Teaching Alternative Licensed Literacy Teachers to Learn from Practice:
A Critical Reflection Model

By Lasisi Ajayi

Introduction

The need to better prepare teachers for classroom realities is a goal shared by many teacher education programs. Hence, an important issue in teacher education is the need to explore the processes that candidates go through as they learn to teach. A view of learning to teach as a process suggests teacher education programs should provide candidates with a framework for developing more complex understandings of teaching. In essence, teacher education approaches should encapsulate "the complex, analytical, and inquiring nature of teaching" (Harford & MacRuairc, 2008, p. 1885). Hoffman, Roller, Maloch, Sailors, Duffy, and Beretvas (2005) argue for programs that emphasize "reflective thinking as central to learning and understanding teaching" (p. 269).

Lasisi Ajayi is a professor of language and literacy education in the Department of Education at San Diego State University Imperial Valley, Calexico, California.

However, while reflective practice has been generally embraced by teacher education programs, there is hardly a consensus about effective approaches to teaching it in the specific field of literacy education. In some programs, reflection is another means of transferring knowledge of how to implement good strategies to candidates (Jones & Enriquez, 2009). In many other programs, candidates are not required to

engage in "structural critiques of the arrangements and policies of schooling" (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan, 2009, p. 372). In such programs, reflection does not emphasize the need for candidates to make connections between their pedagogy and "economic structures, social and cultural conditions, and the way schooling works" (Smyth, 1989, p. 4). Indeed, rarely do discussions of reflective literacy teaching involve the competing perspectives about literacy education, what counts as effective reflective approaches, or what constitutes "scientific" reflective research. Roskos, Vukelich, and Risko (2001) put this problem bluntly: "How to help aspiring teachers become more reflective about their literacy teaching across the preparatory years is not clear, and proven strategies for improving reflection through professional education are lacking" (p. 595).

For reflection to be meaningful and relevant to the practice of alternative licensed literacy teachers (ALLTs), its conceptualization and practice has to pay more attention to how they uncover the tension between teaching and the complex social and cultural contexts in which they teach. Unlike student teachers, ALLTs engage in active teaching because they have their own classrooms. In addition, many of them have been teaching in the same school for two years. This unique situation suggests that ALLTs have practical experiences of school policies and practices that may "reinforce existing inequalities and systems of power and privilege" (Cochran-Smith, 2008, p.2), including accountability tests, mandated curriculum, scripted programs, tracking, and textbooks. Therefore, a critical literacy approach has the potential to help ALLTs develop skills and knowledge to analyze and critique practice in ways that deepen understanding of teaching in relation to the broader social and cultural factors that shape instructional practices (Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Smyth, 1989). For the purpose of this study, critical reflection is defined as an educational imagination that allows candidates to look at themselves and their situations with new eyes, and in the process, become conscious of the multiple ways they can interpret, critique, challenge, confront, and reconstruct teaching.

The research objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of using explicit instruction in methods courses to increase the capacity of ALLTs to develop critical reflective practice. The following research questions guided the study:

(a) In what ways do ALLTs critique and question their own practice?

(b) What connections do they make between learning to teach literacy and the wider society?

(c) In what ways do the participants articulate literacy teaching and learning principles that inform their specific situations and contexts of practice?

This study makes important contributions to bridging the theory-practice gap in reflection between teacher education and the specific field of literacy teacher education. A study of critical reflection from interdisciplinary perspectives between the wider field of teacher education and the specific field of literacy teacher education

offers useful insights and strengthens literacy education programs. This study also demonstrates how literacy methods professors can use an explicit instruction model to support ALLTs' critical reflection. Explicit instruction involves a framework for organizing teaching/learning where the professor "explicitly includes declarative, procedural, and conditional understandings within a gradual release of responsibility, or heavily scaffolded format" (Robinson & Buly, 2007, p. 90). The goal of explicit instruction is to facilitate critical, deliberate, purposeful, pre-planned, shared, and regular reflective practice.

Alternative Licensed Literacy Teachers and Teacher Education

ALLT, as used in this study, refers to individuals who are actively engaged in teaching in schools while completing their certification at a university. The need for alternative licensed teachers was raised in the 1980s for divergent reasons that may be summarized as "concerns for improving teacher quantity and teacher quality" (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p. 123). Since then, all the 50 states in the nation have implemented some type of alternative teacher certification. The core of the program across the states is the focus on developing new pathways for certifying non-traditional candidates into the teaching field. By guidelines set up by the different states, candidates must: (a) have at least a bachelor's degree in fields other than education, (b) pass specified tests, (c) take coursework in professional education studies in universities, (d) participate in field-based programs, and (e) have support from in-school mentors (National Center for Education Information, 2007; Maloy, Seidman, Pine, & Ludlow, 2006).

Different models of alternative teacher certification are practiced in different states. Most models include features such as cohort groups, evening or weekend coursework schedules, induction activities, self-contained classrooms, appointment of in-school cooperating teachers and site administrators. Research in the alternative teacher certification suggests that the program has been helpful in providing teachers for hard-to-staff schools. The program also creates opportunities for bringing into teaching new groups of candidates (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Candidates, because of their age and background, bring special life experiences to teaching and provide students different perspectives. In addition, candidates bring high academic records into the program. At the site of this study, for example, the minimum requirement for admission is a 3.0 grade point average (GPA). Many candidates have higher GPAs and even a few have master's degrees. However, critics of the program contend that its graduates tend to have "greater difficulties in the classroom" (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002, p. 286).

