be more patient. (Interview, Marcela, 06/15/09)

The social justice component of the PDP offered this teacher the possibility to analyze and understand students' personal and social issues that she was not able or open to understand before and helped her to reassess the way she related to them.

Making Curriculum/Lessons Relevant and Applicable to Students and Knowing and Understanding Their Social and Cultural Contexts

Both teachers understood the importance of presenting topics related to students' social and cultural contexts so that the lessons were relevant and applicable to their real lives. One of the teachers, for instance, incorporated activities with materials which were more related to the everyday life and experiences of her students.

> Another thing is that you have to give students examples related to their experiences, the context where they are involved, as when we worked with [the topic of] my family . . . students looked interested in that. [For instance] the names . . . they felt identified with those names [because] those were names from here [Colombia]. Then, all those details help you. (Interview, Cristina, 11/25/09)

This teacher was able to understand the importance of including in her classes materials with examples from students' social and cultural contexts which allowed her to make her lessons more relevant and motivating for her students.

Having and Holding High Expectations About All Students

One of the teachers did not care much about students' learning and how her lessons could contribute to their learning and the responsibility she had in that process, which, in turn, translated into not having high expectations of students. It was common to hear her complaining about the students and about their futures. Along the process in the PDP, she realized she needed to change her attitude towards her students and her role as a teacher:

> [I see] a change in my attitude concerning my role as a teacher, with my students. Before I went to the classroom and taught. [I didn't care if students] learned or not. [Now] I see the responsibility that I have in their learning. . . . What was important [for me] before was to teach some topics even if the students didn't learn about them. I realize now that what is important is that students learn something from a topic. (Interview, Marcela, /06/15/09)

This change in attitude helped her realize the importance of having high expectations of the students so that they could learn more and, for instance, be more prepared to pass the entrance exam to a university, which would mean a chance for them to succeed in life and not to end up being part of the armed insurgent groups or gangs in their neighborhoods.

Participating and Building Collaborations to Support Students and Improve Schools

Finally, one of the teachers was able to promote, with my support, school change by challenging the system. The principal and coordinators changed some conditions to support the teaching of English due to our constant requests. They separated the English and Spanish subjects which were organized as one area of study for which students needed to pass either one of them in order to pass the area. For example, students could fail the English class and still pass the area, a situation which was interfering with teachers' efforts to change their teaching methodology. They also provided better teaching conditions to teachers by moving the English classrooms to the quietest rooms in the school for teachers to better implement the new teaching methodology, which included listening activities that were not working well due to the constant outside noise. This particular teacher started to voice her concerns in the school meetings. She also set an appointment with the principal to tell him about how the integration of English and Spanish was not contributing much to her change of methodology. In this way, she was able to voice her concern in relation to this regulation and how it was affecting her teaching and her students' learning.

In this study, teachers' work as agents of change remained at the classroom and the school level and did not cover the community outside the school because of time issues. With more time to work together, we might have been able to continue working in this direction and accomplish the kind of teaching for social justice that Zeichner (2011) proposes. This example suggests that learning to teach for social justice is feasible and possible to achieve, and that language teachers when challenged or given the opportunity, are able to explore and align with a SJLTE approach that not only emphasizes changing understandings of language learning, teaching and usage, accepts the existence of inequities in education, and imagines fair social futures for people but also emphasizes the responsibility of teachers in being agents of social change (Hawkins, 2011). It is important to acknowledge that this PDP missed many of the features stated above that should characterize teacher learning for social justice and that could have provided both teachers with other important learning to improve their practice even more. Most of what these teachers learned to do with their students was promoted through dialogue and collaborative work between them and me and their subsequent reflection on their practice.

Implications of a Social Justice Language Teacher Education Perspective

Implementing a social justice perspective in language education requires the support and commitment of different educational stakeholders. The suggestions below are based on discussions that scholars in the field have had in relation to SJTE and SJLTE and my own insights as regards how this support and commitment could be built.

Teacher Educators

To prepare language teachers to work for social justice, we need to prepare teacher educators first. As Zeichner (2011) states: "A major limitation in the social justice agenda, is the lack of capacity among teacher educators to do the job that needs to be done" (p. 16). He argues that many teacher educators have not had successful experiences working in the poor, diverse, and segregated schools systems that we currently have (Zeichner as cited in Zeichner, 2011). Teacher educators need to model the same teaching practices and activism as well as the same caring, compassionate, and responsive relationships that they hope teachers promote with their own students in schools (Conklin as cited in Zeichner, 2011). Moreover, they should be able to help teachers to deeply examine their attitudes and assumptions about education and their roles as teachers that may not allow them to work towards social justice in their own classrooms and schools.

However, since teachers' learning for social justice is not an easy job and teachers might show resistance to work from this perspective because they have to achieve what reform initiatives demand or because they do not want to assume this role of leaders of social change (Zeichner, 2011), teacher education programs should start by raising teachers' awareness of the importance of teaching from this perspective so that they can move from awareness to individual action and then to the structural for a broader social impact. Additionally, language teacher educators should construct partnerships with schools to work on the design and implementation of curriculums and pedagogical strategies that are based on a social justice perspective.

Professional Development Program Coordinators and Policy Makers

Given that policy makers and many PDP coordinators in the country work hand in hand to provide in-service teachers with programs to attain the goals set by the government in terms of language teaching and learning in schools, they should also work to include in those programs objectives that reflect a social justice perspective and that prepare teachers to become agents of change, not only in their schools but also outside them. Preparing teachers in the knowledge and skills the government has established to help students to be competent in a globalized world, which normally offers possibilities for some students but not for all, is not enough if we really want to provide them with the kind of education they deserve and that can offer them better life chances.

