Chapter 11
The Struggle Is Real:
Teachers' Experiences With Recruiting Critical Digital Literacy to Their Practices

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ABSTRACT

Digital environments offer opportunities and spaces for students to engage in critical literacy practices. This necessitates a teacher's critical understanding of the social structures at work in online environments while instructing students. In this chapter, findings are presented from a mixed-methods study of four practicing teachers who characterized themselves as having strong personal and pedagogical knowledge of critical digital literacies (CDL) and claimed to recruit that knowledge to their classroom practices. Data analysis of teacher surveys, lesson plans, classroom observations and interviews pointed to several obstacles the teachers faced with incorporating critical dimensions into their students' technology use. The obstacles include: school/district technology restrictions; a lack of in depth understanding of CDL, and limited modeling and opportunities during teacher education and teacher development programs to build and recruit CDL to their practices. Implications for teacher education and development and suggestions for future research are presented.

PURPOSE

Digital environments provide dialogic opportunities for students to engage in critical literacy practices (Pangrazio, 2016). This requires instruction founded on sociocultural awareness and teachers' critical understanding of digital environments (Hosek & Handsfield, 2019; Song, 2016; Watulak & Kinzer, 2013). However, there is an over-emphasis in teacher education and professional development on the technical aspects of integrating digital literacy practices into instruction (Philip & Olivares-Pasillas, 2016; Selwyn, 2016). This is particularly the case in work centered around technological pedagogical content

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knowledge (TPACK) (Hosek, 2018; Koehler & Mishra, 2006, 2009). Less emphasis is devoted to the critical dimensions of digital literacy practices and development of a teacher's own critical digital literacies (CDL) (R. J. Chen, 2010; Philip & Olivares-Pasillas, 2016). This has led to digital literacy practices that are largely substitutive, resulting in superficial rather than meaningful student engagement in digital environments (Cuban, 2009; Author, 2018; Lim et al., 2013). In other words, such practices reproduce a functionalist frame, which "avoids ideological considerations (Marcuse, 1964), reflecting a positivist view that facts are separate from human values, thus avoiding explicit linkages between education and politics" (Edmondson, 2002, p. 113). This approach to and understanding of digital environments positions teachers and students as passive recipients of discourses present in those environments rather than active representatives of diverse perspectives.

In this paper, we share findings from a mixed-methods study investigating practicing teachers' beliefs about how they are prepared to critically integrate technology into their classroom practices and what led to and/or hindered their engagement in the critical dimensions of technology use in their teaching practices. Specifically, we explore the following question: What do practicing teachers who characterize themselves as having strong personal, pedagogical and technological knowledge of CDL identify as factors that support or hinder their abilities to engage CDL into their instruction? This research carries implications about both future research, such as pushing past functionalist frames (Edmondson, 2002) for technology use in educational settings, as well as the importance of connecting critical theory to digital literacy practices during teacher education and development programs.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

We reviewed literature in two areas: 1) studies concerning how the digital literacy and CDL practices of teacher candidates and practicing teachers has been conceptualized and measured; and 2) studies exploring how teacher candidates and teachers recruit a critical lens when integrating digital literacy tools into their instruction. In our review, we found a strong emphasis on the technical aspects of digital literacy practices in teacher education and professional development and less emphasis on the critical dimensions of teachers' digital literacy practices.

Measuring Digital Literacy and TPACK

There is an emphasis in the research on the technical aspects of digital literacy and the quantitative valuation of it. This is especially true of studies that rely on the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework and TPACK measurement instruments (Chai et al., 2010; Hofer & Grandgenett, 2012; Koh & Divaharan, 2011; Neiss, 2011; Schmidt et al., 2009). The TPACK framework connects teachers' domains of knowledge whereby "technology, pedagogy, and content do not exist in a vacuum, but rather, are instantiated in specific learning and teaching contexts" (Koehler et al., 2013, p. 16). See Figure 1 and Table 1 for detailed explanations of each TPACK component. Complexity of the knowledge domains that comprise TPACK led to issues of reliability and validity in multiple studies (Archambault & Barnett, 2010; Banister & Reinhart, 2012; Chai et al, 2010; Koh & Divaharan, 2011; Pamuk, 2012). Importantly, these studies stop short of considering the role of critical theory in the development of digital literacy practices despite Koehler, Mishra, and Cain's (2013) emphasis on the importance of context when operating in digital environments. Missing is consideration of the so-