A Theoretical Construct

The goal of critical reflection is to help candidates interpret, evaluate, and critique their teaching and uncover the tension between practice and the broader

social and cultural context in which teaching is embedded (Freire, 2000; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Smyth, 1989; Van Manen, 1977). Similarly, Shor and Freire (1987) argue that literacy learning is about the production of new knowledge based on two dimensions—*critical reflection* and *action*—where individuals relate literacy to social-cultural contexts of education and challenge, critique and transform their worlds. Reflecting on the link between theory and practice, Freire (2000) argues that the interaction between critical reflection and action produces praxis: "the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (p. 79). This theoretical shift from a knowledge transmission-oriented approach to critical reflection requires teachers to critically examine their actions and connect teaching to the socio-economic structure of the broader society with the goal of changing the social conditions of inequality and be transformative (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Nieto, 2006; Wenger, 2005).

The notion of critical literacy, built on reflection and action, emphasizes the need for teacher education to develop candidates' ability to understand texts as a social construct that reflects ideas, perspectives, beliefs, and assumptions held by some social groups. Working from sociological perspectives, Street (2003), Freire (2000), Luke (1997), and Bourdieu (1991) argue for theoretical understandings that frame teaching in terms of interconnections between literacy pedagogies and social structures in which classroom practices are embedded. Hence, Bourdieu (1991) contends that literacy teaching/learning should be viewed within the context of the wider structures of power relations: the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the broader society. Bourdieu's (1991, 1986) theory of capital and related notions of linguistic habitus, social, economic, and cultural capital becomes a powerful framework for teachers to analyze contexts of teaching, reflect on practice, and develop insights into how social structures and cultural forces mediate literacy teaching/learning. Viewed from this theoretical position, the role of teacher education programs is, therefore, to help candidates acquire skills for questioning, challenging, critiquing, and transforming the relationship between texts, language and social structures.

In his effort to understand how theoretical knowledge is translated into curricula development and school practice, Van Manen (1977) uses a critical reflection model and identifies three interrelated and intertwined hierarchical levels of reflection. The first level—*technical*—is concerned with the technical application of knowledge to achieve certain ends. Hatton and Smith (1995) contend that technical reflection deals with effective means of achieving specific educational ends. The second level—practical—deals with how individuals combine technical and practical reflection to engage in examinations, analyses, and interpretative understandings of concepts: meanings, knowledge, and their purposes. The third level—critical provides a critique of the social conditions of teaching by relating literacy instruction to the broader sociopolitical context of instruction. These categories are opened to contestation.

In a similar effort to connect theory with practice, Schon (1987), on the other hand, identifies two levels of theories of action: "reflection-on-action" and "reflec-

tion-in-action" (p. 26). Schon (1987) defines reflection-on-action as thinking back on a previous action to uncover how specific behavior brings about a particular outcome. Schon (1987) also explains reflection-in-action as thinking and reshaping while the action is on-going. While the first theory has no immediate connection to present action, the second seeks to modify the action while in progress.

Van Manen's (1977) and Schon's (1987) postulations on the connections between theory and practice are complementary and crucial to effective teacher preparation: how to prepare candidates to make the linkages between "economic structures, social and cultural conditions, and the way schooling works" (Smyth, 1989, p. 4). Both Van Manen (1977) and Schon (1987) conceptualize teaching in terms of: (a) teacher thinking and teacher action, (b) teacher making connections between specific contexts of teaching and personal experiences, and (c) a practice where candidates evaluate and critique the social structures in which teaching is embedded.

Review of Related Literature

The pioneering research of Smyth (1989), Schon (1987), and Van Manen (1977) lays the foundation for the central role of reflection in teacher education. Korthagen (2001) notes its potential as "an important means to link theory and practice" (p. 12). Wenger (2005) contends that reflective practice helps teachers to focus on the relationship between practice and theory, which is "always a complex, interactive one" (p. 48). This focus on the central role of reflection in teacher education is crucial. Schon (1987) denounces the traditional technical-rationality approach of teacher education that separates theory from practice and proposes reflection-in-action—where candidates use the specificity of their particular contexts to construct knowledge.

Following Schon (1987), researchers in teacher education have provided substantive studies in reflective practice (e.g., Hatton & Smith, 1995; Korthagen, 2001; Smyth, 1989). For example, Wenger (2005) and Lave (1996), both theorists, refine and extend the notion of reflective practice. Together they argue that teaching is a process of participation in social practice and that reflection serves as a vehicle for exploring possibilities, reinventing the self and at the same time transforming society. Wenger (2005) posits that engagement and imagination are central to reflective practices. Wenger (2005) also contends that a reflective practice "combines the ability both to engage and to distance—to identify with an enterprise as well as to view it in context, with the eyes of an outsider" (p. 217). From the perspective of teaching as a social participation, while engagement affords teachers opportunities to expand the possibilities for learning, imagination allows them to relate teaching to broader sociopolitical contexts.

Many studies have experimented with different pedagogical approaches for preparing reflective teachers, including portfolio, journal writing, case studies, interactive writing, and videotapes. While the availability of large number of studies in reflective teaching seems to point to abundant research in teacher education,

critical reflection is in reality under-researched and under-theorized in the specific field of literacy teacher education. Most of the available studies tend to focus on two areas: (a) Characteristics of literacy teacher candidate's reflective teaching, and (b) pedagogical strategies that enhance literacy reflective practice as candidates learn to teach literacy. It is, therefore, not a surprise that many of the existing studies do not investigate how candidates critique their practice to better understand the sociopolitical context of teaching.

However, a few studies have begun to examine the issue of critical reflection as a tool of preparing literacy teacher candidates to make connections between teaching and wider social contexts. Richardson and Murray (2007) explore how reflective practice in literacy methods courses helps preservice literacy teachers gain critical consciousness and conclude that such candidates gain "an informed perspective to improve learning and practice" (p. 76) when they reflect on the social-cultural forces that shape their practice. Also, Jones and Enriquez (2009) explore the interplay between students' formal learning and their personal, social and political experiences. The study suggests that teacher education programs should prepare candidates who are committed to teaching critical practices that prepare students to challenge the reproduction of power relations in schools. Beans and Stevens (2002) examine the effect of scaffolded reflection in literacy education courses for candidates. The findings show that the candidates tend to rely on societal discourse to reflect existing ideologies rather than challenging them. Also, Elish-Piper (2001) uses teaching inquiry projects to promote reflection. She argues that the candidates enhance their knowledge bases of literacy instruction through the project.

