Chapter 11
Critical Ethnography in a Language Classroom:
Learning to Become an Equitable Practitioner

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses a critical mini classroom ethnography as a pedagogical tool for educators working with multilingual learners in K-12 or adult settings. Critical classroom ethnography and culturally responsive instruction in language teaching are discussed. For practicing language educators, a questionnaire, an interview guide, and a reflection template are offered. For pre-service teachers, a structured observation template is included. The suggested tools are discussed in relation to equitable and inclusive educational practices to help develop critical ethnographic skills as they pertain to critically reflective observation which can be utilized by all teachers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the mini classroom ethnography's use by a candidate in a language teacher preparation program in the US led to the process of critical and linguistic self-reflection and transformation towards becoming a more culturally responsive and inclusive practitioner.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are in a sense researchers in their own classrooms, either informally or formally, which can help to better understand students' language choices and cultural norms, inform oneself to be a reflective practitioner, and create space for promoting equitable moments of learning. Even when a teacher

is not conducting a formal research study, they can engage in culturally responsive instruction (CRI) by identifying students' cultural and linguistic practices and experiences. This awareness can be drawn on, endorsed, and maintained through relevant instruction that recognizes students' strengths and contributes to empowerment and better student achievement (Powell, et al., 2016). The authors of this article maintain that one part of this process is gaining a good understanding of the learners, while another part is better understanding oneself in relation to the teaching space.

This chapter discusses critical praxis in language teaching and advocacy using instructional practices and tools including a critically-oriented mini ethnographic case study as a pedagogical tool for pre- and in-service teachers working with multilingual learners to develop and/or work towards culturally responsive instruction. Pre-service teachers can be those who are completing teacher preparation programs to begin their teaching careers while in-service refers to practicing educators in the field of English or Other Language Education. In the chapter, the term 'teachers' or 'educators'' will be used to refer to both pre- and in-service teachers. These can be teachers of K-12 ELD/immersion programs and post-secondary TESOL, EFL, ELD, and/or EAP classrooms and centers of learning.

The chapter focuses on the area of language teaching and discusses the combined perspectives of an instructor and a student who have participated in a similar assignment. We first introduce the reader to the concept of critically-oriented ethnography and culturally responsive instruction in education as pedagogical tools for teachers. We then discuss conducting research on one's own teaching context, being a careful observer, and a critical reflective practitioner by using a questionnaire (see Appendix), *Interview Guide*, and *Reflection Template* guided by the Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol (CRIOP) (Powell & Rightmyer, 2011; Powell et. al., 2016).

Next, we discuss the specific skills and steps that teachers should take away from doing the ethnographic case study for their own teaching practice. To support these practitioners to become more culturally responsive educators, fieldwork journals and an *Observation Template* are discussed with the CRIOP pillars. Although any educator, whether they are a seasoned practitioner or just starting out in the area of language teaching can use one or all of these tools at any point in their career, they can also be used in combination to conduct the mini-ethnographic case study. We then proceed to provide an example of how an ethnographic case study was implemented in the context of a teacher preparation program at the University of Southern California. In this section, Author 1 discusses the process of conducting the mini-ethnography case-study in a secondary immersion classroom and how she was lead to observe and reflect on multilingual and multicultural students through culturally sustaining methods. Specific tools such as course-specific fieldwork journaling and the *Interview* and CRIOP-based *Observation Templates* are discussed in relation to becoming a more critically reflective and culturally responsive practitioner. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the suggested approach and additional resources for those interested in further readings.

CONCEPT

Ethnography in Education

If not presented with live moments of interaction, to theorize about a classroom one might rely on others' descriptions, memory, and/or some degree of imagination. Recreating scenarios of classroom dynamics for innovative future possibilities of education pale in comparison to observing and considering the lin-

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