Equity & Excellence in Education, 35(3):265–275, 2002

1066-5684/02 $ 12.00+ .00
DOI: 10.1080/10665680290175275

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

Teachers as Activists: Teacher Development and Alternate Sites of Learning

Theresa Montaño, Laura López-Torres, Noah DeLissovoy, Mariana Pacheco, and Jamy Stillman

Recently, hundreds of teachers, parents, students, and community activists, most of them members of the Organization for Justice in Teaching (OJT) gathered in front of the urban school district headquarters in Los Angeles, California. These educational activists were responding to a set of educational priorities proposed by the California State Department of Education, Governor Gray Davis, Superintendent Roy Romer, and the local school board. These priorities collectively mandate the yearly standardized testing of students, scripted reading programs, and student retention, along with other education reforms that remain in contention today. Among the hundreds of activists were five alumni from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Teacher Education Program (TEP), the group of activists this study focuses upon "whose advocacy of social justice . . . illuminate[s] their pedagogical practices" (McLaren & Baltodano, 2000, p. 57). Becoming transformative educators and working for social justice are central tenets of the UCLA TEP. The program's recruitment document declares that one of TEP's goals is to "prepare teachers to have the commitment, capacity, and resilience to promote social justice, caring and instructional equity in low-income, urban schools" (UCLA Graduate School of Education, 2000). Cochran-Smith (1997) asserts that teachers who work for social justice also work for the transformation of society's "fundamental inequities." We maintain that many social justice educators are, in fact, teacher activists in political and social movements working to bring about changes in educational policies that they perceive to be unjust.

UCLA TEP began with a set of nonnegotiable principles. Among these ideals is an explicit reference to the embodiment of a social justice agenda, defined as follows:

> The racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of our Los Angeles is its strongest asset and we will add on this by constructing extraordinarily high quality education for all children and particularly for low-income, children of color in Los Angeles schools. We seek to turn policymakers attention, educational resources and teachers' talents toward those in our city who have the least outside of school (Oakes, 1996, p. 6).

However, missing from UCLA TEP's mission statement is any discussion of social activism, community organizing, or political engagement as a means of achieving social justice in education. As members of the UCLA TEP community and as educators committed to the implementation of a social justice agenda in teacher education, we are interested in learning about the skills and knowledge teacher activists attain as they engage in political work. During this era of dubious educational reform such as scripted reading programs, anti-immigrant legislation, and high-stakes testing, we maintain that an effective and caring classroom teacher must not only recognize the inequities and disadvantages experienced by urban students of color but should realize that history dictates that educational opportunities are born out of political struggle. This belief in social action implies that a teacher must not only possess competence in subject matter but also should assume the role of teacher activist and student advocate. We believe that the process of becoming a teacher activist occurs primarily in alternative sites of learning or communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), sites not directly connected to the formal learning structures traditionally found in TEPs. We maintain that the development of a teacher activist identity is not only a process of acquisition of knowledge through course curricula or seminars but more importantly an experiential process that allows teachers to acquire the skills, disposition, and political consciousness necessary to engage in social and political action.

There is little research in teacher education on how participation in alternative sites of learning such as an

Address correspondence to Theresa Montaño, 1312 Hepner Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90041. E-mail: theresa.montano@csun.edu

activist group has an impact on teachers' development as social justice educators. Therefore, in this study we examine the perceptions of a group of five teacher activists in relation to the learning they acquire as they participate in activist organizations in Los Angeles, and how this learning relates to their classroom practice. The participants in this study are five UCLA TEP alumni who are members of two activist organizations: Organization for Justice in Teaching (OJT) and the Consortium on Critical Pedagogy (CCP).[1] We have selected these two organizations because they provide contexts as alternative sites of learning, where these teacher activists come together around joint enterprises, during which they develop a whole repertoire of activities, common stories, and ways of speaking and acting (Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

In this study, we use sociocultural theory to account for the actual learning trajectories of teacher activists. A sociocultural view of learning considers learning as a socially mediated process (i.e., through the use of semiotic-cultural artifacts) in which peers (i.e., novice and more expert ones) participate in co-constructing authentic activity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). From the perspective of sociocultural theory, learning is a social process, a process of transformation of participants themselves. This theory argues that how people develop is a function of their transforming roles and understandings in the activities in which they participate (Rogoff, 1995). The concepts of learning through participation and the idea of learners as apprentices in communities of practice are central to such a view (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995). For the purpose of this study we refer to the activist organizations in which the five teacher activists do their political work as the "alternative sites of learning." We maintain that these five teacher activists attain the skills and knowledge necessary to enact their social justice agenda as they interact in these sites.

MAKING CONNECTIONS: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND TEACHER ACTIVISM

Another important body of literature that informs our theoretical framework is critical pedagogy. The literature of critical pedagogy, following Paulo Freire (1996), argues for a concept of social justice that is dynamic and revolutionary, and which involves a commitment to engage in critical reflection, dialogue, and social activism (Darder, 1998; Freire, 1998b; Greene, 1998; McLaren & Baltodano, 2000; McLaren & Fischman, 1998; Shor, 2000). For critical educators, the concept of social justice is a foundation upon which to disrupt and change unjust, unequal, and undemocratic political institutions. The definition of a critical educator differs from theorist to theorist. For instance, McLaren and Farahmandpur (2001) take an anti-capitalist stance and call upon critical educators to become "morally and politically active social agents," and to unite with the "labor movement, community activists, progressive organizations, schools of education, and parent and student organizations" (pp. 360–361) in a struggle against global capitalism. On the other hand, Edelsky (1999) asserts that the role of critical educators is to develop and implement a "critical curriculum" that encourages students to "take action" (p. 30) by writing letters and participating in political demonstrations and marches. While the definition of critical educator varies, most critical pedagogues agree that the activity of teaching is an inescapably political process (Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 1997; Darder, 1998; Freire, 1998a; Shor, 2000; Zeichner, 1993).