The above literature review points to the fact that teacher education programs use different approaches for reflection. Many of the approaches fail to carefully delineate teaching strategies that might scaffold ALLTs' thinking and teaching beyond existing schemas. In particular, many reflective approaches do not clearly identify strategies that can help ALLTs critically analyze and critique structural inequalities of the school in ways that "deepen their understandings of the contextual and socio-political dimensions of teaching practice" (Roskos et al., 2001, p. 598). However, because of the confusion in reflective practice, Roskos et al. (2001) argue that "much remains muddled and confused as to its purpose, development, and role in preparing new teachers of reading" (p. 596). Therefore, the contribution of this study is to provide: (a) a conceptual frame for teaching and assessing reflection, (b) an explicit instruction model, and (c) a frame of socio-contextual issues involved in teaching literacy.

Context of the Study

The study was conducted in a public university in Southern California. The teacher education division of the university has a total of about 151 candidates in both the elementary and high school credential programs. The teacher candidates

work as interns, full-time and substitute teachers, and teacher assistants. They attend classes between 4:00 p.m. and 10 p.m. Mondays to Fridays. The student population is about 90% Hispanic and 10% White. The university is situated in a county of 142,361 people. More than 81% of the county's population is Hispanic while Whites and African-Americans account for 12.37% and 3.95%, respectively. About 25% of residents live below the poverty line, as compared to statewide 13.4% (U.S. Census Website).

Methodology

This is a self-study. Self-study as used in this study refers to teachers' effort at investigating their practices to better inform teaching and improve students' learning (Loughran, 2004). Pinnegar and Russell (1995) cited in Loughran (2004) define self-study as teachers' work to "investigate questions[s] of practice . . . that are individually importantly and also of broader interest to the teacher education community" (p. 9). The studies of Loughran and Russell (2002) and Samaras (2002) provide some methodological justifications for the design of the study. Loughran (2007) argues that the goal of self-study is the teacher's desire to "better align their teaching intents with their teaching actions" (p. 12). Samaras, Beck, Freese, and Kosnik (2005), LaBoskey (2004), and Samaras (2002) argue for a methodological approach that emphasizes the interplay between theories of teaching and actual practice within a particular classroom setting. Video reflection is, therefore, appropriate for this study as it provided the ALLTs the opportunity to explore how they could enhance the quality of teaching and improve student learning.

Participants

Forty-four ALLTs participated in the study. There were 30 female (68.18%) and 14 (31.82%) male participants. Also, there were 37 (84.10%) Hispanics, six (13.63%) Caucasians, and one (2.27%) biracial. The age of the participants ranged from 26 to 47. Twenty-three (52.28%) participants were full-time teachers. Full-time teachers had first degrees and had been hired to teach by their school districts while completing their credentials. Also, nine participants (20.45%) were university interns. University interns were in a program designed for individuals who were teaching while completing their credentials. They had first degrees before they were enrolled in the internship program. Interns had their own classrooms and were paid by their school districts. Eight (18.18%) were substitute teachers.
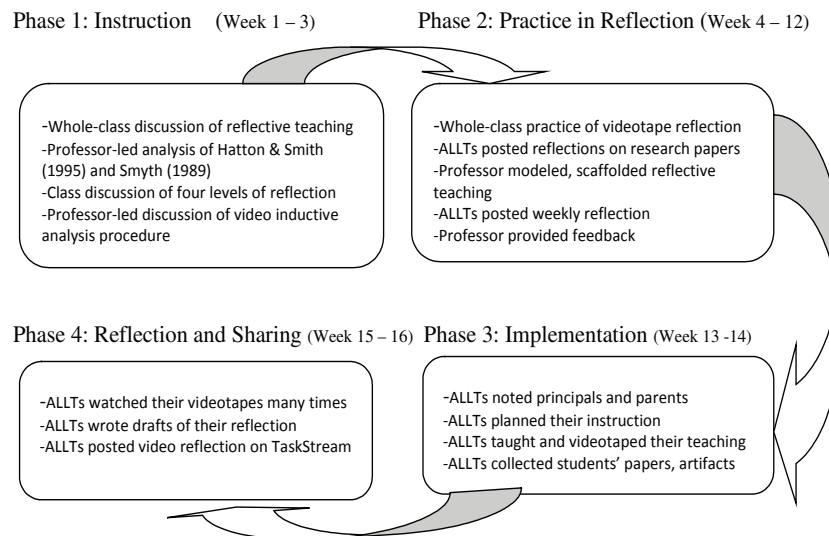
The participants were enrolled in two methods courses: *Skills in Teaching Reading in Secondary School* and *Teaching and Learning in the Content Area*. The two courses shared the same philosophical framework, to: (a) provide the participants skills for critical reflection and (b) provide them with the development of conceptual and practical tools for teaching literacy.

Figure 1 summarizes the procedure for the study. The course lasted 16 weeks. On the first day of class, the professor led the class in defining critical reflection as a way of deconstructing and reconstructing teaching through a deep analysis of practice. The goal of critical reflection as conceived in this study is to help ALLTs develop teaching practices that: (a) challenge and confront social and cultural contexts of schooling and existing structural inequalities in the broader society, and (b) draw on students' social and cultural capital in ways that affirm their cultures, languages, values, experiences and perspectives. The goal here was to provide an alternative to the participants' common, simplistic view of reflection: looking at your teaching to understand what went well, what did not, and what you need to change. Furthermore, as part of the required texts for the two courses, the professor provided all participants hyper link (in the syllabus) to websites to read Hatton's and Smith's (1995) and Smyth's (1989) papers about teacher reflection. During the second week, the professor led the class in discussion of the four levels of critical reflection by Smyth (1989):

Level 1: Describing: (a) Describe, explain concrete teaching events. (b) Find the meaning of the event. (c) Provide an account of how the event happened as a basis for analysis.

