

ABSTRACT

Learning Linguistics, Teaching for Change: Preparing Secondary Educators to More Equitably Teach Disciplinary Literacies

This dissertation explores ways to better prepare middle and high school teachers for equitably teaching disciplinary literacies to English language learners (ELLs). Historically, teachers' lack of preparation in this area has meant that ELLs are effectively denied access to secondary curriculum and post-secondary college and career opportunities. This is a pressing equity issue as ELLs now represent nearly 15% of urban public school students. Thus, I investigate a new approach to this problem: how a particular linguistic theory—critical social semiotics—might help teachers develop the knowledge they need about language, learning, and social change to do better by these students. The dissertation is structured as a set of three papers that address different aspects of this topic. The first is a systematic literature review that surveys how this type of linguistics has already been used with U.S. teachers and to what effect. The second and third are mixed methods studies that build on and add to this body of literature by tracing 55 secondary teachers' learning following a course that introduced the theory. One paper analyzes pre- and post-course surveys to document changes in feedback on student writing, a key part of literacy teaching. The other takes a more longitudinal approach to studying these teachers' learning over two years. It combines in-depth case studies of three focal teachers with survey data on the larger group to more holistically explore what kinds of knowledge, beliefs, and practices these teachers developed as they learned some linguistics, completed student teaching, and accepted their first jobs as classroom teachers. Cumulatively, this dissertation contributes to teacher education, literacy studies, and applied linguistics by offering a comprehensive literature review and additional empirical information regarding the opportunities and challenges of using linguistics to support secondary pre-service teachers' development as disciplinary literacy teachers and, possibly, change agents.