Critical pedagogy argues that mainstream education proceeds from a particular political viewpoint—the ideology of the dominant culture and the elite. Critical educators view the mainstream education of students from subordinate cultures and sectors (students of color, poor students, and those who speak a language other than English) as a process of deculturalization, subjugation, and silencing (Darder, 1991; Giroux & McLaren, 1986; Macedo & Bartolomé, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Spring, 1997). As a result, critical educators engage their students in exposing these processes as they are enacted through textbooks, standardized tests, and other curricular materials. From this perspective, those in power work to maintain the status quo and those who believe in social justice must challenge this hegemony. This challenge requires that critical educators possess a "political and ideological clarity" or critical consciousness (Ayers, 2001; Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000; Darder, 1998; Freire, 1998a; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001; Sleeter, 1996) that arms them with the understanding to " 'name the problem' in terms of systemic assumptions, structures, rules or roles that are flawed" (Harro, 2000, p. 463). Political and ideological clarity, according to Macedo and Bartolomé (1999) is what teachers use to "challenge the status quo" or "work to transform the sociocultural reality at the classroom and school level" (p. 124). Critical educators refer to this ideological and political clarity as *conscientizacâo* or conscientization.

Conscientization is not enough to effectuate change, however. According to Ayers (2001) we must link "consciousness to conduct," because it is important to be "both a dreamer and a doer, to hold onto ideals, but also to struggle continually to enact those ideas in concrete situations" (p. 126). The concept of praxis—action informed by critical reflection and dialogue—is central to the literature of critical pedagogy: "Further, it is only as beings of praxis—as students accept their concrete situations as a challenging condition—that they are able to change its meaning by their action .... [C]ut off from practice, theory becomes simply verbalism" (Darder 1991, p. 84). Exploring the key role that reflection plays in the concept of praxis allows us to bridge learning theory and

the literature on critical pedagogy. Thus, this emphasis on praxis implies a conceptualization of social justice that is oriented to action.

A critical educator who defines social justice as a call to social action is a teacher activist. It is for this reason that we choose to use the term "teacher activist" as opposed to "critical educator" or "social justice teacher." A teacher activist criticizes those who are social justice teachers in thought only—who believe in the central tenets of critical pedagogy but who do not enact them in their own teaching and who are not active in social movements. A teacher activist argues that "believing in the importance of social and political change is one thing. Doing it is another" (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997, p. 126). Teacher activists are involved in a transformative social movement, including but not limited to the immediate school community in which they work on issues related to education, health care, labor, the struggle for affordable housing, and other issues of political and social relevance. Teacher activists are not only interested in culturally and socially relevant curriculum but are seeking to transform an unequal and unjust society beyond the immediate school community. Teacher activists are engaged in a political battle to reclaim the public schools where they engage in dialogue and social action "around the issues of what kind of society we are forming, what kind of schools we want, and what kind of teachers our current struggle for social justice demands" (McLaren & Baltodano, 2000, p. 56).

As teacher activists struggle collectively for change, they construct sites of learning for themselves. This learning necessitates an engagement with theory and reflection. Just as dialogue by itself is incomplete as political engagement, simple action, uninformed by reflection, is also inadequate without theory, or as one activist claims, "Practice is nothing, but blind activism" (Darder, 1998, p. 84). Learning must develop in the spaces between coparticipants actively engaged in struggle. A teacher activist who engages in a social movement enacts a social justice philosophy by choosing a curriculum and activities that invite students to challenge educational and social inequities in their schools and in their communities. We framed our research in terms of critical pedagogy because we believe it calls upon teachers to take up transformative politics and to struggle alongside their students against oppressive conditions, both inside their classrooms and beyond the confines of the school in which they teach. In the organizations in which these teacher activists participate, there is an implicit link between the frameworks of critical pedagogy and communities of practice discussed in sociocultural theory. In the Freirean tradition, consciousness, knowledge and meaning are dialogical and constructed collaboratively. As the organizations evolve in struggle, they become sites of learning for participants, sites where these teacher activists will acquire the necessary skills to enact their social justice philosophy rather than absorb them through a set curriculum. The frameworks of critical pedagogy allow us to explore an evolving conscientization as it occurs for these five teacher activists within the activist groups in our study. By engaging in the process of politicization, these five teacher activists demonstrate their commitment to "become a subject and maker of history and not simply a passive, disconnected object" (Freire, 1998b, p. 55). Further, through their activism they accept the challenge to struggle against educational injustice, in words, in thoughts, and in action.

