

Implementing a Critical Community of Practice Within a University–Based Teacher Induction Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter describes the initial stage of implementing a critical community of practice within a university-based teacher induction program in Southern California. This case highlights how novice critical teachers work together to support one another, engage in problem-solving, and bridge theories to action to address challenges they face in their teaching. Implications for using critical community of practice in academic programs and professional programs to bridge critical theories to equitable practice are presented.

“The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.” - James Baldwin “A Talk to Teachers”

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“There’s no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom.” - Paulo Freire, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”

CONTEXT

Being a new teacher is difficult. Many new teachers struggle to reconcile their experiences in teacher preparation programs, with the real world demands of classroom management and the need to understand the culture and politics of school settings (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2005). The arduous task of being a classroom teacher becomes even more complex for those who devote themselves to becoming critical educators. There is a great deal of variation in how the title **critical educator** is conceptualized, which will be explored within this chapter, yet the commonality across these definitions centers around the idea of examining and challenging oppression within and outside the classroom. Critical educators seek to address systems of inequalities within their pedagogical practice and the institutions they are situated within and is one of the features that separate teachers and critical educators (Hinchey, 2004).

To put the demand of being a teacher into context, it’s helpful to consider the role of attrition within the field. Forty-four percent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll et al., 2018). While quantitative data is not widely available on the attrition rates for critical educators specifically, there is robust evidence that suggests these educators face added challenges, including institutional and individual resistance, lack of support from colleagues and students, and inadequate resources (Dover et al., 2013). These challenges leave many teachers feeling isolated and demoralized, two critical contributions to leaving the profession (Kawasaki, Clark & Francois, 2020). In 2021, as many conservative state legislatures are passing laws banning critical pedagogies aligned with Critical Race Theory, these challenges have increased intensity.

To support new teachers, the “Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment” (BTSA) program was established to address the problem of early-career teacher attrition for those within their first five years of the profession. In 1992, the California Department of Education began requiring newly credentialed teachers to participate in BTSA to provide a scaffolded transition from teacher education programs at districts and universities into their first years of schooling (Mitchell et al., 2017). BTSA has gone through various changes over the last 30 years, implementing specific teacher “induction” standards and expanding the program to include Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) as induction program providers (Lovo et al., 2006). This case explores an induction program at a large public state university in Southern California. In particular, the discussion that follows describes how the induction program sought to offer support for novice teachers with a commitment to **critical pedagogy (CP)** as they ventured into their first years of teaching. This research explores the emergent identity of teachers as critical educators by investigating their pedagogical practice, which critical theorists like Paulo Friere argue is key to the development of a critical consciousness (Bizzell, 1992). According to Freire (1970), “CP is an approach to education that facilitates learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (pg. 37). Through this case, we will discuss the role of critical pedagogy in implementing a critical community of practice (CCOP) within this teacher induction program.

In addition to pedagogy, relationships are another critical element of successfully supporting novice teachers. A literature review reveals the importance of novice teachers developing and maintaining relationships with like-minded teachers through regular meetings focused on inquiry, mutual support, and

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