Figure 1
Phases of Explicit Instruction for the Study

Phase 1: Instruction   (Week 1 – 3)

-Whole-class discussion of reflective teaching
-Professor-led analysis of Hatton & Smith (1995) and Smyth (1989)
-Class discussion of four levels of reflection
-Professor-led discussion of video inductive analysis procedure

Phase 2: Practice in Reflection (Week 4 – 12)

-Whole-class practice of videotape reflection
-ALLTs posted reflections on research papers
-Professor modeled, scaffolded reflective teaching
-ALLTs posted weekly reflection
-Professor provided feedback

Phase 4: Reflection and Sharing (Week 15 – 16)

-ALLTs watched their videotapes many times
-ALLTs wrote drafts of their reflection
-ALLTs posted video reflection on TaskStream

Phase 3: Implementation (Week 13 -14)

-ALLTs noted principals and parents
-ALLTs planned their instruction
-ALLTs taught and videotaped their teaching
-ALLTs collected students' papers, artifacts

Level 2: Informing: (a). Explore principles that inform classroom. (b). Develop theories of teaching based on particular classroom situations (theory-in-use).

Level 3: Confronting: (a). Ask questions about your theory, practice, assumptions, beliefs and values about teaching (b). Situate your theory/ practice in broader social contexts.

Level 4: Reconstructing: (a). Take a position about the meaning of teaching. (b) Describe what action you will take to change the situation.

As homework, the participants wrote a two and a half page reflection on Hatton and Smith's (1995) and Smyth's (1989) papers and uploaded their answers to the discussion board for all members of the class to read. During the third week, the professor led the class in the discussion of videotape inductive analysis procedures. For practice, the participants watched a videotape, identified and developed teaching events (presented in the videotape) into categories. The categories were then coded as group reading, individual reading, questioning, sharing ideas, providing clarification and making arguments. Also, the participants practiced how to develop hypotheses from the teaching events and provided possible explanations for them. The activity allowed them to learn how to develop categories grounded in the data from their videotapes.

During the practice in reflection phase, the professor scaffolded critical reflection. One video clip was selected for a class activity. The participants watched it and responded to the following questions: (a) Define critical literacy teaching (b) Is critical literacy important in teacher education? If yes, why? (c) Which positions and perspectives are represented in the videotape? (c) In what ways did the teacher connect instruction with the social and cultural conditions of the students? and (d) What kinds of structural constraints (e.g., district/school policies, resources, etc.) do you think shape the teacher's practice? Each group presented its work to the class. The course professor provided feedback. This activity was designed to provide the ALLTs practice on how to ascribe specific meanings to teaching/learning in videotapes and how to frame and reframe the problems teachers face in classrooms (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Smyth, 1989).

In addition, the participants reflected on the teaching/learning in the class, posted a question weekly and answered another participant's question on the discussion board. Instruction for the weekly reflection was posted on the discussion board: (i) reflect critically on the topic covered in class and write half a page (or 10 sentences) for each posting, and (ii) read course textbooks, journal articles, peers' postings, and websites before posting your response. The rubric for grading the postings also was posted on the discussion board. The rubric emphasized that: (i) each participant must post a response per week; (ii) each posting must be substantive, that is, extensive and directly answers the question of the week in 10 or more

sentences; and (iii) each posting must show evidence that the author evaluates and integrates knowledge from different sources—course texts, journal articles, websites, and also make connections with their teaching. This was a required assignment and accounted for 30% of the course grade.

At the implementation phase, the participants advised school principals of the need to videotape their classroom and also sent permission slips to parents. Also, they were asked not to use any identifying information such as names of schools and students. The ALLTs taught and videotaped a 20-minute lesson. They were asked to use mini-DV (Digital Video) cameras with Firewire (IEEE1394) capability, or Flip Cameras with USB connections.

During the reflection and sharing phase, the ALLTs watched the videotapes and then responded to structured questions: (i) identify one or two teaching events in your videotape and describe the meanings and significance, (ii) describe the strategy you used to respond to them, (iii) explain a specific literacy theory that informs the use of the strategy, (iv) what do the strategy and theory indicate to you about your beliefs, values, assumptions, and literacy teaching, (v) what are the factors that constrain your practice, and (vi) what will you do differently if you teach this lesson to the same group of students again?

The research questions were grounded in the theoretical framework provided by Smyth (1989). The framework is summarized as: (a) teaching is an activity that can be reflected on and critiqued in the context of practice, (b) analyses of concrete classroom events allow teachers to build accounts of teaching and use their own voices to describe them, and (c) reflective practice prepares teachers to situate teaching in the broader context, question and challenge the way schooling works. For content validity of the research questions, two professors of literacy education had earlier read the instrument and offered suggestions.

The participants responded to structured questions to narrow the scope of their responses. From past experiences of teaching the courses, the course professor had observed that ALLTs tended to provide broad answers when given open-ended questions. Structured survey allowed the ALLTs to provide more focused, deep-level, and meaningful reflection. In particular, the design of the survey allows the researcher to provide a model of critical reflective questions that may shape ALLTs' understanding of how schooling work. In addition, the critical questions may help ALLTs develop interpretative frameworks for structural critiques of schools' policies and practices. Loughan (2004) argues that "at the core of [the] teacher education practices is the practitioner's desire to influence their students' learning" (p. 12).

Sources of Data

Multiple sources of data were used to allow for triangulation of findings: (a) *Reflection on two research papers*: The professor downloaded and printed out each of the participant's two-page reflection on Hatton and Smith (1995) and Smyth (1989). (b) *Weekly reflections*: The researcher also printed out the participants'

weekly reflections. In all, there were 291 postings. (c) *Videotape reflection*: The professor downloaded and printed the participants' responses to the research questions from the TaskStream.