THE STUDY

This study examined the perspectives of a group of five teacher activists, all UCLA alumni, regarding their learning and participation in two educational activist organizations in Los Angeles. Although "teacher activism" is not an explicit part of UCLA TEP, the call for teachers to become "generative change agents" is implied throughout the program: "We must prepare our Center X teachers to develop the commitment, capacity and resilience to participate effectively in efforts to fundamentally reconceptualize, change, and renew urban schools" (Oakes, 1996, pp. 7–8). However, UCLA TEP has not institutionalized or created a space within its current structure that enables its preservice teachers to engage in any activist work in order to effectuate that change, even though its specific mandate for social justice and social change attracts students who have a background in political activism or students interested in community organizing and social activism. Since the social justice theme is so pronounced in the UCLA TEP, we believe we must address how the UCLA social justice agenda influences the identity development of our teacher activists. We address what the program has done to facilitate the development of our teachers as social justice educators and the implications that this may have on other programs that choose to adopt a social justice outlook in our findings section.

Through our investigation of five UCLA TEP alumni, we focused upon the perceptions that this group of teacher activists have about what new knowledge and skills they attained as they worked in these activist settings. The major research questions that framed our study are: (1) What do teacher activists learn as they participate in political organizations that focus on social justice issues in education and in their communities? and (2) How does being an activist influence the classroom practices of these teacher activists? Since the theme of social justice is such an integral part of the UCLA TEP, in our findings we will discuss what these teachers learn from their preservice experience in the program that facilitates their development as social justice teachers and share our perspectives on the implications that these results might have for other TEPs.

Methods

We captured the views that these five teacher activists expressed in their own words about their learning in these activist organizations. Because their narratives are the central source of data, a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate approach. The central method employed in this research was in-depth recorded interview, conducted with each of the five UCLA TEP alumni. The interview protocol included an open-ended question about each teacher's history of activism. We asked about role models or critical moments that had a major influence in their lives as activists. The rest of the questions focused on issues related to the learning process, including the different types of knowledge they acquired in the activist organizations as well as the ways in which they bring political activism into their classrooms. Although the classroom practice of the teacher activists was not observed, the in-depth interviews with the participants provided us with an opportunity to explore the assumptions, values, and beliefs these teacher activists have about what they learn as they participate in these nontraditional, educational activist organizations (for the purpose of this study, alternate sites of learning). In this light, we examine what these five teacher activists learned through their involvement in these organizations, but more importantly how they apply that learning to their work in the classroom with their students.

Participants

Our study sample was composed of three female and two male teacher activists (see Table 1). The teacher activists (as self-reported)[2] represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Three participants are White; one is Chicana; and one is of mixed ethnicity (Chicano, Czech, Hawaiian, and Native American). The sample includes four participants who obtained a Bilingual Cross-Cultural, Language, and Academic Development (BCLAD) teaching credential, and one who obtained a Cross-Cultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) credential.[3] Two participants taught elementary school at the time of the study (both in primary grades) and the remaining three taught social studies at the secondary level, two of whom were at the same high school. The criteria for selecting the participants was based on the fact that all were alumni of the UCLA TEP and that they were participants in one or both of the teacher activist organizations, Organization for Justice in Teaching (OJT) or Consortium of Critical Pedagogy (CCP). Our focus was not the educational activist organizations but the UCLA alumni who were members of these particular communities of practice. All the activist teachers participated in OJT, while one participated in both OJT and CCP. The entire group continues to teach in the urban Los Angeles area.

ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS AS ALTERNATIVE SITES OF LEARNING: RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the context of this study, becoming an *activist* social justice teacher is conceptualized as a process that engages complex yet distinct forms of learning that emerge through participation in activist organizations and practices. One way to elucidate the *type* of learning that emerges through this participation is to identify the skills and tools teachers develop through their engagement in various activities. However, the interview data revealed that these skills were not as discrete and measurable as we had anticipated. Whereas several teachers emphasized their learning of more discrete skills, for example political organizing, many of the teachers' perceptions of their own learning centered on acquired ideational tools and skills that enabled them to enhance their effectiveness as teacher activists.

Rhetorical and Discursive Skills

As they participated in numerous activities related to their work in activist organizations, teachers described the extent to which they acquired rhetorical and discursive skills that enabled them to work more effectively to promote the goals of the organization. For example, the teachers recognized that engagement with other community members required them to develop coherent, logical

Table 1
Participants

	Gender		Ethnicity		Credential		Teaching level			Activist Organization	
Teacher	F	M	Chicano/a	White	BCLAD	CLAD	Elem.	Sec.	Alumni year	OJT	CCP
Frank		X		X		X		X	2000	X	
Adela	X		X		X		X		2000	X	X
Tania	X			X	X			X	2000	X	
Stephanie	X			X	X			X	1999	X	
Felipe		X	X/mixed		X		X		1997	X	

arguments that considered alternative views in order to connect the actions and aims of the activist organization in a recognizable and substantive way. Tania described her emerging skills this way:

> In a more intense way, [we are] developing coherent arguments, thinking about what other people are thinking about so you can respond to what they're thinking about, developing questions. How do you ask a coherent question? How do you make connections between crappy bathrooms and the Stanford 9?[4]

Tania's explanation of her thought process revealed that her involvement with others in the activist organization required that she not only deliver coherent arguments but that she ask questions that addressed alternative perspectives. Moreover, the nature of this engagement prompted these teachers to further consider a more critical approach to issues of classism and racism in their discourse. Frank stated that he was interested in the consideration of "how racism and classism works in education, works in society and how to build social movements around these issues." Participation in these organizations, then, invoked a critical analysis of relevant issues as well as a concern for their more complex dimensions.