Moreover, these stakeholders should move from PDPs that focus on issues of language, that is, grammar, function, structure, and usage to include content and activities that focus on linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogies, that critically explore a social justice approach to language teaching, and that emphasize the responsibility of teachers in being agents of social change (Hawkins, 2011). Policy makers and PDP coordinators who really care about students' learning and their possibilities to succeed in life should design PDPs that combine the characteristics of effective professional development and the kinds of goals, principles, contents, and activities suggested above with the purpose of preparing in-service teachers to be able to work from a social justice perspective with their own students.

Researchers

Several issues should be considered by researchers in our language teacher education field. Researchers should analyze and monitor PDPs that attempt to infuse a social justice language perspective to really understand how teachers are learning to teach. Moreover, keeping in mind that previous research has concentrated on teachers' attitudes and ignored their actions (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009), researchers should study the impact of PDPs in teachers' actions inside and outside the schools. Furthermore, they

should conduct studies of PDPs in which the learning of in-service teachers in terms of social justice is followed and analyzed across time in order to see its evolution and the impact of such learning in their teaching practices. This last item leads us to a very complex but essential research issue which is to study the relationship between teacher learning and student learning. We need to understand how what teachers learn in PDPs structures to promote a social justice language perspective can contribute to students' learning. Finally, researchers should conduct studies to determine the time it takes for teachers to move from awareness raising about social justice to individual action and then from individual action to action inside and outside the school as well as what it requires for teachers to move from awareness raising to action inside and outside the school. Understanding all these issues will provide researchers with insights to theorize about teacher learning and professional development and stakeholders with ideas to plan PDPs for in-service teachers accordingly.

Teachers

In-service teachers themselves should commit to the work that a social justice perspective implies if they really want to provide their students with better life chances. Given that teaching is a political act, teachers are called to learn to work from a political perspective such as this one and become the change agents our education system needs. In this sense, we need teachers who are committed to their students' education and who do not give up the possibility to change the oppressive structures and practices we are experiencing in these neoliberal times (McInerney, 2007). Furthermore, in times of reform and accountability such as the ones we are living, educators should accept the need for change and work to design curricula and pedagogies that respond to the needs of their students and provide them with better life chances.

Administrators

Administrators should encourage and support language teachers to work from a social justice perspective by providing them with the necessary time and resources to participate in the PDPs they are offered. They should welcome in their schools PDPs that are designed to promote a social justice perspective in language teachers for the benefit of students. Moreover, they should support teachers in building relationships with families and the community so that they can move from individual action to social action outside the schools. Last, but not least, they should support teachers when challenging language regulations or policies that promote inequalities and injustices in schools and consider teachers' perspectives and voices when deciding whether these should be implemented or not. Because policies are enacted in schools, teachers can resist them, modify them, and appropriate them at the school level (McInerney, 2007) after considering the benefits or drawbacks for students.

Final Remarks

Teaching from a social justice perspective requires teachers' understanding that they themselves are responsible for challenging inequities in society (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). They should be advocates for students and their efforts should support larger efforts for social change (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) as they understand that both inequities in education and low quality education are closely related to the lack of access to decent jobs, which affects people's access to housing, healthcare, food, and so on (Hawkins, 2011; Zeichner, 2011) and, at the same time, the lack of all these basic needs might hinder students' school attendance (Hawkins, 2011). Therefore, teachers are called to accept the responsibility they have in the construction of better futures for their students and as consequence a better society. However, constructing a better society is not

only the responsibility of teachers. Although teachers can play a fundamental role in dealing with issues of inequities and injustices in schools, they are only part of the solution given that changing societies requires a broader political work at different levels (Berliner as cited in Zeichner, 2011).

Although for many stakeholders working from a social justice perspective may sound very idealistic, it is possible to accomplish. The example of the two teachers provided in this paper is precisely a proof of what teachers can achieve when they are willing to change their attitude and accept the challenge. Language teacher educators, teachers, and in-service and pre-service language teachers are thus called to begin that change that our country needs and demands from us. We have all heard that teaching is a political endeavor; however, many of us do not fully understand what this implies. SJLTE provides us with the opportunity to understand what it means to be political, make our job more meaningful, and contribute to a more equal and just society as we provide our students with access to learning and better life chances (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Designing and implementing professional development programs that offer possibilities to teachers other than just preparing them to teach the knowledge and skills policy makers determine as important to be competitive in the world economy, is paramount in language education. Therefore, PDPS should be structured in a way that they will provide in-service teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that allow them to change their teaching practices and carry out more effective work with their students as they help them make important connections between language and the world around them and in a way that is meaningful for them. In other words, PDPS should be designed in a way that can help teachers to separate or detach from language issues such as grammar, function, structure, and usage and move to provide teachers with the opportunity to understand their role in society and their responsibility as agents of social change. A SJLTE perspective can offer this possibility to language teachers.

Exploring a different way of working with teachers that could help them construct better futures for their students is paramount in times of reforms such as the ones we are living. Experiences for students in schools can be different, but we need to prepare in-service and pre-service teachers to be open to work from a social justice perspective that will allow them to understand the political purposes of education. There is still the hope that despite the many oppressive neoliberal reforms, teachers in our country can exercise their autonomy to achieve alternative, progressive, and emancipatory practices and promote socially just schools (McInerney, 2007).

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