Method of Data Analysis

Thematic analysis technique (Mackey & Gas, 2005) was used to analyze data for this study. First, the professor carefully read the participants' reflections on essays, weekly reflections and responses to the research questions many times to discover and categorize the data into patterns of ideas, concepts, argument chains, and topics of discussion that were pertinent to the research questions and other viewpoints (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The emergent patterns and themes were developed into a categorization scheme: critiquing practice, describing practice, connecting practice with the classroom, linking practice with broader society, and using theory to guide practice. The coding system allowed the researcher to explore what the participants knew, how that knowledge shaped the way they experienced teaching and the way they developed insights in specific situations. The researcher trained a master's student to code the data again to establish the reliability of the coding system. The two raters used the same code. The categorizations were subjected to intra-rater reliability tests to determine the level of similarity between two ratings. The intra-rater reliability was then calculated using a simple percentage of agreement. The intra-rater reliability ranged from 0 to 100% where 100% indicated a case of complete agreement between the two times the categorizations were rated. Table 1 showed that each categorization had a high percentage intra-rater reliability rate at 92.01%, 95.47%, 91.90%, 84.07%, and 88.25% respectively.

Findings

The research objective of this study was to examine how the ALLTs increased their capacities for critical reflection after exposure to explicit instruction about reflective practice in literacy methods courses. Three to four responses were chosen to exemplify each theme so that the samples represented a generalization of the participants. Also, the participants were assigned pseudonyms for anonymity.

Table 1
Inter-Rater Reliability of Categorizations

Sub-categorization	Percentages
a. Critique practice	92.01%
b. Describe practice	95.47%
c. Connect practice with classroom	91.90%
d. Link practice with broader society	84.07%
e. Lack of theory to guide practice	88.25%

Furthermore, a brief profile of each participant whose narrative was analyzed was provided. The findings are presented next.

The Participants Critiqued and Questioned Their Own Practice

The participants critiqued their practice by deconstructing teaching to identify specific problems, examine details of the problem-situation, and deliberate alternatives. They developed the skill for using reflection as a tool of developing an understanding of teaching through interpretation of practice. For example, Andres (40 years old), Hispanic, high school university intern, wrote:

> Even though I have gained an immense amount of knowledge in teaching, I sometimes fall back into the way I was taught certain materials such as vocabulary in this instance. The way[s] I attempted to teach the vocabulary words were much like I was taught when I was in the 7th grade. I was taught by being told to look up words in the dictionary and write a sentence for each one. I now realize that using this strategy . . . discourage[s] students from learning that words have multiple and value-laden meanings.

On what he needed to do to improve, Andres explained that he would encourage group discussions so that students could read the passages to find contextual meanings. He further explained:

> I will use semantic mapping to provide visual display to help them understand and explore words. . . I will also use enrichment activities that allow my students to relate vocabulary meanings to their own lives. As my students are Latinos, I will ask them to use their language and culture as resources for vocabulary development.

Similarly, Jessenia (35 years), Hispanic, high school substitute teacher, used reflection to probe and gain an understanding of his practice:

> An important lesson that I learned was that I needed to pay a close attention to content of reading materials. . . I realized that I focused on literal level interpretation of the text. As we constantly talked of critical literacy in this course, I need to go beyond the obvious message in the story and push my students to analyze the text at deeper levels. I think I should have asked them to consider how the issues of race, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status were presented in the story. Also I should have asked them to read the visual images for any hidden message.

Jessenia reflected on what she could have done differently:

> If I teach this lesson again, I will like to divide my student into small groups. I will ask them to: (a) examine why the author wrote about illegal immigrants (b) explain why Latino pictures were used in the story, (c) why the author used "illegal immigrants" instead of undocumented workers, (d) Who benefit from stories such as this? (e) Identify stereotypes in the visual images and story, and (e) Rewrite the story with drawings to provide an alternative viewpoint of immigration and Latinos.

Brenda (32 years old), Hispanic, elementary school intern teacher, summarized her understanding of Hatton and Smith (1995) and Smyth (1989) this way:

> There are too many people outside the school system that tell teachers and educators what is that they need to teach in their classrooms . . . They tell us what to teach and we teach it, whether we think it is the right material to teach or not, we have to teach it or we kiss our career goodbye. As the school system is constituted today, teachers are in classrooms to transfer information to students. . . We go to school [university] to learn all these strategies on how to be effective teachers . . . but once we get our own classrooms . . . we are handed this book of knowledge [a code for scripted textbooks] and it is that knowledge we have to pass down to our students . . . It is time to stand up for ourselves and make our own history and write our own teaching method.

The narratives above showed that Andres recognized the danger of falling back to the old way he was taught vocabulary development, Jessenia acknowledged her failure to encourage her students to engage in higher level analysis of the text, and Brenda provided a critique of her school. Data analysis suggests at least four crucial findings. First, the participants make connections between practice and past literacy learning experiences. This is crucial as it suggests that prior experiences of literacy learning can influence new learning and how candidates interpret their roles as teachers. This suggests that methods professors can use explicit teaching to scaffold candidates' thinking to elicit ideas about influences of prior experiences on teaching.

Second, the participants become conscious of the fact that literacy texts are not neutral but are sites of multiple interpretations, competing interests and values. This means that candidates' need to develop a repertoire of practice in literacy instruction as a means of scaffolding students' access to challenging texts. Third, the participants raise the possibility of transformative pedagogy where candidates learn to teach students to draw on experiences to interpret texts and make connections to the society. Through explicit instruction in critical reflection, Jessenia learns to teach students how texts are used to position social groups, to empower or disempower certain groups and how students can be taught to present alternative viewpoints to what they read. Fourth, Brenda criticizes the power relations between teachers and the school system: the ways the school structure constrains what teachers do in classes.