In addition, these skills facilitated teachers' intentions to help their students develop similar critical abilities. For example, Frank explained that because of his participation in activist organizations, his students also were given the opportunity to write and publicly speak about critical educational and community issues. Frank described his reaction when he listened to his students' presentations at an OJT-sponsored event. "I learn how amazing students . . . are and how much we have to change the education system to offer my students as good an education as I got." Despite the fact that his students had struggled with their writing skills, he shared an example of their effective political work. "I get to this meeting and they give a presentation that's so powerful for the members of OJT and you see people listening to their speeches and crying because students are so inspirational in terms of what we are trying to do." Students were given the chance to show their academic and intellectual abilities in the organizing arena. Tania agreed that the development of rhetorical and discursive skills was reflected in the work that she did with her students. "I see myself as trying to help kids develop skills in my class that I do and mirror when I am working with [other UCLA] students who are involved in OJT, but in a more intense way." She added that her experience in OJT motivated her to establish a classroom community that encouraged students to take risks and make mistakes and then reflect on the process. "What do you think went good? What do you think went bad? What could you do better next time?" Hence, the reflexivity that was characteristic of her work became a focus of her classroom curriculum.

Strategies to Develop Collective Consciousness

While teachers developed their own rhetorical and discursive skills, they also developed abilities that enabled them to engage other members of these organizations in the development of collective consciousness. While we cannot discuss the effectiveness of their efforts, we can describe teachers' perceptions of those elements of their learning they found most essential in their work with their diverse colleagues. Leading community and organization meetings, for instance, allowed these teachers to develop what they believed to be one of the more important skills, that of facilitation. Felipe shared his learning:

> One strategy or one tool is just facilitating or facilitation. That's something I've been learning a lot about, how to facilitate discussions or meetings. There are definitely different ways to do that, and different ways that different people choose to do that. How to interact with people, how to facilitate conversations and discussions.

Largely due to his consistent participation in the activist organization, it was apparent that Felipe's interactions with others in large meetings helped develop his ability to facilitate effectively. He learned to provide assistance to community members as they made connections between their lives and pertinent issues, to develop a sense of community within the organization, and to promote the collective goals and visions of the organization and its members. In order for an activist organization to meet its political and social goals effectively, its diverse members must acknowledge and align themselves with those goals, a process that requires leaders who are attuned to the needs and perceptions of the collective whole. Adela felt more "productive" in her facilitative role, as she explains here: "When I am in OJT there is this ideology that is used as a foundation to create more proactive work towards a vision or goals. I am more productive." Adela valued the vision and goals to which the organization commits, which in turn helped her to orient herself within the organization.

Stephanie explained that her participation in OJT and her own consciousness-raising have helped her to develop more effective relationships with her students and their parents as well as to create a curriculum that is more relevant to her students' lives.

> Really becoming aware of myself as a white female teacher from a middle class background, and not just what my privilege means, but how to be conscious of that when talking to parents and students. And how to listen to parents and students to hear what they need and to work from what they need rather than what I think should be done.

Stephanie explained that her own process helped her engage her students in a process of conscientization as well.

> We address all of the issues that are addressed in OJT (Organization for Justice in Teaching) in my classroom on a daily basis, I would say. Being an activist forces me to truly reflect on what I'm teaching and why I'm teaching it, and to throw out all the non-essential stuff and really get to the point, and somewhat to battle my own prejudices or my own ingrained content. Like I have to struggle within myself like, oh, this is what I should be teaching, like according to standards or whatever. Or according to what I learned or how I learned it. But it's really not effective teaching, and it's really not effective learning.

Lastly, skills were learned through participation in activist organizations in ways that made possible the mobilization of individual members and communities. The ability to mobilize others in inclusive ways depends upon the development of a political praxis that includes collective reflection, as well as the orientation of people to action. Tania explained her own process of reflection this way:

> I'm thinking about this amazing space to experiment . . . understanding that we're trying to build something that is relatively untried, it's new, so it's a learning experience for me because it's an experience to try to bring together people from all over the place—power, race, gender differences and different dynamics. How do you do that? How do you make that model for the kind of society you want to see?

Some of the more discrete, recognizable skills included the effective dissemination of information, the employment of political tactics, and the implementation of logistical and organizational procedures. In addition, these teachers employed problem-solving strategies when they attempted to unite individuals around collective goals. Some of the teachers discussed the utility of questioning strategies as one specific approach that facilitated the engagement of members in issues deemed most urgent. In sum, participation in the activities of teacher activist organizations helped these teacher activists become politically savvy.

Politicizing the Curriculum

All of the teacher activists highlighted a variety of examples that spoke to their awareness that teaching is inherently political. In addition, they described the increased politicization of their pedagogy and curriculum content resulting from this heightened awareness. Several mentioned the fact that their new consciousness changed the lens through which they taught and enabled them to offer their students multiple perspectives on curriculum content. For instance, Frank wanted his students to see how exciting history can be and to understand the role that underrepresented people have played in the history of the United States. The participants emphasized the fact that their activist work helped them to support students to make connections between what is learned in school (based on state frameworks) and current issues in their communities and society at large. Several participants explained that they adjusted the issues addressed in OJT so that they can present them to their students on a regular basis.