The data indicate that ALLTs can be explicitly taught a critical analytical framework that prepares them to evaluate teaching and reshape literacy practices. Critical literacy theorists such as Street (2003), Luke (1997) and Freire (2000) contend that literacy instruction is shaped by the forces of the broader society. Therefore, reflection should help ALLTs construe teaching as a process of uncovering, interpreting, understanding and making connections between "cultural conditions [of teaching] and the way schooling works" (Smyth, 1989, p. 4).

Explicit critical reflection in this study provides ALLTs a space to create personalized narratives that speak to teaching experiences and reflect the participants' voices as they provide descriptions of concrete teaching events. This kind of codification is necessary for ALLTs to build an account of practices for critical reflection.

Also, it allows them to critically deconstruct and reconstruct teaching with a view to developing practices shaped by emerging understandings of classroom realities and personal experiences. However, reflective practice in teacher education programs rarely prepares ALLTs to engage in this type of higher level of reflection, where they focus on how to meet the challenges raised by the complexities of literacy instruction resulting from difference, diverse and contradictory perspectives and backgrounds. Nor does it usually require ALLTs to examine past literacy experiences in light of what they are learning for the purpose of extending pedagogical actions and thinking.

The Participant Made Connections between Teaching Literacy and the Wider Society

A key issue for teaching literacy is teachers' ability to grapple with the complex issues of literacy and schooling in multilingual, multicultural and diverse cognitive abilities in the U.S. classrooms. The participants in this study situated reflective practice in the wider social-cultural context in which literacy teaching is embedded. For instance, Ashley (28 years old), Caucasian, university intern in special education in an elementary school, wrote:

> I have special education students in my class. The students vary in their abilities. Their ages range from 5 to 10 (kindergarten to fourth grade) and have abilities ranging from reading simple 3-letter sight words to being unable to understand symbols. . . The problem as I reflect on this videotape is the school district expects us to teach them to read at grade-level because of the new policy that requires special education students to be mainstreamed into the regular classrooms. The question nobody is asking is whether the students have the ability to work in regular classes. The school does not even give me the tool to teach multiple age-levels, diverse learning experiences, and different learning abilities. Our methods course professor talked of educational technology for teaching students but such materials are not available in schools.

In her reflection, Judy (35 years old), biracial, elementary school intern teacher, wrote:

> My teaching is impacted by my students' diverse backgrounds and the varying degrees of [English] language development. As ELLs [English language learners], they vary in English language proficiency, ranging from beginning to advanced levels. . . Their [English] language ability definitely affects their learning. If we know this, why then are many students of diverse abilities lumped together into one class.

In his weekly reflection, Jose (39 years old) Hispanic, full-time elementary school teacher, argued that:

> It is important to acknowledge and incorporate students' background and language into teaching practices . . . Many of them do not know English . . . But by using a student's culture and language I can get them to participate more in class because . . .

they can relate to the language and culture being used . . . By doing this, the teacher is signaling to students that their home values, culture, and language are welcome in the class.

Ann (42 years old), Caucasian, high school substitute teacher, wrote in her weekly reflection:

I think incorporating a student's background culture and language is a great way to show that you care and [you] are interested in what they believed in. This is a good way to show interest in them and build positive relationships with your students. Especially with the adolescent children [students] this makes literacy learning meaningful and relates reading and writing to their prior experiences. If a teacher incorporates the students' culture into a literacy lesson this make them feel comfortable and also proud of their culture. This will be a building block to find out what their interests are, and what other interests they might have that you don't know about.

The above narratives show that the participants reflected on the difference between the school district expectations and the stark realities of teaching special education pupils without resources. Jose and Ann, for example, reflected on the centrality of students' sociocultural identity in literacy teaching. Through explicit instruction model, they conceptualized literacy teaching in terms of students' cultures, languages, background, interests, and experiences.

The narratives suggested that an important aspect of reflection is the participants' ability to situate practice in the wider society. This finding is important in two ways. First, the participants moved the discourse from a focus on themselves as teachers to cast a critical look at the social and institutional constraints that shaped teaching. By referencing classrooms as local contexts, the participants began the process of questioning and understanding tensions between learning to teach and literacy teaching in real-life classrooms. In this way, they gained insights into teaching through the interaction between experiences, classroom realities, and school policies in which literacy teaching is situated. Second, the participants disrupted the traditional student-teacher relationship and moved beyond just imparting knowledge to students to begin a process of critical reflection where they focused on what students brought to the classroom: languages, cultures, values, traditions, and perspectives.

The finding that the ALLTs in this study link literacy instruction to the school context is contrary to the findings of Beans and Stevens (2002) that candidates do not make connections to specific classrooms in which teaching is embedded. By using explicit instruction, the professor encourages the ALLTs to become conscious of "the processes that inform the day-to-day aspects of their teaching with the wider political and social realities within which it occurs" (Smyth, 1989, p. 7). The finding suggests that role of critical reflection is to familiarize candidates with the complex issues that relate to teaching literacy and schooling with the goal of helping them to address those issues. Also, the ALLTs recognize the cultural

capital students bring to the school. Bourdieu (1986) defines cultural capital as the habits, embodied practices, dispositions, attitudes, and language that individuals have learned. Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital has different values in different social contexts and influenced by the relations of power.

Through explicit instruction in critical reflective practice, the methods course professor encouraged the participants to construct literacy as a social practice that is usually embedded in people's world-view and identity. The participants acknowledged the legitimacy of students' cultural background and accord symbolic capital to learners' cultural and linguistic identities (Bourdieu, 1986; Smyth, 1989). However, teacher education programs rarely use explicit instruction to prepare teacher candidates to deploy critical reflection to develop conscious awareness and deliberative thinking about contexts of literacy teaching. If the goal of teacher education programs is to respond to the challenges and demands of literacy instruction in diverse classrooms, the findings here suggest a need to use explicit instruction to prepare teachers to use critical reflection to develop a more complex understanding of teaching.