For Stephanie, every classroom activity, every student dialogue, and every lesson plan evolved from struggle, "any struggle in history." An example of an OJT issue Stephanie included in her classroom is what she called "the craziness of the standardized tests." In response to what Stephanie and the others believed was a testing frenzy in schools today, Stephanie's students studied the history of testing, analyzed different tests, and created a standardized test that in Stephanie's opinion "visibly reflected their reality." She explained how her students discussed the origins of standardized tests as well as considered "what the debate might have looked like back in the 1900s over this test." Through their examination of the tests, students searched them for bias. Stephanie then used their findings to focus a discussion with her students about institutionalized racism, classism, and sexism. Stephanie believed this study enabled students to get at the root of some of the educational and societal injustices that they face and also that it instilled hope in her students that "we can do something and that we want to do something and that we love ourselves and our community enough to want to do something to change it and make it better."

In the recognition of their politicized role in the classroom, several teacher activists explained that they were better prepared to support their students in becoming critical thinkers and readers. The teacher activists argued that their participation in OJT and CCP had concretized their definition of social justice and taught them how to talk about injustice with students in a different way than was presented in UCLA TEP. Specifically, the participants felt that they were better able to discuss issues related to race and class because of their experiences in these activist organizations. Stephanie summarized the social justice intentions of these activists as a commitment to addressing issues of "racism and classism" and to exposing students to issues of injustice while simultaneously teaching hope.

Understanding the Nature of Social Change

A pattern that we noted in our analysis of the interview transcripts was that as teacher activists increasingly began to reflect on their activism, they also developed a new consciousness. Although we cannot capture the

extent of the development of this consciousness, we *can* speak to the fact that all of the teacher activists began to contextualize the struggles they faced in their classrooms with ongoing struggles that addressed broader social, political, and economic injustice. That is, they began to see their classrooms as another space in which to instantiate this new consciousness. Several of the teachers reported that their participation in OJT and CCP helped them to see issues that emerged in the classrooms and schools as embedded in broader social justices issues. For instance, Frank explained that through his activist work, he understood that changes for students and communities come from grassroots organizing and not necessarily from within the school itself. Likewise, Felipe described his increased awareness of "where we are this historical moment, like where we are in terms of educational policies and what's happening right now in education as it relates to the larger context, like the broader political economy." Thus, the mutually influential character of schools and society became more salient.

While all of the teacher activists agreed that the primary goal of their teaching was to radically transform inequitable schools and society at large, at least three of the participants we interviewed articulated a change in their notion of agency. In terms of their own agency, the teachers described a newly developed understanding that profound change transpires *not* as a result of a single, dedicated teacher who works "their butt off" in isolation but rather from the organized efforts of communities who come together to struggle against broader social, political, and economic injustices. This heightened sense of individual and collective agency is subsequently passed onto their students in a variety of ways. Stephanie emphasized that the work she did in her classroom was directly related to her commitment as an activist. She explained that she hoped to motivate her students to ask, "what we can do as a community to change it or make it better." She added, "All the time my goals are to get the students to see themselves as people who can participate in this kind of change also." Similarly, Frank hoped that exposing his students to the historical and current contributions made by people of color and other underrepresented communities would inspire his students to act. He shared:

> I think my spending more time doing activism helps me to figure out ways to help the kids understand how they can participate with their skills and their talents . . . I talk with them about what is going on in terms of activism, in terms of education, and I try to get them to engage in it.

The participants acknowledged the fact that the UCLA TEP significantly contributed to their development as teachers through exposure to powerful and useful theoretical concepts and teaching methods. However, they also emphasized the fact that their activism in OJT and CCP prompted them to establish practical applications of the theories they employed in their classrooms. The participants unanimously agreed that their definition of social justice had become more lucid, which enabled them to directly apply their theoretical knowledge to their practical work in the classroom. This increased understanding and resulting commitment were manifested in myriad ways in the different teachers' classrooms. Adela explained:

> When I got there [UCLA] we did not get down to the deeper issues about race and class in the classroom or about interrelations between races in our school . . . . We were very on the surface about things . . . . With that we never got anything practical. A video was not going to tell me how to talk about race in my second or third grade class. So outside in organizing when I do presentations, when I write about something related to the issues, I feel like I can take them back and say, "Oh—I got an idea from my organizing and I can approach teaching this way." TEP never did that.

So, it was evident that the political work of teacher activists in these communities of practice helped them to think more constructively about their philosophical, theoretical, and practical orientations in their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Our interviews with the teacher activists revealed that the activist sites, referred to as the alternative sites of learning in this study, were central to the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for these teacher activists to effect change. These teacher activists learned to apply their theoretical knowledge to critical practice inside and outside the contexts of the classroom. They learned to transfer new information, skills, or knowledge they acquired while participating in the activist organizations directly to the classroom in the form of critical pedagogical approaches to curriculum. They developed their conscientization and transformed their notions of agency by reconceptualizing their work as social justice educators from activist work in a self-contained classroom to activist work that contributed to a broader social movement. They entered into the process of coalition building and broadened the reference of their work to include communities beyond their own or those of their students. During this process they rethought the agent of change—the organizing group—as a structure of solidarity between diverse constituencies.

As these teachers participated in the activist organizations, they engaged in multiple activities and different kinds of learning (e.g., organizing and pedagogical skills) as well as the development of their own "conscientization." Through this process they developed and

transformed their identity as activists. Identity and meaning were negotiated and co-constructed as they engaged in political praxis within their activist communities.

In our research, we found that our cohort of teacher activists faced a unique challenge as they engaged in activist work in community organizations. When prospective teachers sit in university courses they often read about inequitable conditions in urban schools; they discuss the lived experiences of poor and working people who send their children to dilapidated schools; and they are exposed to the latest research on inequity in education, but they do not necessarily see or directly experience the injustice. We found that as these activists engaged in their political work, they witnessed firsthand the inequitable conditions faced by students and parents in urban schools. In addition, through their work they developed new political and personal relationships with diverse constituencies—parents, students, and community. This new political relationship enabled them to learn about different perspectives, hear different languages, and interact with people whose lives and experiences they had only encountered in texts. The participants became increasingly angry at injustice based upon race and class and learned to become advocates for and with members of oppressed groups and marginalized students. This process of advocacy, in which they began to struggle on behalf of a particular group—e.g., their own students or community—was part of a broader effort to transform society for the benefit of many groups, not only those with whom they identified. The teachers believed this advocacy work often placed them in opposition to the local school board who determines educational policy, the school district administrator who implements policy, and many of their colleagues who deliver instruction based on these policies. However, to be successful, these teacher activists also discovered ways to bring these different voices together in a productive way.

For these teachers, simply being a "good" (that is, a social justice) teacher within the four walls of their own classrooms was not enough. Political trends in education forced them to modify their notion of engagement to include participation in a collective project for change. Thus, an effective agent of change became reconceptualized as an individual teacher who participates in an activist organization. As they became more involved in political work, the teachers' notion of the nature of activism deepened as a result of their confrontation with problems of organizing. In particular, they discovered that activism around education necessitated a process of coalition-building involving parents, teachers, and students of diverse backgrounds and localities.

But as Felipe's statement illustrated, this new notion of engagement itself stemmed directly from his initial commitment to his students. "But to me that's what this is all about. I mean, that's what I know. That's my experiences in my classroom. So I'm always relating what we do in OJT to my kids. Always thinking about it through that lens." Clearly, as these teachers became more involved in activist work, they did not lose sight of the students who became the reason and reference for their engagement. Their sense of the strategic necessity of a social movement remained rooted in the needs of inner-city students and in particular the students in their own classrooms, who continue to give their struggle meaning and urgency.

We must recognize that social justice activism has an impact on learning in the classroom. Social justice activism does not sacrifice content knowledge or competence; rather it enhances this knowledge and makes it real. Social justice education for these five teacher activists did not exist without working to create changes beyond the immediate classroom. These teachers were especially critical of TEPs that describe themselves as "social justice programs" but do not engage in social action. In the words of one, "You can be an activist and not believe in social justice, but you cannot be a social justice teacher and not be an activist." This thirst for an orientation toward action to end educational injustice compelled one of our teacher activists to chastise UCLA TEP for its failure to provide a "critical analysis of social justice, a practical approach to social justice." Another participant suggested that UCLA TEP faculty needed to be more closely involved with community activism so that students can make links to grassroots community organizations. They also suggested that the program make a commitment to maintain ties with grassroots organizations by inviting these groups to campus to participate in conferences or other forums. One of the teacher activists also stated emphatically that UCLA TEP needed to have a philosophical outlook on social justice that connects teaching to social movements. In her words, "I need TEP to open my door, to make me look outside."

Implications for Teacher Education Programs

The overall findings of this research call into question the role that TEPs play in the facilitation of teacher activism. In a recent meeting of teacher educators in California, we noticed that an increased number of TEPs are addressing and focusing on issues of educational equity and social justice. However, according to our analysis as well as our current experience as teacher educators in a social justice TEP, we suggest that if TEPs want to adopt social justice frameworks, name existing injustice in schools, and urge their students to become change agents, they must prepare teachers to struggle to change schools and the society in which these schools exist. From our research we learned that for teacher activists, social justice is a term that begs teachers to be political and to struggle against injustice in their classrooms, in their schools and in society. We believe that we must consider

the words of Paulo Freire (1998b) and be reminded that "[a]s educators we are politicians; we engage in politics when we educate, and if we dream about democracy, let us fight, day and night" (p. 68).

Therefore, we contend that TEPs must facilitate this organic and intertwined process in which classrooms and activist sites are mutually informed and challenged by each other. We propose that TEPs consider three key initiatives for greater participation in communities: (1) a community social action practicum prior to student teaching in which prospective teachers engage in field work with parent and community activist organizations as these organizations work on issues of social justice, (2) the establishment of a reciprocal relationship with community, labor, and civil rights activists in which members from these organizations are invited to teach a course or seminar and engage preservice teachers in activist work, and (3) the requirement that teacher educators partake in a practicum for social justice through participation in activist work alongside their students. Teacher educators can and should facilitate this process by asking students who participate in activist sites to assume leadership roles in the development, design, and implementation of curriculum in TEPs.