The Participants Articulated General Literacy Teaching/Learning Principles That Informed Their Specific Situations and Contexts of Practice

A crucial aspect of teaching is teachers' ability to reflect on the specificity of situations and ask how a particular theory is related to particular situations and contexts of specific classrooms. However, the participants in this study provided only general theoretical knowledge that mediated the relationship between what they know (e.g. content knowledge and skills) and action (e.g. teaching). For instance, Leon, Caucasian, elementary school teacher, wrote:

> Constructivism is a main theory that was part of my literacy instruction throughout the implementation of instruction. Since constructivism calls for the activating of students' background knowledge . . . I was asking students to go back to what they knew about the topic because I did not give them definitions; they had to construct their definitions.

Similarly, Rose (32 years), Hispanic, high school full-time teacher, wrote:

> A specific pedagogical theory which corresponds [grounds] with my literacy instruction is Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory. By having my students work in groups I was tapping into their interpersonal skills. They were working and interacting with one another in order to come up with synonyms and antonyms for their vocabulary word. I was tapping into their visual/spatial skills by having them construct a word definition chart . . . I also tapped into their linguistic skills by first showing them . . . how to read words, definitions and sentences out aloud as well as write them down. The theory states that people have different skills and tend to learn in different ways.

In addition, Savannah (24 years old), Hispanic, elementary school intern teacher, wrote:

A specific educational theory that informs my literacy instruction in this video is that of the multiple intelligences. It was important for me to address all areas of intelligences and levels of learning in the lesson. In this lesson, I wanted my students to use different intelligences such as linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, etc. to interpret the literacy text.

Stella (23 years old) Hispanic, elementary school intern teacher, wrote:

The theory of literacy that I am using comes from both Howard Gardner. Gardner proposed eight different intelligences that account for a broader range of human potential in children and adults . . . Gardner believed that we as people should place equal attention on individuals who show gifts in the other intelligences: the artists, architects, musicians, naturalists, designers, dancers, therapists, entrepreneurs, and others who enrich the world in which we live. The theory of multiple intelligences also has strong implications for student learning and development which is why I used it in my instruction.

The narratives above indicated that the participants provided textbook-based, generic, conceptual theory that potentially applied to many different contexts. While Leon used constructivism theory to explain his practice, Rose, Savannah, and Stella relied on Gardner's theory. However, the participants did not seem to make a distinction between educational theories (e.g., Gardner's theory) and literacy theories such as cognitive or psycholinguistic, social constructivism, sociocultural, critical literacy, and multiliteracies. An understanding of the difference between the two types of theories will provide ALLTs knowledge of conceptual and practical tools for literacy instruction in their future classrooms.

More importantly, the participants did not provide an explanation of the particular and situational knowledge of classrooms where they taught. While ALLTs need an understanding of the general theories to guide practice, they also need to articulate how a particular theory relates to particular situations and contexts of teaching. In the cases in this study, the knowledge of theory-in-use might better serve the participants rather than conceptual, abstract knowledge.

This analysis suggests that explicit instruction did not prepare the participants to better explore the context-specific knowledge necessary to understand the "here and now" actions of their classrooms. Schon (1987) argues that tacit knowledge is perceptual and context-related. Situated pedagogical theories enable candidates to better articulate explanatory principles that inform practice (Korthagen et al., 2001). This means the participants need to develop skills to articulate the knowledge of particular facts of specific situations in order to proffer the right solutions to specific problems (Smyth, 1989). They could be encouraged to: (a) identify the many meanings of a situation in their classrooms, (b) formulate the problem, (c) think of the potential reasons for the situation, and (d) construct many strategies for dealing with the situation.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

The research objective of this study was to assess the use of explicit instruction as a strategy for teaching critical reflection in literacy methods courses. The findings showed that explicit instruction prepared the ALLTs to critique practice and create personalized narratives that speak to their experiences. The study further showed that explicit instruction prepared ALLTs to examine the complex relationship between teaching and the broader social structures.

The findings have significant implications for literacy teacher educators who may want to implement strategies to help their students become critical reflective teachers. First, professors may use scaffolding to help candidates think beyond existing schemas to higher levels of critical reflection (Roskos et al., 2001). ALLTs and professors can jointly watch videotapes to identify and discuss specific teaching events where discussions of general theories are appropriate and others where the articulation of the knowledge of theory-in-use may better explain what candidates do. For example, professors can ask ALLTs to discuss why and how interpersonal, linguistic, or visual/spatial skills (Gardner's theory) are appropriate in a specific teaching situation. In this way, ALLTs can learn how to create equalizing conditions for students' learning by using diverse strategies to reach all learners. Second, professors can model critical reflection by encouraging their students to ask critical questions such as: How does my teaching draw on my students' linguistic, social and cultural experiences? How do I design teaching to promote the cultural well-being and agency of my students? How do I teach literacy to prepare my students to critique and change inequalities rooted in the existing socio-economic structure of the broader society? Here, modeling affords professors opportunities to prepare their students to develop the capacity to understand the politico-economic contexts in which schooling is embedded and how human agency and institutional factors (e.g., resources and school policies) constrain teaching.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates how an explicit instruction—videotape reflections, discussions, modeling, feedback, and scaffolding—can provide an effective conceptual framework for teaching critical reflection in literacy teacher education programs. Explicit instruction model provided the ALLTs the skill to describe specific teaching events, focus on meanings, and connect teaching to schools' social and cultural contexts. The findings in this study suggest that professors can use critical reflection to prepare ALLTs to challenge educational inequalities by culturally locating literacy teaching in the conditions and cultures of schools in which they are teaching. When ALLTs locate teaching in the broader political and social realities, they can then "begin to act on the world in a way that amounts to changing it" (Smyth, 1989, p. 7).