As teacher educators committed to social justice, it is also our responsibility to establish support networks for our students and opportunities for the development of long-term and continuous relationships with members of the community in which they teach. In addition, we need to establish ongoing, reciprocal relationships with civil rights organizations, teacher unions, state legislators, and others whose job it is to protect teachers as they engage in the struggle for change. It is also the responsibility of TEPs to establish community advisory groups comprised of district and union officials, leaders of activist organizations, parents, and community members to maintain ongoing and reciprocal relationships. It is critical that TEPs maintain relationships with their graduates who are teacher activists and others who participate in these activist organizations. Finally, when we call upon our students to challenge inequity and injustice, we must defend and support them as they engage in the political work necessary to transform our schools.

We acknowledge that some TEPs are arming students with theory and research that facilitate and support the development of a social justice philosophy. We often read, reflect, and discuss social justice theory in our courses, and we have discovered that the presentation of educational research, social justice educational frameworks, and discussion of critical issues in teacher education courses is necessary and welcomed by teacher activists. However, this is insufficient. Our five teacher activists believe that learning to become a social justice educator is not acquired from books, course discussions, or case study development. A social justice teacher learns to apply that theoretical knowledge, gain a deeper understanding of critical pedagogy, and become a change agent through her or his participation in activist organizations. It is only through engagement in the practical and theoretical tasks of political activism that teacher activists begin to instantiate and make sense of their social justice philosophies and agendas. They embark upon a process of reflection that deeply transforms their conception of the nature of activism, which ultimately impacts their identity development as social justice educators. These changes in conceptualization are not arrived at a priori or in a detached way but rather in the course of and in an intimacy with the praxis of organizing. In analyzing our interviews, we found that this transformation is a process in which the identification, purpose, and scope of struggle are radically rethought. This change shifts the subject of praxis for these activists. They move from the organizing coalition itself to an identification with a larger historical, social movement aimed at improving the social conditions of schools. As teacher educators, we must embrace and encourage this process.

Often, those of us who are privileged to teach in institutions of higher education are not connected to marginalized communities, the communities we struggle with our students to teach in, the communities we advocate for, and the communities who value social justice teachers the most. We argue that it is time that social justice TEPs become active participants in the struggle for educational justice. We are reminded of an interview with the activist Antonia Pantoja (Perry, 1999) in which she speaks of the importance of participatory democracy and long-term struggle: "Life is a struggle. It never ends. And in this regard the struggle for justice and freedom must continue . . . . Everyone has a part to play. No one can afford to sit on the sidelines" (p. 178). In this light, we consider it of utmost importance that teacher educators not only teach about social justice and acknowledge the learning that takes place as our students engage in the political process but that we also engage in activist work—ourselves.

NOTES

1. The Organization for Justice in Teaching (OJT) is comprised of mostly teacher activists. However, the coalition members also include an increasing number of community organizers, parents, and university-based students and activists. OJT's strategy is building a grassroots movement of parents, students, teachers, and community members who are "anti-racist" and oppose class bias. Challenging racism, reestablishing bilingual education, and ending prison spending for educational spending are also key issues for the coalition. The structure of OJT includes a steering committee, which meets on a regular basis to discuss ideas, strategize, and respond to policies contrary to the goals and vision of the organizations. In addition, in order to respond and meet the needs of urban Los Angeles, OJT is organized and meets regularly in smaller

regional areas such as east area, north west area, central area, and north area. While recent campaign issues have focused on ending the Stanford Achievement Test Series 9 and democratizing the teacher's union agenda, OJT is also interested in the long-term issues related to educational justice.

The Consortium of Critical Pedagogy (CCP) works to provide support for educators at all levels in schools, colleges, and universities who are committed to bringing critical perspectives to their work in the classroom and to their activism. The organization consists of a network of study groups that provide an environment of solidarity for teachers who are struggling on behalf of their students and communities on a daily basis, and who are interested in deepening their understanding of a radical approach to schooling an their ability to effect change. The study groups discuss critical pedagogy literature, strategize ways of responding to oppressive policies and practices, and support individual members in their struggles at school sites. The larger membership of CCP meets regularly at a regional area general meeting in which participants engage collectively to increase their understanding of transformational educational practices and to create structures of solidarity to sustain their work.

2. As part of the data collection participants completed a demographic sheet in which they self-reported their ethnic background.

3. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing standards for credential candidates include requirements related to the placement of student teachers for the qualifications of those identified as supervising teachers. BCLAD credential candidates (in Spanish) must complete a one quarter assignment in a bilingual classroom in which instruction is taught in the students' primary language. CLAD credential candidates must complete one quarter of course experience in a classroom identified as ESL (ELD) or a content class identified as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE).

4. The *Stanford Achievement Test* Series, Ninth Edition, Form T (Stanford 9), was designated as the 1998 STAR test in November 1997 by the California State Board of Education. The Stanford 9 is a standardized, multiple-choice, timed test (offered only in English) that allows comparisons to be made to a national sample of students. Since 1998, school districts in California have been required to test *all* students (including English Language Learners and students with disabilities) in grades 2 through 11, inclusive, between the months of March and May. The only exemptions allowed are for special education students whose Individual Education Plans (IEPs) explicitly exempt them from such testing and for students whose parent/guardian submits a written request for exemption. Students in grades 2 through 8 are required to be tested in reading, mathematics, written expression, and spelling. Students in grades 9 through 11 are required to be tested in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and history/social science (California Department of Education, 1998). Stanford 9 student scores are also used to calculate school performance levels and rank schools using the Academic Performance Index (API).

REFERENCES

Ayers, W. (2001). *To teach: The journey of a teacher* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Bartolomé, L. I., & Trueba, H. (2000). Beyond the politics of schools and the rhetoric of fashionable pedagogies: The significance of teacher ideology. In E. T. Trueba & L. I. Bartolomé (Eds.), *Immigrant voices: In search for educational equity* (pp. 277–292). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

California Department of Education. (1998). *Standardized testing and reporting program* [On-line]. Available: http://star.cde.ca.gov/star98/

Cochran-Smith, M. (1997). Knowledge, skills, and experiences for teaching culturally diverse learners: A perspective for practicing teachers. In J. J. Irvine (Ed.), *Critical knowledge for diverse teachers and learners* (pp. 27–88). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Darder, A. (1991). *Culture and power in the classroom*: *A critical foundation for bicultural education*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Darder, A. (1998). Introduction: Teaching as an act of love. In A. Darder (Ed.), *Teaching as an act of love: Reflection on Paulo Freire and his contributions to our lives and work* (pp. 25–41). Ontario: California Association of Bilingual Education.

Derman-Sparks, L., & Phillips, C. B. (1997). *Teaching/learning anti-racism: A developmental approach*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Edelsky, C. (1999). On critical whole language practice: Why, what, and a bit of how. In C. Edelsky (Ed.), *Making justice our project: Teaching towards critical whole language practice* (pp. 7–36). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Freire, P. (1996). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1998a). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Freire, P. (1998b). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters for those who dare to teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Giroux, H., & McLaren, P. (1986). Teacher education and the politics of engagement: The case for democratic schooling. *Harvard Educational Review, 56*(3), 213–238.

Greene, M. (1998). Introduction: Teaching for social justice. In W. Ayers (Ed.), *Teaching for social justice* (pp. xvi–xvi). New York: Teachers College Press.

Harro, B. (2000). The cycle of socialization. In M. Adams, W. Blumenfeld, R. Castañeda, H. W. Hackman, M. L. Peters, & X. Zúñiga (Eds.), *Readings for diversity and social justice: An anthology on racism, anti-semitism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism* (pp. 15–21). New York: Routledge.

Lave, J. (1996). Teaching, as learning, in practice. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 3*(3), 149–165.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Macedo, D. P., & Bartolomé, L. I. (1999). *Dancing with bigotry: Beyond the politics of tolerance*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

McLaren, P., & Baltodano, M. P. (2000). The future of teacher education and the politics of resistance. *Teaching Education, 11*(1), 47–60.

McLaren, P., & Farahmandpur, R. (2001). Educational policy and the socialist imagination: Revolutionary citizenship as pedagogy of resistance. *Educational Policy, 15*(3), 343–378.

McLaren, P., & Fischman, G. (1998). Reclaiming hope: Teacher education and social justice in the age of globalization. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 25*(4), 125–133.

Nieto, S. (1999). Multiculturalism, social justice, and critical teaching. In I. Shor & C. Pari (Eds.), *Education is politics: Critical teaching across differences K-12* (pp. 1–32). Portsmouth, NH: Heinneman.

Oakes, J. (1996). Making the rhetoric real: UCLA's struggle for teacher education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist. *Multicultural Education, 4*(2), 4–10.

Oakes, J., & Lipton, M. (1999). *Teaching to change the world*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Perry, W. (1999). *Memorias de una vida de obra* (Memories of a life of work): An interview with Antonia Pantoja. In J. A. Segarra & R. Dobles (Eds.), *Learning as a political act* (pp. 167–178). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rogoff, B. (1995). Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: Participatory appropriation, guided participation and apprenticeship. In J. V. Wertsch, P. del Rio, & A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind* (pp. 139–164). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Shor, I. (2000). (Why) education is politics. In I. Shor & C. Pari (Eds.), *Education is politics: Critical teaching across differences, postsecondary* (pp 1–14). Portsmouth, NH: Heinneman.

Sleeter, C. (1996). *Multicultural education as social activism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Spring, J. H. (1997). *Deculturalization and the struggle for educational equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States* (2nd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. (2000). *Teacher education program: Program materials.* Unpublished manuscript. University of Los Angeles, California.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zeichner, K. (1993). Connecting genuine teacher development to the struggle for social justice. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 19*(1), 5–20.

Theresa Montaño is an assistant professor of Chicana/o Studies at California State Northridge and is president-elect of the National Association of Multicultural Education. Her emphasis is in critical pedagogy, multicultural education, social justice teacher education, and educational rights activism.

Laura López-Torres is a doctoral candidate at the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. Her research interests center on teacher education, social justice, and critical pedagogy with a particular emphasis on Paulo Freire's theory and pedagogy.

Noah DeLissovoy is a doctoral student at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA. His research interests include hegemony and resistance in public schools.

Mariana Pacheco is a doctoral student in the Division of Urban Schooling in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA. Her interests include the effects of the convergence of school accountability measures and language and reading policy on the teaching and learning of reading, especially as these issues pertain to culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

Jamy Stillman is a graduate student in the Division of Urban Schooling in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at UCLA. A former bilingual teacher, her interests include critical pedagogy, teacher education, and language acquisition for language minority students.