References

Albrecht, N., & Carnes, G. (2006). Voice's of preservice teachers: Improving teaching and learning through microteaching and critical reflection. *International Journal of Learning, 13*(4), 151-158.

Anders, P., Hoffman, J., & Duffy, G. (2000). Teaching teachers to teach reading: Paradigm shifts, persistent problems, and challenges. In M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P. Pearson, & E. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 719-742). New York: Longman.

Beans, T., & Stevens, L. (2002). Scaffolding reflection for preservice and in-service teachers. *Reflective Practice, 3*(2), 205-218.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Oxford, UK: Polity.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2008). Toward a theory of teacher education for social justice. A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City, NY.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1990). Teaching and knowledge: Policy issues posed by alternative certification for teachers. *Peabody Journal of Education, 67*(3), 123-154.

Darling-Hammond, L., Chung, R., & Frelow, F. (2002). Variation in teacher preparation: How Well do different pathways prepare teachers to teach? *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*(4), 286-302.

Elish-Piper, L. (2001). Teaching inquiry projects: Promoting reflection and action in literacy education for preservice teachers. In W. Linek, E. Sturtevant, J. Dugan, & P. Linder (Eds.), *Celebrating the voices of literacy: The twenty-third yearbook of College Reading Association* (pp. 209-224). Commerce, TX: Texas A&M University-Commerce.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th edition). New York: Continuum.

Harford, J., & MacRuairc, G. (2008). Engaging student teachers in meaningful reflective practice. *Teaching & Teacher Education, 24*, 1884-1892.

Harrison, J., Lawson, T., & Wortley, A. (2005). Facilitating the professional learning of new teachers through critical reflection on practice during mentoring meetings. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 28*(3) 267-292.

Hatton, N., & Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in teacher education: Towards definition and implementation. *Teaching & Teacher Education, 11*(1), 33-49.

Hiebert, J., Morris, A., Berk, D., & Jansen. (2007). Preparing teachers to learn from teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*(1), 47-61.

Hoffman, J., Roller, C., Maloch, B., Sailors, M., Duffy, G., & Beretvas, S. (2005). Teachers' preparation to teach reading and their experiences and practices in the first three years of teaching. *The Elementary School Journal, 105*(3), 267-287.

Jones, S., & Enriquez, G. (2009). Engaging the intellectual and the moral in critical literacy Education: The four-year journeys of two teachers from teacher education to classroom practice. *Reading Research Quarterly, 44*(2), 145-168.

Korthagen, F. (in cooperation with) Kessels, J., Koster, B., Lagerwerf, B., & Wubbels, T. (2001). *Linking practice and theory: The pedagogy of realistic teacher education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

LaBoskey, V. (2004). The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings. In J. Loughran, M. Hamilton, V. LaBoskey, & T. Russell (Eds.), *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices*, Vol. 2 (pp. 817-869), Dordrecht,

Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Lave, J. (1996). Teaching, as learning, in practice. *Mind, Culture & Activity, 3*(3), 149-164.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Loughran, J., & Russell, T. (Eds.). (2002). *Improving teacher education practices through self-study*. London, UK: Routledge/Falmer.

Loughan, J. (2004). A history and context of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices. In J. Loughran, M. Hamilton, V. LaBoskey, & T. Russell (Eds.), *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices,* Part One (pp. 7-39). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Loughran, J. (2007). Researching teacher education practices: Responding to the challenges, demands, and expectations of self-study. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*(1), 12-20.

Luke, A. (1997). Critical approaches to literacy. In V. Edwards & D. Corson, D. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education*, Vol. 2 (pp. 143-151). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Mackey, A., & Gass, S. (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Maloy, R., Seidman, I., Pine, G., & Ludlow, L. (2006). Arriving on a fast track: Perceptions of teachers from an alternative licensing program about their first four years in the class-room. *The Teacher Educator, 42*(2), 106-121.

National Center for Education Information. (2007). *Alternative teacher certification: A state by state analysis*. Retrieved March 10, 2009 from http://www.teach-now.org/overview.cfm

Nieto, S. (2006). *Teaching as political work: Learning from courageous and caring teachers*. Bronxville, NY: Sarah Lawrence College.

Richardson, G., & Murray, R. (2007). Developing critically reflective practitioners: Integrating a practice-reflection-theory cycle of learning in an undergraduate literacy course. In P. Finn & M. Finn (Eds.), *Teacher education with an attitude: Preparing teachers to educate working-class students in their college self-interest* (pp. 63-77). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Robinson, L., & Buly, M. R. (2007). Breaking the language barrier: Promoting collaboration between general and special education. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 34*(3), 83-94.

Rogers, T., Marshall, E., & Tyson, C. (2006). Dialogic narratives of literacy, teaching and schooling: Preparing literacy teachers for diverse settings. *Reading Research Quarterly, 41*(2), 202-222.

Roskos, K., Vukelich, C., & Risko, V. (2001). Reflection and learning to teach reading: A critical review of literacy and general teacher education studies. *Journal of Literacy Research, 33*(4), 595-635.

Samaras, A. (2002). *Self-study for teacher educators: Crafting a pedagogy for educational change*. New York: Peter Lang.

Samaras, A., Beck, A., Freese, A., & Kosnik, C. (2005). Self-study supports new teachers' professional development. *Focus on Teacher Education Quarterly, 6*(1), 3-7.

Schon, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education*. Boston, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Smyth, J. (1989). Developing and sustaining critical reflection in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(2), 2-9.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures*

and techniques. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Street, B. (2003). What's "new" in new literacy studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current Issues in Comparative Education, 5*(2), 77-91.

U.S. Census Website. 2000. Retrieved Jan 4 2008 from http://www.census.gov/main/ www/ cen 2000.html.

Van Manen, M. (1977). Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical. *Curriculum Inquiry, 6*(3), 205-228.

Wenger, E. (2005). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity* (13th ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.